

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Monday, 18th January, 2021

MINUTES

Present:

Councillor Joe Baker (Chair), Councillor Jennifer Wheeler (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Joanne Beecham, Michael Chalk, Peter Fleming, Andrew Fry, Julian Grubb and Mark Shurmer

Also Present:

Councillor Matthew Dormer – Portfolio Holder for Planning, Economic Development, Commercialism and Partnerships

Officers:

Lyndsey Berry, Helen Broughton, Kevin Dicks and Ostap Paparega

Democratic Services Officers:

Jo Gresham and Kerry Somers

58. APOLOGIES AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES

At the opening of the meeting the Chair requested that all Members took a moment to pay tribute to Councillor Pattie Hill who sadly had passed away over the Christmas period.

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors Akbar and Isherwood with Councillors Beecham and Grubb as named substitutes.

59. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND OF PARTY WHIP

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

Chair

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60. MINUTES

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on Thursday 3rd December 2020 be approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chair.

61. PUBLIC SPEAKING

The Chair welcomed Ms. S. Harvey as a public speaker to the meeting, who was invited to address the Committee.

Ms. Harvey's speech was delivered as follows:

"Thank you for the opportunity to share some concerns I have over the current Town Deal project.

The prospect of a large investment was announced in September 2019, and it was made clear from the start that community engagement and participation was key.

The prospectus asks the Town Deal board to "Encourage local people to get involved and to generate ideas."

As a member of the community, I have tried my best to be engaged in the Town Deal process, because I can see that Redditch desperately needs investment and regeneration, not just in the town centre but also in the district areas.

"Communities should have a meaningful role in decision-making" is what we were told in the prospectus.

I was keen to follow progress and looked for as much information as possible. A promised dedicated website never materialised, although in the past few weeks "Redditch Town Deal" has its own web address. This takes you to the page on the Council website. There is still no direct link from the Council homepage.

The information when found is uninspiring and sparse. I was forced to trawl through minutes to find any nugget of progress. There are no published minutes for meetings in December or scheduled for

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January. The terms of reference demand a page which is “prominent, accessible and easy to navigate” and “updated regularly to ensure that information remains current.”

I feel that the Town Deal Board has largely failed in this obligation. I point members towards the St Ives town deal website as an excellent example with an exciting layout, thorough minutes and links to social media sites.

The main opportunity for engaging was 13 months after launch when an online survey was opened, and according to the council report “over 650 local residents took part in this and in online group discussions.”

Can these few responses be truly representative of the whole community? I understand that the coronavirus pandemic has created additional hurdles, but it is for the town deal board to overcome these in order to promote inclusivity.

What measures have been taken to engage those residents who do not access information online? This may include elderly residents or families living in our more deprived areas. Were physical copies of the survey available, and how many were returned? What support was given to enable the hard of hearing or those with sight issues to access the survey?

I want to know which voluntary and community groups have been involved in the project so far? Do they include those supporting young people, disabled people or disadvantaged residents? Which faith organisations have been approached? Have we ensured that voices from the BAME community have been heard? Or those residents who speak English as an additional language?

Which community forums have been involved? Do they represent a diversity of interests and backgrounds?

I guarantee that if you asked a hundred people in Redditch about the Town Deal fund ideas that the vast majority would have no clue what was on the table. I only know what the proposals are because I have taken the time to read a council report published only last week. Appendices to this report were unpublished at time of writing.

To sum up - my grievances are this: I have tried hard to be engaged, to find out information and to play a part in this process. I have been frustrated when I should have been inspired. I have felt ignored when I should have been empowered.”

