

Executive Committee

7th October 2009

Minutes

Present:

Councillor Michael Braley (Vice-Chair) and Councillors P Anderson, J Brunner, W Hartnett, N Hicks, C MacMillan and M Shurmer

Officers:

J Bough, M Bough, J Braithwaite, S Hanley, R Kindon, S Mullins, G Revans, A Rutt and P Wilkins

Committee Services Officer:

I Westmore

141. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors B Clayton and Gandy.

142. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Anderson declared a personal and prejudicial interest in Item 11 (Minutes / Referrals - Urgent Recommendation from the Grants Panel) as detailed separately at Minute 151 below.

143. LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair advised that the following items of business, scheduled on the Forward Plan to be dealt with at this meeting, had been rescheduled to a later meeting:

- Energy Strategy
- Easemore Road Community House – Options Appraisal

The Chair also advised that he had accepted the following matters as Urgent Business:

Item 5 - Overview and Scrutiny Committee referral in respect of the Joint Municipal Waste Strategy;

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Chair

Item 11 - Minutes / Referrals – Urgent Recommendation from the Grants Panel in respect of the grant application from the Caribbean Roots Connection; and

Item 15 - REDI Centre – Leasing Options

(Not meeting the publication deadline)

144. MINUTES

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 12th and 26th August 2009 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

145. JOINT MUNICIPAL WASTE STRATEGY

The meeting considered the revised Joint Municipal Waste Management Strategy for Herefordshire and Worcestershire. The key changes had been outlined at a special meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee the previous week to which all Members had been invited.

The Committee was content to endorse the recommendations within the report aside from reservations over the possible collection of garden waste at some future date. Members remained to be convinced that this was going to provide an environmental benefit. It was conceded by Officers that the case for garden waste collection still needed to be made, although the benefits in terms of recycling rates were apparent and the need to redirect waste from landfill was pressing. It was noted that the Strategy did not commit the Council to the introduction of garden waste collection.

The Committee discussed the future direction of waste collection services within the County. It was noted that the direction of travel was towards increasing harmonisation of service provision with the possibility of significant cost savings to be made for disposal if not the collection of waste.

RECOMMENDED that:

- 1) the Council endorses the reviewed Joint Municipal Waste Management Strategy and agrees the adoption of the revised Strategy for Herefordshire and Worcestershire, subject to full consideration of the business case for the collection of garden waste;**

- 2) **the Council requests that the County Council provides Worcestershire District Councils with suitable financial support to better enable the authorities to work jointly toward the goals set in the JMWMS. The Head of Environment be delegated responsibility to undertake such negotiations in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Housing, Local Environment and Health;**
- 3) **the Council requests that Worcestershire County Council work with the District Councils to identify any efficiency savings on waste collection and disposal that arise from the revised JMWMS that can be shared amongst the Partners;**
- 4) **the Council thank the drafting team of Richard Woodward (Worcestershire County Council), Kenton Vigus (Herefordshire Council) and Sue Horrobin (Redditch Borough Council) for their work producing this document and Bobbie Ashby (Redditch Borough Council) for her graphic design work on both the questionnaire and the final Headline Strategy document.**

146. DISABLED FACILITIES GRANT AND THE LIFETIME GRANT

The Committee received a report setting out the expenditure for the current year for the Disabled Facilities Grant and the Lifetime Grants provided by the Council to elderly and disabled homeowners. The report highlighted the benefits of reallocating a proportion of the Lifetime Grant funding to the money available for the Disabled Facilities Grant as there was projected to be an underspend on the former and an overspend on the latter.

Members recognised the tremendous benefits of these services both in terms of allowing individuals to live independently and, consequently, as an example of spending to save over the longer term. The Committee was reassured that the reallocation of funds would not disadvantage grant recipients and also that the service worked hard, in concert with the Occupational Therapy service, to ensure that the Council achieved value for money from the adaptations that were carried out.

Officers undertook to provide a written response to Members in respect of the use, if any, that the Council made of second hand equipment, particularly stairlifts.

The Chair proposed that the investigation of possible actions to reduce the Priority waiting list be referred to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

RESOLVED that

- 1) the contents of the report relating to budget spend for the Disabled Facilities Grant and Lifetime Grant for 2009/10 be noted; and

RECOMMENDED that

- 2) a re-allocation of funding in the sum of £50,000 from the existing Lifetime Grant capital funding for 2009/10, to the Disabled Facilities Grant funding be approved.

147. PLANNING APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS - NATIONAL CHANGES

The Committee considered the suggested Council response to the Communities and Local Government (CLG) consultation 'Streamlining information requirements for planning applications' as prepared by Officers.

RESOLVED that

the response at Appendix 2 to Communities and Local Government regarding the consultation document 'Streamlining information requirements for planning applications' be endorsed and submitted.

