

Executive Committee

Tuesday, 14 August 2018

MINUTES

Present:

Councillor Matthew Dormer (Chair), Councillor David Bush (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Tom Baker-Price, Greg Chance, Brandon Clayton, Bill Hartnett, Gareth Prosser and Michael Rouse

Also Present:

Councillors Roger Bennett and Pattie Hill

Mrs N. Wood-Ford

Officers:

Kevin Dicks, Clare Flanagan, Sue Hanley, Dean Piper and Sarah Sellers

Democratic Services Officer:

Jess Bayley

16. APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was received on behalf of Councillor Craig Warhurst.

17. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

18. LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair thanked all those present for attending the meeting of the Executive Committee at the slightly earlier time of 6.00pm. He explained, as detailed in a written update to Members on his announcements, that he would need to leave the meeting early to attend a meeting with the Mayor of the West Midlands Combined Authority area, Andy Street.

During consideration of this item concerns were raised that the early start time for this meeting was occurring at a time when

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Chair

changes were being made to other Committees, including the rescheduling of meetings of the Constitutional Review Working Party in August and full Council in September. Members were urged to ensure that these changes did not compromise the access of Members and the public to information about decisions that were being taken through the democratic process.

It was noted that in some of these cases changes had been made to accommodate the needs of both Members and Officers, for example the meeting of Council in September had been rescheduled to ensure that senior Officers could be present at the Council meeting.

19. MINUTES

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee held on Tuesday 10th July 2018 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

20. SCRUTINY OF CARE LEAVERS SHORT SHARP REVIEW - FINAL REPORT

Members welcomed former Councillor, Nina Wood-Ford, who presented the findings of the Scrutiny of Care Leavers' Short Sharp review on behalf of the group. During the delivery of her presentation the following points were highlighted for Members' consideration:

- Following a notice of motion to Council in January 2018 Members had been tasked with undertaking an overview and scrutiny review of the financial support available to care leavers.
- The group had focused on; the legal duties of local Councils towards care leavers; the position of care leavers in Redditch in 2018; the steps taken by other Councils to meet the needs of care leavers; and the options available to assist care leavers.
- Evidence had been gathered from a range of sources including; interviewing officers from Worcestershire County Council, interviewing officers from Redditch Borough Council who managed the Council Tax service, the *Wolf at the Door* report; Worcestershire Care Leavers' Strategy; and information about how other Councils were supporting care leavers.
- The group had found that legal reforms had led to improvements to the support available to care leavers, including better planning for those aged over 18, young people

remaining in foster placements for longer and personal advisors being provided to care leavers.

- As a Corporate Parent Redditch Borough Council had a duty to have regard to care leavers when carrying out its functions.
- Debt problems and difficulties with budgeting had been identified as problems for care leavers, though many received good advice in relation to this.
- The government had no plans to introduce guidance as to how Councils should treat care leavers in relation to Council Tax. This therefore needed to be determined at the local level.
- There were 72 care leavers residing in Redditch, 28 of whom were recorded as having Council Tax liability.
- In total 19 of these care leavers qualified for support under the Council's Council Tax Support Scheme and nine were liable to pay Council Tax.
- In proposing their recommendations the group had aimed to secure actions that would be cost effective, easy to administer and apply for and would be available to care leavers.
- The proposals would require means testing of care leavers aged 22 to 25.
- The group felt the best option for supporting care leavers would be to amend the Council Tax Support Scheme. This was preferred to amending the Hardship Fund as that was meant to be used on a discretionary basis. Changing the Council Tax support scheme would also be cheaper for the Council than amending the hardship fund.
- The group had concluded that the fairest approach would be to include care leavers from outside Redditch. However, Officers could not forecast the costs involved in extending the scheme to care leavers from outside Redditch as it was uncertain how many would move to the Borough.
- The group's third proposal had been made as any changes to the Council Tax Support Scheme would only come into effect in April 2019, following consultation.
- The third recommendation proposed that assistance should be provided to care leavers in the interim period, in 2018/19, for care leavers residing in Redditch from the Hardship Fund.
- This third proposal, if agreed, would cost the Council £10,3000 to implement.