62. REDDITCH TOWN DEAL INVESTMENT PLAN - PRE-SCRUTINY

The Head of Economic Development & Regeneration from North Worcestershire Economic Development and Regeneration (NWEDR) presented a report in respect of the Redditch Town Deal Investment Plan. During the presentation, the following matters were highlighted for Member’s consideration:

- There were three key themes included in the scope of the Town’s Fund including urban regeneration, enterprise and connectivity (including digital and transport).
- Any proposals put forward as part of the Town Deal Investment Plan needed to be evidence based and have economic impact in the location.
- Governance arrangements were outlined in the Government guidelines including establishment of the Town Deal Board. The Board was responsible for creating a long-term vision and interventions in order to support that vision. External consultants were engaged to aid the development of the Town Deal Investment Plan and to carry out an independent assessment of any projects that were proposed to ensure that they aligned with the Board’s vision.
- That unlocking Redditch was the vision in order to move Redditch from a traditional New Town to a New Town that was fit for the 21st Century.
- There were expectations included in the Government guidance regarding public consultation and the Board fully supported the engagement with the local communities and that external consultants undertook comprehensive and targeted market research.
- The report that had been provided to the Committee was in draft form and the final version of the plan would be available in time for Members’ consideration at the meeting of Council on Monday 25th January 2021.

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The Chair invited Councillor Dormer, as Portfolio Holder for Planning, Economic Development, Commercialism and Partnerships to comment on the report and in doing so he thanked the Head of NWEDR, the Regeneration and Implementation Manager and the Board for all of their hard work and time in preparing the Redditch Town Deal Investment Plan. He informed Members that it had been more difficult to engage with members of the public during Covid-19 but that the number of responses and engagement during the public consultation had been very encouraging.

The Chief Executive updated the Committee in respect of the Town Board meeting that had taken place during the previous week and confirmed that it had been agreed that the Town's Investment Plan was proposing a budget of £25 million. It was further clarified to Members that this decision had been made as Government required Town Boards to demonstrate that projects bidding for more than £25 million would have needed to clearly show that the projects would impact at a regional or national level.

Members raised some concerns in respect of the Redditch Town Deal Investment Plan website and transparency for residents. The low numbers of responses to the public consultation were also queried given the number of people who lived in Redditch. Officers were requested to provide data regarding the demographic of those residents who had provided responses and the types of public consultation that was carried out. Officers undertook to provide information to the Committee outside of the meeting.

Further queries that were raised included the following:

- The situation of the Police Station including what were the plans and what funding had been received.
- The future of Library provision and location in the Town Centre.

The Head of NWEDR and the Regeneration and Implementation Manager responded to the queries and informed Members that the Police Station was a key site for the development and the funding that had been provided had been given to enable site development and that discussions were taking place with relevant colleagues in

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order to progress the project. In terms of the public consultation, it was clarified to Members that there had been engagement through the Government's 'My Town' campaign which had yielded a decent response. A survey was undertaken by an external provider who ensured that there had been a broad range of demographics who had responded to the survey. In addition to this, groups were established, and interviews carried out through a variety of methods for example via telephone and online meeting, which ensured social inclusivity. It was confirmed to Members that there had also been wider distribution of the survey which had included members of the Redditch Partnership, Heart of Worcestershire College (HoW), Redditch Churches and Redditch Community Forum. Members were advised that consultation would usually include road shows however Covid-19 had meant that such events could not take place. Officers confirmed that the website would be live within the next few days and was part of an ongoing project up to 2026.

Members enquired regarding the engagement of education providers in the Borough and noted that they felt it would be beneficial in the future if there were greater engagement in this area. It was confirmed to Members that HoW College had been invited to meetings and included in the process along with all key strategic partners.

Some Members discussed that the plan outlined an ambitious project which hopefully would lead to a positive future for Redditch and once again officers were thanked for their hard work on the project.

In respect of delegated authority being granted to the Head of NWEDR and Head of Legal, Democratic and Property Services, the Chair requested that in order for the Committee be kept informed of decisions made that regular updates were presented to the Committee.

After further detailed discussion Members were informed that a Programme Manager would be involved in the delivery of the project and Members requested that a robust process be undertaken when recruiting the person to the position to ensure that they held the relevant experience for a project of this scale.

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The Chair concluded the debate and noted that this project was a very important stage in Redditch's development and that it was important to work together to ensure the best for residents in the Borough.

