

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Thursday, 3rd January, 2019

MINUTES

Present:

Councillor Joe Baker (Chair), Councillor Debbie Chance (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Joanne Beecham, Michael Chalk, Andrew Fry, Julian Grubb, Pattie Hill and Anthony Lovell

Officers:

Jayne Pickering, Guy Revans and Paul Spooner

Democratic Services Officers:

Jess Bayley and Amanda Scarce

70. APOLOGIES AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors Gemma Monaco and Jennifer Wheeler and it was confirmed that Councillors Julian Grubb and Yvonne Smith were attending as their respective substitutes.

71. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND OF PARTY WHIP

There were no declarations of interest nor of any party whip.

72. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 6 DECEMBER 2018

Members noted that during the discussions in respect of sexual health services those representing the services had indicated that they would review the opening hours for the service on Saturdays. This needed to be reflected in the minutes.

RESOLVED that

subject to the amendment detailed in the preamble above, the minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 6th December 2018 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

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Chair

73. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN 2019/20 TO 2022/23 - UPDATE - PRE-SCRUTINY

The Executive Director of Finance and Resources provided Members with an update on the Medium Term Financial Plan 2019/20 – 2022/23. It was confirmed that the Fees and Charges for 2019/20 would be considered by the Budget Scrutiny Working Group at its meeting on 7th January 2019.

The report outlined the issues faced by the Council in achieving a balanced budget and delegated to officers to investigate ways to achieve this. The Executive Director of Finance and Resources drew Members' attention to a table within the report which demonstrated the changes in the financial projects and budget gap for 2019/20 based on the original estimation of a £475k gap as presented in February 2018. Explanations of the reasons for the changes which resulted in the current gap of £496k were also highlighted, with particular reference being made to the additional costs in respect of the implementation of the National pay agreement in relation to increasing the spinal points attached to the current pay model, which had increased the cost by £160k.

The following areas were also discussed in more detail:

- Unavoidable costs in order to maintain current services. This included funding for an automated transactional process which would allow for the process to become more efficient.
- Savings and income – this included £100k from a contract with Cannock achieved by the Lifeline service.
- The need to ensure that all savings were identified and not to be recorded as “unidentified” as had been the case previously.
- Negative Revenue Support Grant – it was noted that, whilst it had not been confirmed, the projections included the removal of the £331K negative grant payment to Central Government.
- Business Rates baseline, the increase in the Section 31 Grant and the impact of this.
- The officer recommendation to increase Council Tax by 2.99% and the proposed increase at County Council level.
- New Homes Bonus Scheme (NHB) – concerns around the future of the scheme and the impact from the loss of the “new” NHB payments.
- Assumptions that had been made for future years including additional costs of borrowing for the capital programme.
- The current and minimal recommended level of balances.
- Capital bids including fleet replacement.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Thursday, 3rd January, 2019

- Members sought clarification in respect of the £58k additional rental income in respect of savings and additional income. Officers agreed to provide information in respect of the properties this referred to outside of the meeting.
- It was confirmed that the reduction in the Grants budget of £20k had been returned to balances and formed part of the savings.
- The £10k referred to in respect of the new Lottery Scheme was for the licencing fee.
- The additional cost of £28k in respect of Electoral Services and what this referred to – officers agreed to provide the information outside of the meeting.
- Members asked for the capital bid in respect of Terry’s Field to be clarified and it was confirmed that this should read Terry’s Memorial Field and would be highlighted in the report presented to the Executive Committee.
- Offices confirmed that the Council had a statutory duty to provide a balanced budget by 23rd February 2019.

Members took the opportunity to thank the Executive Director of Finance and Resources and her team for all their hard work in producing a balanced budget.

RESOLVED that

the recommendations within the Medium Term Financial Plan 2019/20 – 2022/23 be noted.