148. PUBLICATION OF PLANNING APPLICATIONS - CONSULTATION

The Committee considered the suggested Council response to the CLG consultation 'Publicity for Planning Applications' as compiled by Officers. Members were supportive of the proposals and recognised that there was no ideal solution to publication. It was noted that the cost savings accruing could be reinvested in other means of publication. To this end, Officers were asked to consider a slight expansion of the circulation of notifications of planning applications should these new measures come into effect.

RESOLVED that

the response at Appendix 2 to Communities and Local Government regarding the consultation document 'Publicity for Planning Applications' be endorsed and submitted.

149. INCREASED PERMITTED DEVELOPMENT RIGHTS

Members considered the suggested Council response to the CLG consultation 'Improving Permitted Development' as compiled by Officers.

Officers had detailed a number of concerns in their response to this consultation for reasons including a lack of clarity and the difficulty of enforcing what was proposed. It was suggested that the implications of the proposals contained within the consultation paper would be greater for communities with a greater proportion of older buildings. A possible reduction in the level of consultation with those affected by permitted developments was highlighted as a further cause for concern.

RESOLVED that

the response at Appendix 2 to Communities and Local Government regarding the consultation document 'Improving Permitted Development' be endorsed and submitted.

150. IRRECOVERABLE DEBTS

The Committee considered a report requesting that 17 cases of irrecoverable debt amounting to £47,922.19 be written off.

Members were concerned that a number of the debts that they were being asked to write off were long-standing. Officers were able to reassure the Committee that tenants were contacted as soon as rent arrears were present. It was stated that repayment plans were established where appropriate although the implications of seeking Court Orders on the possibility of reviewing such schedules was acknowledged.

It was noted that the Portfolio Holder had requested a briefing for Members on the processes involved in the recovery and write off of debts relating to the Council's property.

RESOLVED that

the debts totalling £47,922.19 as detailed in the Schedule attached to the report be written off as irrecoverable.

(During the consideration of this item, Members discussed matters that necessitated the disclosure of exempt information. It was therefore agreed to move to exclude the press and public prior to any debate on the grounds that information would be revealed concerning the personal details of individuals.

There is nothing exempt, however, in this record of the proceedings.)

151. MINUTES / REFERRALS - URGENT RECOMMENDATION FROM THE GRANTS PANEL

The Committee received an urgent referral from the Grants Panel, a request for funding from a voluntary sector organisation for a cultural event in the town. The money available to fund the event comprised funds left from 2008/09, which was originally allocated to MECA but subsequently retained by the Council following the demise of that group. The funding request under consideration required a decision prior to the meeting of the Committee at which it was intended to consider the allocation of funds to all Groups who had applied.

(During the consideration of this item, Members discussed matters that necessitated the disclosure of exempt information. It was therefore agreed to move to exclude the press and public prior to any debate on the grounds that information would be revealed in respect of the financial or business affairs of other organisations, including the authority holding that information.)

(Prior to consideration of this item, and in accordance with the requirements of Section 81 of the Local Government Act 2000, Councillor Anderson declared a personal and prejudicial interests in view of his involvement in a local voluntary sector organisation, and withdrew from the meeting.)

152. ADVISORY PANELS - UPDATE REPORT

Members considered an update report on the Council's advisory Panels, Working Groups and similar bodies. It was noted that there was to be a meeting of the Planning Advisory panel on Tuesday, 20th October 2009, to which all Members would be invited, at which an update on the Regional Spatial Strategy would be provided.

RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

153. ACTION MONITORING

Members noted the Action Monitoring Sheet.

154. EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC

RESOLVED that

under S.100 I of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006, the public be excluded from the meeting for the

following matters on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraphs 1, 2 and 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12 (A) of the said Act, as amended.

Irrecoverable Debts (as detailed at Minute 150 above);

Minutes / Referrals – Urgent Recommendation from the Grants Panel (as detailed at Minute 151 above); and

REDI Centre – Leasing Proposals (as detailed at Minute 155 below).

155. REDI CENTRE - LEASING OPTIONS

The Committee considered a report which set out a number of options for leasing the REDI Centre building. Following the decision taken previously that an alternative provider be sought for the services at the REDI Centre the current report was seeking to provide certainty to providers as to the nature of the lease they would be expected to take on should they be selected through the tendering exercise.

It was established that the REDI Centre Trust was still nominally in existence but had no building from which to operate and so was not considered to be a significant factor in the leasing of the Centre. It was confirmed that the building was in need of some remedial works before it could again be used to provide a service. Officers explained that the repairs required to be carried out would be a condition on the lease.

Officers undertook to provide Councillor Hartnett with an estimate of the capital value of the property following the meeting.

(During the consideration of this item, Members discussed matters that necessitated the disclosure of exempt information. It was therefore agreed to move to exclude the press and public prior to any debate on the grounds that information would be revealed which could reveal provisional terms of land disposal subject to negotiation which may affect the Council's bargaining position with prospective tenants.)