RESOLVED that

the Overview and Scrutiny Committee receive regular, six-monthly updates in respect of the Redditch Town Deal Investment Plan.

63. REDDITCH PARTNERSHIP REPORT 2021

The Redditch Partnership Manager presented the Redditch Partnership Annual Report 2021. The following was highlighted for Member's attention:

- The Redditch Partnership worked to a set of priorities which included the following:
 - Health Inequalities
 - Education Attainment school readiness and raising aspirations of young people.
 - The economy of Redditch with a focus on providing a larger and more diverse job offers.
 - Lead on transformation change of services for citizens in Redditch.
- That the Redditch Partnership was overseen by a number of strategic partners including the Redditch Partnership Executive Group, Redditch Community Wellbeing Trust, and the Redditch Business Leaders Group. It was clarified to Members that the Redditch Business Leaders Group had emerged over the previous year and that various businesses were represented on the group.
- Changes had inevitably occurred over the previous year as a result of Covid-19. Members were informed that it had proved more difficult to meet in lockdown however it was confirmed that some meetings had taken place virtually. The Business Leaders Group had continued to meet regularly and had undertaken a mentoring project, mentoring young people in schools. This initiative was involved in raising the

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- aspirations of young people in the Borough and in the introduction of the industries that existed in Redditch.
- The Redditch Partnership structure had been really effective during the response to the pandemic. It was reported that Voluntary Sector Groups had provided support to vulnerable people during lockdown and that food, medicines and support for those who were isolated was provided. The Partnership was able to consolidate that support and create links between the Council and the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) groups. The Department for Work and Pensions had provided funding in order for further work to be carried out and that this funding would be allocated to VCS groups as soon as possible. Members were informed that it was hoped that this kind of work would continue in the future and that links would continue to flourish after the lockdown.
 - There were projects that had been planned prior to the pandemic and it was hoped that these would continue to move forward, and Members would be updated on these projects in the future.

The Chief Executive reiterated that the VCS groups had been invaluable during lockdown and he expressed his thanks to the Redditch Partnership Manager for her hard work in respect of the Partnership and for facilitating the arrangements so successfully during a difficult time.

The Chair invited Councillor Dormer, as Portfolio Holder for Planning, Economic Development, Commercialism and Partnership to comment on the report. He echoed the Chief Executive's thanks to the Redditch Partnership Manager and that their work alongside the VCS groups had been vital.

The Chair highlighted the importance of the VCS groups in local communities during the pandemic and that the cross-party activity that had taken place was encouraging and had been of great benefit to the Borough.

RESOLVED that

the Redditch Partnership Report 2021 be noted.

64. REDDITCH COMMUNITY LOTTERY UPDATE

The Redditch Partnership Manager presented the report in respect of the Redditch Community Lottery Update and informed Members that it was the one-year anniversary since the launch of the Community Lottery.

Members were advised that this report outlined updates regarding the figures and statistics of 'Good Causes', players and ticket sales for the Community Lottery.

Members attention was drawn to following during the presentation:

- The predicted target number of 682 players during the year had not been met and had only reached 342. A total of approximately £17,600k of tickets had been sold and that the Council had received 10% of the sales. The rest of the costs were used for license fees to the Gambling Commission and membership to the Lottery Council. In addition to this the Council received approximately £3k from players who selected the Council as their beneficiary when purchasing tickets. These monies were then redistributed as part of the grant funding process. Members were informed that £5,730 was allocated to 'Good Causes' and the remainder was used to pay for costs from Gatherwell Ltd, the organisation who administrated the lottery on behalf of the Council. In addition to cash prizes there was the opportunity to win free tickets, and 'bolt-on' prizes provided by Gatherwell Ltd.
- Community groups had not been able to promote the lottery through their usual fundraising events during the pandemic as much as they might have in normal circumstances.
- The demographic of people purchasing the tickets was spread evenly across the Town and Members were informed that it was mainly women between the age of 36 and 40 that had purchased tickets throughout the year.

