

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Thursday, 3rd December,
2020

Microsoft Teams

MINUTES

Present:

Councillor Joe Baker (Chair), Councillor Jennifer Wheeler (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Salman Akbar, Michael Chalk, Peter Fleming, Andrew Fry, Ann Isherwood and Mark Shurmer

Also Present:

Councillor Matthew Dormer - Portfolio Holder for Planning, Economic Development, Commercialism and Partnerships
Councillor Nyear Nazir - Portfolio Holder for Community Services and Regulatory Services
Councillor Mike Rouse - Portfolio Holder for Leisure

Officers:

Sue Hanley, Mike Dunphy, Ostap Paparega, Rebecca Pritchett and Mary Worsfold

Democratic Services Officers:

Jess Bayley and Jo Gresham

47. APOLOGIES AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillor Pattie Hill.

48. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND OF PARTY WHIP

There were no declarations of interest nor of any Party Whip.

49. MINUTES

Chair

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on Thursday 22nd October 2020 be approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chair.

50. PUBLIC SPEAKING

There were no registered public speakers on this occasion.

51. CIVIL CONTINGENCIES ANNUAL REPORT

The Civil Contingencies Manager presented the Civil Contingencies Annual Report and in doing so highlighted the following to Members:

- It had been recommended in 2018 that the Corporate Emergency Plan be updated annually. Officers confirmed that this year the plan had been updated in March 2020.
- The Storm Dennis floods were considered a significant incident during 2020 and that all learning from that incident had been captured following a detailed debrief.
- A debrief exercise was carried out in respect the Council's response to Covid-19 after the first lockdown. Initially the uptake in response was low due to the heavy workload of officers. However, once the information was received, 18 recommendations were made and accepted by the Chief Executive. All actions, except for one, were undertaken within four weeks. It was clarified that due to the nature of the outstanding recommendation and the way in which it needed to be implemented the recommendation would be ongoing and monitored closely.

The Chair invited Councillor Nazir, as Portfolio Holder for Community Services and Regulatory Services, to comment on the report. She thanked officers for their work during a difficult period.

The Deputy Chief Executive reported to Members that the Corporate Management Team (CMT) continued to meet three times a week to discuss any Covid-19 related issues including business continuity and service-related issues.

RESOLVED that

the Civil Contingencies Annual Report be noted.

**52. SKILLS IN THE LOCAL WORKFORCE - VERBAL
PRESENTATION**

The Head of North Worcestershire Economic Development and Regeneration (NWEDR) presented a verbal update in respect of Skills in the Local Workforce. During the presentation, the following was highlighted for Members' consideration:

- Support programmes around employment, skills and apprenticeships were currently being developed by NWEDR
- There were a number of providers who delivered courses for 16-21-year olds. It was reported that the skillsets targeted in the courses included CV preparation, communications and working in teams. In addition to these, there were topic specific courses such as customer service and construction along with Maths and English. Independent providers delivered these courses as did the Heart of Worcestershire College (HoW).
- Worcestershire County Council provided skills support through their website. A Skills Hub service had recently been launched and was available to employers and individuals.
- A number of apprenticeship grants were available to young people and initiatives were in place to enable young people to be matched with suitable placements and vacancies within the Borough.
- The provision of courses from HoW College was aligned with the supply and demand from local businesses and employers. Officers reported that there were four top sectors that accounted for employment in the Borough. These were identified as manufacturing, wholesale and retail, professional services and human health and social work. It was reported that new sectors were also emerging including digital technology and artificial intelligence and although these might have an impact on manufacturing and retail, they would also provide an enormous opportunity for young people. Officers advised that it was important, to ensure that

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young people were equipped with the correct skills and knowledge to undertake jobs within these sectors. Members were informed that the college did provide some relevant courses in these areas but that discussions were ongoing to ensure that the right infrastructure was in place to face challenges and maximise potential opportunities.

- Initiatives and support measures were communicated to local businesses and individuals through various business networks and channels, although it was considered a challenge to reach every single business and individual.

Members expressed an interest in whether intervention could be made earlier in young peoples' education in respect of training and skills. It was confirmed that there was an initiative that was currently underway in the Borough named 'Opening Doors to Business'. This scheme promoted the opportunities to a greater number of schools across a variety of ages. It was reported that an initiative called 'Stem Works' was also being undertaken by Worcestershire County Council in Primary Schools.

The Chair invited Councillor Dormer, as Portfolio Holder for Planning, Economic Development, Commercialism and Partnerships, to comment on the presentation. He acknowledged that there were challenges in this area for the Borough and that the perception of available employment in the Town needed to change going forward.

The Chair questioned whether local businesses could do more to engage with young people and it was agreed that although there were projects in place, such as mentoring, more needed to be done to increase engagement and regarding the provision of relevant courses in order to close the skills gap in the Borough.

RESOLVED that

the Skills in the Local Workforce presentation be noted.

- 53. CHURCH GREEN DRAFT CONSERVATION AREA AND
MANAGEMENT PLAN CONSULTATION - PRE-SCRUTINY**

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The Principal Conservation Officer presented a report in respect of the Church Green Draft Conservation Area and Management Plan consultation. During the presentation, the following matters were highlighted for Members' consideration:

- The Conservation Area around St Stephen's Church was originally designated in 1971 with later extensions in 1978 and 2006 after further appraisals.
- A summary was provided of the Church Green Conservation Area and areas of special interest.
- A high number of buildings within the area were Designated Heritage Assets.
- The positive features of the Conservation Area would act as a focus for the future regeneration of the Redditch Town Centre.
- The areas for concern within the Conservation Area included the poor state of shop fronts, parking around St Stephens' Church and vacant units.