Following the presentation of the report Members discussed a number of points in detail:

- The costs involved in delivering the changes to the Council Tax Support Scheme and the reasons for the different costs associated with the group's third recommendation. Officers explained that the Council needed to cover the full costs of the interim arrangement to support care leavers through the

hardship fund. The £10,300 that had been quoted was an estimate.

- The potential to extend the scheme only to young people leaving care who lived in Redditch. Mrs Wood-Ford advised that the group had explored this opportunity but had been advised that the Council could then be subject to a legal challenge from care leavers who had moved into Redditch from outside the borough.
- The restriction of the interim support to Redditch care leavers. Mrs Wood-Ford advised that Officers had confirmed that this was acceptable.

Reference was made to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 9th August 2018 when Members had considered the report. Following a detailed discussion Members had approved the Scrutiny Group's proposals at that meeting.

During consideration of this item Councillor Tom Baker-Price proposed an amendment to the proposals. This proposal was seconded by Councillor Dormer. This amendment read as follows:

- 1) "The executive affirms its commitment to introduce reforms to the council tax support scheme for care leavers at the earliest opportunity which achieves the following objectives:
 - i) To reduce the net liability for council tax to zero until the care leaver's 21st Birthday.
 - ii) To provide transitional support for care leavers that enables a reduction in liability for council tax up to and including zero from a care leaver's 21st birthday until the care leaver's 25th birthday.
- 2) In the interim to support care leavers, the council tax support hardship policy should be amended to ensure the net liability of care leavers to pay council tax until their 25th birthday is reduced to zero providing they have left Worcestershire County Council care and are living independently. This is an interim measure and support under the hardship policy should end when reform has been implemented.
- 3) The head of customer services is asked to ensure officers whose role includes supporting care leavers experiencing council tax debt, are provided with appropriate training on corporate parenting and in consultation with the portfolio holder for corporate management explores additional measures to support care leavers to achieve financial independence."

In proposing the amendment Councillor Baker-Price explained that many care leavers were very vulnerable, having often experienced abuse in their early life which could cause life-long issues. A significant proportion of those in the criminal justice system had been in care as had many people who were homeless. Councillor Baker-Price suggested that to address this there was a need to introduce a support system based on prevention and all of the precepting authorities had a role to play in this. Members of Redditch Borough Council, as Corporate Parents, needed to recognise the lived experience of care leavers.

Councillor Baker-Price expressed concerns that the group had not consulted with care leavers during their review. Members were advised that he had recently met with some care leavers and they needed support. He also raised concerns that means testing would be highly bureaucratic which would add costs to the scheme proposed by scrutiny Members. Councillor Baker-Price explained that his proposals would correspond with those made by other Councils in Worcestershire in respect of care leavers, which would ensure consistency across the county.

Members discussed the amendment and noted the following:

- The delays that had occurred during the course of the scrutiny review which meant it had been completed in seven rather than six months. The Committee was advised that following the elections the group had lost their Chair and this had caused some delays. Officers had also had to wait to gather information from external sources in respect of the recommendations which had added to the timescales.
- The reasons why it had been felt that a scrutiny review was required to investigate support that could be provided to care leavers.
- The need for Members appointed to scrutiny reviews to attend every meeting where possible.
- The need for any changes to the Council Tax Support Scheme, as detailed in the first amended recommendation, to be subject to consultation with the public. It was suggested that this should be reflected in the Executive Committee's decision on this item.
- The need for the Head of Customer Access and Financial Support to work with the Head of Community Services, as the lead officer for safeguarding, in respect of training officers. Again it was suggested that this should be reflected in any decision to be taken by the Executive Committee.
- The questions that had been raised by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in respect of the means testing and how this would work.

- The numbers of children and young people living in care in Redditch compared to other districts in the county. Members were advised that when the review was proposed there were two young people living in care in Wyre Forest District compared to 133 young people living in care in the Borough of Redditch.