The Chair invited Councillor Dormer, as Portfolio Holder for Planning, Economic Development, Commercialism and Partnerships to comment on the presentation. He explained that unfortunately the pandemic had impacted on the promotion of the

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Lottery and that hopefully next year would provide a clearer picture of its performance.

The Chair asked for clarification on the methods of sale for the tickets and was disappointed that the targets had not been met but accepted that the promotion of the Lottery had not been as effective as expected due to Covid-19. He questioned officers whether there was anything more that Members could do in order to promote the Lottery in order to engage with the groups.

There was discussion regarding the change in people's financial position during the pandemic and noted that this also might have had an impact on the number of ticket sales.

Officers undertook to provide a further update to the Committee in six months' time.

RESOLVED that

the Redditch Community Lottery Update be noted.

65. TASK GROUP REVIEWS - DRAFT SCOPING DOCUMENTS

The Chair invited Councillor Dormer to present the draft scoping document in respect of Parking on Unicorn Hill. It was clarified to Members that Councillor Dormer was in attendance as the proposer of the Short, Sharp Review.

Members were informed that the scoping document had been proposed as a result of discussions that had taken place in respect of the available parking on Unicorn Hill during the meeting of the Committee held on 3rd December 2020, the usefulness of the parking and the impact that parking had had on businesses in that area.

Some Members agreed that the proposal was a good opportunity to establish the parking needs in that area and could have a positive impact on local businesses and the Town Centre. However, there was detailed discussion regarding potential community safety concerns if changes were made to the current taxi rank location and that data collected in respect of parking and taxi usage on Unicorn

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Hill might be distorted due to the pandemic. Some Members felt that this should be an area of investigation should the Short, Sharp Review be established.

RESOLVED that

- a) **subject to any changes agreed during the meeting, the proposed Short, Sharp Review of Parking on Unicorn Hill be launched: and**
- b) **Councillor Fleming be appointed to Chair of the Short, Sharp Review.**

66. 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 February 2021 to 30th May 2021. It was highlighted to Members that the following item had been moved to August 2021:

- New Cemetery Provision

The Democratic Services Officer confirmed that the following items would be considered by the Budget Scrutiny Working Group and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

- Medium Term Financial Plan 2021/22 to 2024/25 - Update Report (including the capital programme)

RESOLVED that

- 1) **the minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee held on Tuesday 8th December 2020 and 12th January 2021 be noted; and**
- 2) **the content of the Executive Committee's work programme for the period 1st February 2021 to 31st May 2021 be noted.**

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67. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

The Democratic Services Officer confirmed that, other than those detailed in the previous item, 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.

68. 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 5th January 2021.

The items considered at the meeting had included:

- Homelessness Prevention Grant Allocation for 2021/22
- Housing Revenue Account - Rent Setting 2021/2
- Update on the impact of Covid-19, Brexit and Section 24.

Councillor Wheeler informed the Committee that there had been a slight change to the Work Programme for the group and that Professor Peter Latchford would now attend a meeting of the group in March 2021.

The next meeting was due to take place on 3rd February 2021 where the Medium-Term Financial Plan would be considered.

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b) Dementia Task Group – Councillor Michael Chalk

Councillor Chalk reported that there had been no meetings of the group since the last Committee meeting. However, there was a draft recommendation that had been proposed and would be included in the final report.

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 19th January 2021.

RESOLVED that

the update reports be noted.

69. EXTERNAL SCRUTINY BODIES - UPDATE REPORTS

Councillor Michael Chalk introduced the item regarding External Scrutiny Bodies for Members' consideration and reported, in addition to the written update he had provided, that there had been a meeting of the West Midlands Combined Authority, Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 11th December 2020, which had been an opportunity to ask the Mayor, Andy Street questions regarding a number of areas of interest.

RESOLVED that

the update be noted.

The Meeting commenced at 6.30 pm
and closed at 8.33 pm