

# Overview and Scrutiny Committee

14th July 2010

## MINUTES

### Present:

Councillor Diane Thomas (Chair) and Councillors Kath Banks, Andrew Brazier (substituting for Councillor William Norton), Roger Hill (substituting for Councillor Anita Clayton), Brenda Quinney, Mark Shurmer and Graham Vickery.

### Also Present:

Trish Buckley (Co-opted representative on behalf of UNISON)

Councillor Michael Braley and Mr Michael Collins (Vice-Chair, Standards Committee)

### Officers:

K Cook, C Felton, J Godwin, S Hanley, S Jordan, A Walsh and J Young

### Committee Services Officer:

J Bayley and I Westmore

## 29. APOLOGIES AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors Anita Clayton, Bill Hartnett, Robin King and William Norton.

## 30. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND OF PARTY WHIP

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

## 31. MINUTES

### RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 23rd June 2010 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

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Chair

## 32. ACTIONS LIST

The Committee considered the latest version of the Actions List and specific mention was made of the following matters:

a) Action 8: Improvement Plan 2010/11

It was noted that this item had been removed from the Forward Plan and so would no longer be available for pre-scrutiny.

b) Action 12: Updates from Outside Bodies

It was reported that this matter was due to be discussed at a future meeting of the Constitutional Review Working Party.

c) Action 13: Concessionary Travel

Officers confirmed that copies of this information had now been provided to Members.

d) Action 16: NI 151 – Overall Employment Rate

The Committee was informed that this additional information had been circulated to Members that day.

**RESOLVED that**

**the report be noted.**

## 33. PRE-SCRUTINY

In respect of pre-scrutiny requests, the one matter highlighted as being appropriate from the Forward Plan was the item on Sub-Regional Choice-Based Lettings. The Chair confirmed that this had already been selected for pre-scrutiny and was scheduled to be considered on 15th September.

## 34. TASK & FINISH REVIEWS - DRAFT SCOPING DOCUMENTS

There were no draft scoping documents for the Committee to review. Councillor Vickery reaffirmed his intention to provide a scoping document on the subject of environmental standards on local housing estates.

## 35. TASK AND FINISH GROUPS - PROGRESS REPORTS

The Committee received oral reports in relation to current reviews, namely:

a) Local Strategic Partnership

It was reported that the Group had held its final meeting at which the Director of Policy, Performance and Partnerships had been interviewed. The final report had been drafted and it was hoped that this might be submitted to either the meeting on 22nd July or that on 4th August.

b) Worcestershire Hub Review

It was reported that no further meetings of this Group had taken place.

**RESOLVED that**

**the updates be noted.**

## 36. REDI CENTRE - UPDATE REPORT

The Committee received a presentation and oral report from Officers on the options that were being explored for the REDI Centre going forward and the circumstances that had led to the Council undertaking its current review of the service.

The unsuccessful attempt to establish a Trust to run the Centre and to which the service could be transferred in 2006-7 were briefly outlined. Officers had subsequently undertaken an options appraisal in the autumn of 2008 and the Council had agreed in April 2009 to seek an alternative service provider. This culminated in an expression of interest from NEW College and negotiations for a transfer of the service in March 2010. Funding cuts by the Learning and Skills Council had resulted in NEW College rethinking their involvement and finally withdrawing. The College also ended its franchise agreement with the Centre in June 2010 as a result of budgetary pressures, resulting in a loss of £42,000 per year income. Further funding options were then explored by the Council particularly through the County Council as the authority responsible for adult education but no alternative funding had been secured to date.

It was noted that REDI was the only provider of Learndirect locally and that many of the courses were previously provided under

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franchise to NEW College and so were unfunded for the coming academic year. Other adult education opportunities in the Redditch area were limited and were often accessed through referral from Job Centre Plus and similar agencies. Officers undertook to provide information on the range of courses that would not be provided locally should REDI cease to operate following the meeting.

Four potential options were outlined, these being:

- i) continue to fund and maintain the service as currently provided;
- ii) re-structure and fund the service in line with known business need;
- iii) closure of the service; and
- iv) relocation of Learndirect to another facility.

The consequences of each course of action were set out, including the financial, customer and human resources impacts. One of the key aspects highlighted in each case was the projected budget deficit arising from the proposed option.

Officers undertook to provide copies of the presentation to Members following the meeting.

The Chair invited users of the REDI Centre to address the meeting. The initial proposal put forward was that Members visit the Centre to see staff and users at the site without prejudice. A further submission highlighted that the courses offered at REDI, such as first step, back to work and self-esteem courses, were not readily available elsewhere. The withdrawal by NEW College from lower level IT courses was also noted in this regard.

The UNISON co-opted representative on the Committee provided a Union perspective on the matter. It was noted that the future funding of the REDI Centre had been under close review most years since approximately 2003 with obvious implications for the morale of staff. It was accepted that the financial circumstances were difficult but Members were reminded that the service was created in a similar financial climate. It was hoped that the loss of a valuable service would not result from a short-term financial gain.