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

- The opportunity for regeneration of the shops within the Conservation Area in order to make positive changes to the Town Centre.
- The condition of the long-term vacant premises and the impact this had on business owners' desire to take on these premises.
- The positive outcomes of refurbishment of the shop fronts in the area.
- The issue of parking on Unicorn Hill, and any future changes that could be made that would increase the footfall for the shops in this area and encourage visitors into the town.
- The impact that raising awareness of heritage buildings within the Church Green area and signposting facilities would have on increasing use within the area.
- The improvement of the link between the Kingfisher Shopping Centre and Church Green. Officers reported that this was an area that was being looked at for improvement including removal of the street clutter to encourage greater use of the area.

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- The importance of the strong history of Redditch and its promotion in the future.

The Chair invited Councillor Dormer, as Portfolio Holder for Planning, Economic Development, Commercialism and Partnerships, and Councillor Rouse, as Portfolio Holder for Leisure (including Heritage), to comment on the report and the following was highlighted:

- The inclusion of electric car chargers and other modern infrastructure would be allowed within the Conservation Area. It was reported that as long as the inclusion was sympathetic to the area these types of changes would be permitted.
- The future introduction of increased pedestrian areas within the Conservation Area
- The agreement for the greater need for parking in the area. It was explained that this issue was currently being addressed by the Council but was an ongoing matter.

It was clarified that formal recognition of the area being 'At Risk' by English Heritage did not indicate that the heritage buildings were at risk of falling down but more that it would be considered an area that was at risk of losing its heritage features. It was confirmed that if the area was recognised as 'At Risk' by English Heritage, this would boost the possibility of access to funding in the future.

At the end of the debate the Committee

RECOMMENDED that

- 1) **that the Executive supports the draft Church Green Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan; and**
- 2) **that the Executive approves a 6-week public consultation period. The result of this consultation will be reported back to the Executive in due course.**

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

Members considered the latest edition of the Executive Committee's Work Programme, which covered the period 1st January 2021 to 30th April 2021. It was highlighted to Members that the following item had been moved to June 2021:

- Matchborough and Winyates District Centres - Regeneration

The Democratic Services Officer confirmed that the following items were due to be considered by the Budget Scrutiny Working Group:

- Finance Monitoring Quarter 2 - 2020/2
- Medium Term Financial Plan 2021/22 to 2024/25 - Update Report
- Flexible Homelessness Support Grant and Homelessness Reduction Grant 2021/22

The Chair requested that the New Cemetery Provision be included on the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's Work Programme.

RESOLVED that

- 1) the minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee held on Tuesday 27th October 2020 be noted; and
- 2) the content of the Executive Committee's work programme for the period 1st January 2021 to 30th April 2021 be noted.

55. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

The Democratic Services Officer confirmed that there were no changes to the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme.

RESOLVED that

the content of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's work programme be noted.

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56. TASK GROUPS, SHORT SHARP REVIEWS AND WORKING GROUPS - UPDATE REPORTS

The following updates were provided in respect of the work of a number of Task Groups and Working Groups:

a) Budget Scrutiny Working Group – Chair, Councillor Jenny Wheeler

Councillor Wheeler introduced the verbal update in respect of this item and advised Members that the group had met once since the last meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 10th November 2020. The items considered at the meeting included:

- An update on Housing Revenue Account and any actions currently being undertaken for the financial year 2020/2021
- The outcomes and financial implications of the Stock Condition Survey
- An interview with the Head of Planning, Regeneration and Leisure Services and her role in respect of Fees and Charges

Councillor Wheeler informed the Committee that a recommendation had been proposed by the Budget Scrutiny Working Group in respect of the future setting of Fees and Charges. Members were advised that it was hoped that the recommendation would ensure a robust and transparent approach to the setting of Fees and Charges in the future and include clear justification and explanation for any changes made.

The next meeting was to take place on 7th December 2020 where Fees and Charges were to be considered.

b) Dementia Task Group – Councillor Michael Chalk

Councillor Chalk reported that one meeting had taken place since the last Committee meeting. Age UK had been in attendance for that meeting and had provided a great deal of information and detail in respect of the services they provide

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in their support of people diagnosed with Dementia. The Task Group had agreed at their last meeting that an external expert should be invited to discuss the different types of dementia at the next meeting.

He reported that the Task Group were re-focussing, and that a draft report was being prepared.

c) Performance Scrutiny Working Group – Chair, Councillor Andrew Fry

Councillor Fry advised Members that there had been no meetings of the working group since the last Committee meeting, however, a meeting was scheduled for January 2021.

In order to support the Council's objectives around Commercialism and help ensure that the Council has a transparent and robust approach to setting charges in a sustainable and equitable way the Committee

RECOMMENDED that

Fees and Charges are set following due consideration of the strategy of each service area, taking into account overheads, cost recovery and the provision of the service.

RESOLVED that

the update reports be noted.

57. EXTERNAL SCRUTINY BODIES - UPDATE REPORTS

Councillor Michael Chalk introduced the item regarding External Scrutiny Bodies for Members' consideration and, in addition to the written updates that he provided, he explained to Members that there had been one West Midlands Combined Authority Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting since the Committee last met. He advised that this was a private meeting in respect of the Budget and further information would be provided to Members in due course.

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Councillor Chalk informed Members that at the last meeting of the Worcestershire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee it was reported that Covid-19 patient numbers were relatively low in hospitals across the County.

RESOLVED that

the updates be noted.

The Meeting commenced at 6.30 pm
and closed at 7.52 pm