RESOLVED that

- 1) **the Executive Committee affirms its commitment to introduce reforms to the Council Tax Support Scheme for care leavers at the earliest opportunity, subject to statutory consultation on the Council Tax Support Scheme, which achieves the following objectives:**
 - iii) **to reduce the net liability for Council Tax to zero until the care leaver's 21st Birthday;**
 - iv) **to provide transitional support for care leavers that enables a reduction in liability for Council Tax up to and including zero from a care leaver's 21st birthday until the care leaver's 25th birthday;**
- 2) **the Head of Customer Access and Financial Support, with the help of the Head of Community Services, is asked to ensure officers whose role includes supporting care leavers experiencing Council Tax debt, are provided with appropriate training on Corporate Parenting and, following consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Corporate Management, explores additional measures to support care leavers to achieve financial independence; and**
- 3) **the Scrutiny of Care Leavers Short Sharp Review Final Report be noted.**

RECOMMENDED that

- 4) **in the interim to support care leavers, the Council Tax Support Hardship Policy should be amended to ensure the net liability of care leavers to pay Council Tax until their 25th birthday is reduced to zero providing they have left Worcestershire County Council care and are living independently. This is an interim measure and support under the hardship policy should end when reform has been implemented.**

(The Chair left the meeting towards the end of this item, prior to a vote on the matter. In his absence the Deputy Leader, Councillor David Bush, chaired the remainder of the meeting).

21. REDDITCH TOWN CENTRE REGENERATION

The Chair opened the item by noting that discussion of the matter had been postponed from July at the request of the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Councillor Joe Baker. This had occurred because the Executive Committee had only provided 17 days' notice of the item in the Executive Work Programme rather than the 28 days' notice that was legally required for key decisions. The matter had been pre-scrutinised by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, though no recommendations had been proposed and the Chair of the Committee had not taken part in the proceedings for that item. The Chief Executive advised that the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had been unable to participate as the constitution required that no member who had previously taken part in making a decision on a matter, in this case the One Public Estate regeneration of the town centre considered in March 2018, could subsequently scrutinise the issue. In line with the 1972 Local Government Act's guidelines in respect of chairing Council meetings Councillor Baker had left the room to ensure that another Member could Chair the meeting in his absence.

The Head of Economic Development and Regeneration for North Worcestershire presented the report and highlighted that the report in respect of One Public Estate that had been considered in March 2018 had identified a preferred site for a public sector hub; on Church Road. Officers were now suggesting that this should no longer be the preferred location due to the costs involved. There was also a lack of market evidence that this was the most appropriate location for such a hub. Instead, Redditch Town Hall had been identified as a site that was more appropriate for a public sector hub. Members were advised that the Council would continue to work with partner organisations and work on existing proposals in relation to the railway quarter and relocation of the library into the hub.

Following the presentation of the report the Committee discussed a number of matters in detail:

- The new evidence that had emerged in respect of the most appropriate location for a public sector hub in the town centre. Officers advised that this was based on an assessment of the market conditions, with the market for office accommodation in Redditch being quite weak.
- The extent to which partner organisations were supportive of the change to the proposed location for the public sector hub.

The Committee was informed that the partner organisations had indicated they were supportive of these proposals.

- The potential for the Town Hall to act as a public sector hub and the reason why other options were not being explored. Officers advised that it was important to maintain footfall around the area of the Town Hall.
- The potential for residential properties to be included in the regeneration of the town centre and the reasons why a residential zone was no longer explicitly referred to in the report. Members were advised that this would be considered but was not detailed in the report.
- The option for Redditch Town Hall to be converted into residential properties. The Committee was informed that this did not form part of the town centre regeneration plans.
- The potential to introduce residential properties in the town centre which could be used by those both using public transport and people who used their own vehicles.
- The speed with which the plans for regenerating the town centre had progressed and the timescales in which it would be implemented in the future.
- The consultation that had already been held in respect of the town centre regeneration and how this had informed plans for the future.
- The options that had been considered in March by the Executive Committee and pre-scrutinised by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

In discussing the proposal questions were raised as to whether reference could be made to including residential properties in the recommendation for the Executive Committee to support a new multi-purpose public sector hub. However, Members were advised that this was not possible as the proposal had been based on using the Treasury Five case model, which did not take into account residential matters. However, it could be taken into account as part of the work on the regeneration prospectus.

During consideration of this item Councillor Bill Hartnett proposed an amendment to the proposals detailed in the report. This amendment was seconded by Councillor Greg Chance.