74. DEVELOPMENT PARTNER TO PROGRESS THE POSSIBLE REDEVELOPMENT OF WINYATES AND / OR MATCHBOROUGH DISTRICT CENTRES AND SURROUNDING AREAS - PRE-SCRUTINY - TO FOLLOW

The Chair welcomed the Interim Head of the North Worcestershire Economic Development and Regeneration (NWEDR) and invited him to present the report.

The Interim Head of NWEDR explained that the report outlined the initial proposals for the redevelopment of Winyates and Matchborough district centres. These proposals would be considered by the Executive Committee at a meeting on 8th January which would then move the project on to the next stages, to include the establishment of a partnership board to oversee the work.

The following areas were then highlighted in detail:

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Thursday, 3rd January, 2019

- The bid for Worcestershire One Public Estate (OPE) funding to support the proposed feasibility study.
- The need to work with Homes England and the Delivery Partner Panel to carry out soft market testing.
- The fact that both centres suffered from dated layout and design, which impacted on trade and income potential. This in turn led to an impact on the overall environment of the centres.
- The need for regeneration and improvement and the options available – the importance of getting this right was highlighted, in order to meet the needs of all concerned and to ensure that the Council was not put at a financial risk.
- The potential high costs of such a project and the work which had been carried out in recent months between NWEDR, the Planning and Regeneration Team and Homes England, together with Worcestershire OPE to explore a partnership approach.
- The funding streams which might be available and how to access these. This included a bid for £200k which was detailed within the report.
- The potential to provide additional housing of up to 400 units and to enhance the sports and leisure facilities.
- The need for the Council to work in partnership with the Arrow Vale RSA Academy and other public sector partners to ensure all related community services were integrated within the planned development.
- The process and advantages of working with Homes England and its Delivery Partner Panel to ensure that any risks to the Council were mitigated.
- The fact that all options would remain open to the Council upon completion of the soft market testing and the authority would not be obliged to commit to any of these options at the end of the process.
- The Interim Head of NWEDR had previous experience of working with a number of members of the Delivery Partner Panel and he advised that they had the expertise in similar projects and would be able to advise on what would be the best options available at the sites.
- The possibility of having one centre between the two areas and the use of all available land in appropriate ways.
- The Strategic Partnership framework and the restrictions which came with this option. It was highlighted that these partnerships were intended to support housing directly and did not have mixed use development experience. Should the Council opt for a Strategic Partnership an early commitment would need to be made to work with the partners on that partnership.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Thursday, 3rd January, 2019

The Interim Head of NWEDR concluded that he would suggest to the Executive Committee that the Delivery Partner Panel was the most suitable option for the Council to consider at this stage. This would allow for the soft marketing exercise to take place and help shape the Council's own plans, with an option then to go back to the market with more formal proposals at a later date. This created minimal risks for the Council and provided an opportunity to receive expert advice on the best way forward in order to secure the ambitions of the Council to regenerate these areas in the best way possible.

Following the presentation of the report, Members discussed a number of areas in more detail, including:

- Previous plans which had been drawn up in respect of the regeneration of Matchborough and Winyates district centres. It was confirmed that these had been very basic but would help to form a vision of what the Council would like and would provide an indication to potential developers of what was expected.
- Whether residents had been consulted. Officers acknowledged that the report made little reference to consultation stages. However, as this was the very earliest stage of the process it was confirmed that consultation would not take place until completion of the soft market testing. subsequently a steering group would be set up which would include all interested parties and would lead on stakeholder engagement.
- The potential for one district centre rather than two in the location and how this would be addressed in light of the current infrastructure in the area was discussed (reference to the Warwick Highway in particular was made). Officers acknowledged this issue and Members' attention was drawn to the plan provided within the report and the potential wider development area and land available.
- The number of houses that might be available and the breakdown of these. Specific reference was made to affordable housing and the potential loss of 29 Council houses as part of the redevelopment. Officers confirmed that there was the potential for up to 400 houses to be developed in line with the Council's planning strategy and this would include 30 per cent of the properties developed as affordable housing. There was further potential to increase the number of Council owned properties dependent on the final plans.
- The potential for one centre to service both areas and the impact of this on through traffic was considered. Members discussed the thinking behind the Redditch Development

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Thursday, 3rd January, 2019

Corporation's original plans in the 1960s and 1970s, the development of the individual wards and how each area was served by highways infrastructure.