Members commented upon the options before them. It was contended that the cost of providing the service at the Centre was very competitive on a per head basis. The service was described as being demonstrably cost-effective and also effective, on the face of it, in terms of the learning outcomes that were achieved. However, Members were interested to receive a clearer demonstration of the

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measures of success for learners at the Centre over its lifetime. The importance of preserving the service was highlighted but the location and service provider were considered, in some respects as being of lesser importance. The opportunity for picking up the lower level IT courses no longer to be offered by NEW College was raised as a possibility for the future.

In conclusion, and, after considering the information before it, the Committee

## **RECOMMENDED that**

- 1) **Members of the Overview and Scrutiny and Executive Committees visit the REDI Centre prior to the consideration of the REDI centre report at the Council meeting on 9th August; and**
- 2) **Option 1, continuation of the current level of service, be approved by the Executive Committee and full Council.**

## **37. WORCESTERSHIRE ENHANCED TWO TIER (WETT) REGULATORY SERVICE**

The recently appointed Head of the Worcestershire Enhanced Two Tier Regulatory Service attended the Committee to answer a number of questions regarding the service to be provided to the Borough under this new arrangement.

- 1) How do you ensure members of the public are provided with a service relevant and responsive to the needs of their locality?

It was explained that the WETT service would start from the position of the existing service and then seek to identify local priorities moving forward through consultation with the public and local Councillors whilst remaining abreast of national priorities. Members would particularly have an input through the development of the service plan which was to be considered by the Joint Committee.

There would be an emphasis on moving resources to areas that were identified as hot-spots for particular issues and the expanded provision available across the County would increase the potential resources available to tackle priorities. However, the changes to the service would develop over time and Members would not be expected to see much

alteration to the service previously provided at this early stage.

- 2) How are Members expected to advocate specific local provision as mandated by their electorate?

The Committee was informed that Members would still be able to contact Officers directly in relation to local issues and the Joint Committee was identified as a means by which the views of all district councils and their Members could be represented. The Business Plan for the service provided a further opportunity through which Members could influence the shape of the service.

- 3) Does any aspect of the Regulatory service need to take account of the particular needs of a new town with a younger population profile, an industrial heritage, transport links predominantly out of county and a travel to work profile linking it with Birmingham rather than Worcestershire?

Officers made the point that all districts would make claims for their particular difference from others within the County. Officers highlighted the way that the new arrangement could assist the Borough, noting that the prevalence of contaminated land was prompting them to consider how additional resources could be brought to bear on this issue. The Head of the Service also highlighted the opportunities through which the localness of Redditch could be recognised and fed into the regional and national discussion.

Officers would be able to present a comprehensive strategy to Members once the implementation stage was passed but the focus throughout was to be on outcomes.

**RESOLVED that**

**the report be noted.**

## **38. FEEDBACK FROM THE CFPS GOOD SCRUTINY CONFERENCE**

The Chair provided the Committee with an account of the Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS) Conference that she had attended in late June. The Council had for the first time submitted an entry for a Good Scrutiny Award and had been short listed in the Community Influence category for its Neighbourhood Groups Task and Finish Review. Although the Council had not come out on top overall, the submission had been commended by the judges.

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A number of ideas had been gleaned from other contributors to the conference, the most significant of which had been the Scrutiny Café idea practised by Hertfordshire County Council in respect of their scrutiny of the Council's budget. Officers undertook to meet with the Chair to discuss the model and its applicability to Redditch.

## **RESOLVED that**

- 1) **the Executive Director of Finance and Resources and the Head of Legal, Equalities and Democratic Services meet with the Chair to discuss the application of the Hertfordshire model to this Council's scrutiny of the budget; and**
- 2) **the oral report be noted.**

## **39. REFERRALS**

There were no referrals.

## **40. WORK PROGRAMME**

Members considered the Committee's Work Programme. Officers reported that representatives from Worcestershire County Council would be attending the meeting on 22nd July in respect of concessionary bus fares and had requested that Members submit questions in advance to enable them to provide more comprehensive responses on the night.

Members proposed the following questions:

- 1) Why should Worcestershire County Council not guarantee to continue to provide the same standard of service as that which is currently provided in Redditch?
- 2) How much would be saved financially if pre-9.30 a.m. travel is not provided for?
- 3) What would be the social costs involved in any cuts to the service?
- 4) Why can there not be a different approach to the delivery of the concessionary scheme in each of the districts?
- 5) What would be the impact of the overall level of service of any changes?

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**RESOLVED that**

- 1) the Work Programme be noted; and**
- 2) the questions detailed above be forwarded on to the relevant Officers at Worcestershire County Council.**

The Meeting commenced at 7.00 pm  
and closed at 8.10 pm

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Chair