The amendment proposed that the second resolution in the report should be amended to the following:

“To progress proposals outlined in the Redditch Regeneration Prospectus, with the initial focus on commissioning specialist support to produce a new vision and masterplan for the Railway Station Quarter, undertake feasibility work for the Library site and include consideration of residential use in the town centre, utilising the £50,000 already agreed by Council and that delegated authority

is given to the Chief Executive to procure this support, after consultation with the Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Economic Development, Town Centre and Commercialism.”

On being put to the vote the amendment was lost.

At the end of discussions on this item Members thanked the Head of North Worcestershire Economic Development for his work on the report. The committee noted that he would be leaving the organisation shortly for another authority and Members wished him well for the future.

RECOMMENDED that

- 1) the Council provides in principle support for the creation of a new purpose built multi-agency Public Services Hub, with a final decision to be taken by the Executive Committee following:**
 - a) the production of a detailed business case setting out the strategic, economic, commercial, financial and management case;**
 - b) identification of potential location options for the Hub and a recommended preferred site for the Hub; and**
 - c) negotiations with partner organisations regarding their commitment to transferring services to the Public Services Hub.**

Subject to the approval of recommendation 1 above the Executive Committee RESOLVED:

- 1) that delegated authority be given to the Chief Executive to procure external specialist support to develop the business case as detailed at paragraphs 3.3 - 3.4, utilising the £150,000 already agreed by Council, after consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Economic Development, Town Centre and Commercialism; and**
- 2) to progress proposals outlined in the Redditch Regeneration Prospectus, with the initial focus on commissioning specialist support to produce a new vision and masterplan for the Railway Station Quarter and undertake feasibility work for the Library site, utilising the £50,000 already agreed by Council and that delegated authority is given to the Chief Executive to procure this support, after consultation with the Deputy Leader and**

**Portfolio Holder for Economic Development, Town Centre
and Commercialism.**

22. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Officers confirmed that there were no outstanding recommendations for the consideration of the Executive Committee.

RESOLVED that

**the minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on
5th July 2018 be noted.**

**23. MINUTES / REFERRALS - OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE, EXECUTIVE PANELS ETC.**

Officers confirmed that there were no further referrals for Members' consideration.

24. ADVISORY PANELS - UPDATE REPORTS

Members provided verbal updates in respect of the following bodies:

- a) Constitutional Review Working Party – Chair, Councillor
Matthew Dormer

In the absence of Councillor Dormer Officers advised that the following meeting of the Constitutional Review Working Party would take place on Tuesday 21st August and would start at 6.30pm.

- b) Corporate Parenting Board – Council representative,
Councillor Gareth Prosser

Councillor Prosser advised that he had attended the first meeting of the Board the previous week. During this meeting a presentation had been delivered by a group of young people who were living in care across Worcestershire. The main issue that had been raised during this meeting had been the frequency with which social workers moved on and it had been reported that there was an issue with the retention and recruitment of social workers. This was in the process of being addressed by Worcestershire Social Services.

Every member of the Board would be attending a training session on 20th September. In the meantime Members were advised that the Board's annual report could be viewed online,

though a paper copy could be accessed at reception in Redditch Town Hall.

c) Grants Panel – Chair, Councillor Greg Chance

Councillor Chance reported that during the latest meeting of the panel Members had considered a number of grant applications. Members were keen to review how decisions were made by the Panel, though it was important to ensure that decisions were based on consideration of the applications. The cross-party panel was working well, as in previous years, and Councillor Chance welcomed the contribution of the new Members who had been appointed in 2018/19.

d) Member Support Steering Group Party – Chair, Councillor Matthew Dormer

In the absence of Councillor Dormer Officers advised that the following meeting of the group would take place in October 2018.

e) Planning Advisory Panel Party – Chair, Councillor Matthew Dormer

In the absence of Councillor Dormer Members were advised that the meeting of the Planning Advisory Panel that was due to take place in August had been cancelled as the lead officer was on leave.

The Chair confirmed that the Planning Advisory Panel would be invited to consider plans for the regeneration of the town centre during meetings in 2018/19.

The Meeting commenced at 6.00 pm
and closed at 7.20 pm