- The importance of consulting with Ward Councillors and local residents. Members expressed concerns that this had not happened for the redevelopment of Church Hill district centre to the detriment of the development, the community and partner organisations. Officers acknowledged that this was an important point to note.
- A number of Members noted that they were not particularly comfortable at this stage to opt for a particular route in respect of taking the development forward. Officers explained that by using the Delivery Partner Panel the Council was not making a commitment to a particular developer or route and therefore was able to make changes once the soft market testing had been completed, thus leaving the Council with all options still available to it.
- Members sought assurances that the mistakes made during the redevelopment of Church Hill district centre would not be repeated and any lessons learned would be taken on board.
- The importance of the provision of social housing, including Council housing, and the need for the authority to not just focus on developing affordable homes. Officers assured Members that there would be more detail around this within the next stage of the project. However, Members were assured that any plans would meet the Council's planning requirements and there was the potential for the number of Council owned houses to increase as part of the redevelopment.
- Members also questioned when local residents would be consulted and officers advised that consideration would be given to a statement being issued following the decision made at the Executive Committee meeting.
- Clarification in respect of the Arrow Vale Trust was requested and it was explained that this was the governing body of the Arrow Vale Academy.
- Reference was made to the photographs used in the bid document within the report and why the choice had been made to include these images. Officers noted that whilst these did not show the centres in the best light, they had been used specifically for the purpose of the bid.

Members discussed the recommendations which would be considered by the Executive Committee and after further discussion the Committee

RESOLVED that

the recommendations detailed in the report be noted; and

RECOMMENDED that

assurances be given that no Council housing stock or business unit assets would be lost from the redevelopment of the Winyates and Matchborough district centres.

75. WASTE COLLECTION FROM HOUSES OF MULTIPLE OCCUPATION - REPORT

Members were reminded that this was something which had been raised as a matter of concern at the Overview and Scrutiny work Programme Planning event in June when discussing possible areas for scrutiny. The Head of Environmental Services provided Members with details around waste collection services for Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMOs) in light of the recent licensing changes which had come into force on 1st October 2018. The changes meant that landlords had to provide facilities for storing and disposing of household waste, recycling and garden waste. The changes also extended the description of HMOs to include properties which were less than three stories high.

The Head of Environmental Services provided Members with details around the legal implications of the changes and the impact of failure by the licence holder to comply with the scheme. Background information was also provided in respect of HMOs and the important role that they played within the housing sector. The accommodation was typically cheaper than other private rental options and often housed vulnerable tenants. Historically, this type of accommodation also brought with it problems in respect of waste, as the tenants were often transient and did not take responsibility for their waste. There was a lack of ownership and the quality and cleanliness of items presented as generally poor, with waste often uncontained and deposited direct into bins rather than bagged.

The Head of Environmental Services confirmed that his team were working closely with the Private Sector Housing Team to ensure that all future licenses granted for HMOs included a written statement ensuring waste was sufficiently catered for as part of their conditions. The team also carried out inspections before granting any licence with the specifics of those conditions being reiterated. It was confirmed that waste of this nature was being discussed at a national level and there was an argument being put

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Thursday, 3rd January, 2019

forward to justify this type of waste as being classified as commercial.

Following the presentation of the report Members discussed a number of areas in more detail, including:

- Whether the licences were renewed on an annual basis – Officers agreed to confirm this with Members outside of the meeting.
- Agreement that if the Government changed the existing regulations then HMOs would be treated as commercial premises for waste purposes.
- Disposal of garden and bulky waste – it was confirmed that these services were available at the appropriate costs.
- Difficulty in navigating the Council's website – it was agreed that this would be taken up further outside of the meeting.
- Difficulty in being able to establish who was responsible for the waste and how this could potentially be addressed.
- Whether there was the potential for the Committee to further investigate the subject of waste and recycling levels. Following discussion the Committee agreed that this was a subject which had been scrutinised by a Task Group in some detail previously though this had disappointingly not caused an increase in recycling rates. Therefore Members concluded that further investigation of the subject was unlikely to impact on the Council's recycling rates.
- The increased number of HMOs within the Borough and concerns that this would continue into the future and the ongoing problems which it brought.

Members were keen to ensure that the impact of the new legislation was monitored and met the needs of all those concerned, before any further action on this matter was taken.

RESOLVED that

the briefing note in respect of Waste Collection from Houses of Multiple Occupation be noted.

76. TASK GROUPS, SHORT SHARP REVIEWS AND WORKING GROUPS - VERBAL UPDATES

Budget Scrutiny Working Group

Officers advised that the Group would meet on 7th January 2019 when it would consider the Housing Revenue Account and the Fees and Charges report for 2019/20. Due to the timing of this meeting it

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Thursday, 3rd January, 2019

was confirmed that any recommendations would be fed directly through to the Executive Committee meeting on 8th January.

Performance Scrutiny Working Group

Members were advised that the next meeting of this Group would take place on 10th February 2019.

77. EXTERNAL SCRUTINY BODIES - VERBAL UPDATES

West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) Overview and Scrutiny Committee – Councillor M. Chalk

Councillor Chalk advised that at the most recent meeting of WMCA Overview and Scrutiny Committee there had been a question and answer session with the Mayor, Mr. A. Street. There had been some thirty questions put to him, many of them around available funding and Councillor Chalk explained that he would be happy to provide further details to any Members who would like more detail.

Worcestershire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC) – Councillor M. Chalk

Councillor Chalk informed the Committee that at the previous HOSC meeting one of the areas covered had been plans for coping with winter pressures and he was pleased to report that more beds had been made available at the Alexandra Hospital in Redditch.

78. EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MINUTES AND SCRUTINY OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE'S WORK PROGRAMME - SELECTING ITEMS FOR SCRUTINY

Officers advised Members that recommendations from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had been considered at the Executive Committee meeting on 11th December and it was noted that one remained outstanding and that this would be considered at the Executive Committee meeting on 8th January.

An update in respect of the Executive Committee's Work Programme was provided, which included a number of additional items being included following its publication. These were:

- The removal of the item in respect of the restructure of Planning Services – Town Centre Co-ordination.
- Unit 17 Broad Ground Road, Redditch – this had now gone back to March.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Thursday, 3rd January, 2019

- Flexible homelessness item – this was included twice in the Work Programme but Officers confirmed that it was only one item.
- Private Sector Housing Report Scheme item would be considered at the 5th February Executive Committee meeting.
- A new item in respect of a change in the operator at Arrow Valley Countryside Centre had been added recently.

RESOLVED that

- a) the minutes of the Executive Committee held on 11th December 2018 be noted; and**
- b) the Executive Committee’s Work Programme be noted.**

79. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

Officers provided a number of updates in respect of the Committee’s work programme, this included the following:

- Overview and Scrutiny – Select Committee Findings. Members were advised that the Government’s guidance in respect of Overview and Scrutiny, which was due to be issued in December 2018 following a Select Committee review of the process, had not yet been published. It was therefore likely that this item would need to be postponed.
- Housing Improvement Plan – this should have been included within the February meeting as Members’ had requested to pre-scrutinise this item, following consideration of the Executive Work Programme.
- Community Lottery item – this should also have been included in the Committee’s work programme for pre-scrutiny at its February meeting.

It was noted that there were a significant number of items to be considered at the meeting in February and after discussion it was agreed that an additional meeting would be arranged, prior to 5th February Executive Committee meeting in order to give the Committee sufficient opportunity to consider all the items.

RESOLVED that

- a) Officers canvass a date for an additional Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting as detailed in the pre-amble above; and**

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Thursday, 3rd January, 2019

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- b) the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's Work Programme
be noted.

The Meeting commenced at 6.30 pm
and closed at 7.57 pm