



ENVIRONMENTAL

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

19th March 2007

MINUTES

Present:

Councillor I Beech (Chair) and Councillors Chalk, Hunt, Pulsford and Taylor.

Non-members:

Councillors Anderson and Braley.

Also Present:

Mr A Bobowski (Borough Tenants' Panel representative)

Officers:

R Kindon, G Lavery and P Liddington.

Overview and Scrutiny Support Officer:

I Westmore.

61. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors Enderby and Hicks.

62. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND OF PARTY WHIP

There were no declarations of interest or of the Party Whip.

63. BUSINESS CENTRES OVERVIEW

The Committee received a report following a reference from the Leisure, Customer and Business Support Zero-Based Budget Group. The Group had expressed some concern at the way the Business Centres were being used by the Council, with an apparent divergence from the original ideal of having the facilities available specifically for business start-up.

Members were interested to establish how long particular businesses had been tenants of the Centres and the impact of long-term tenancy on potential new businesses. It was reported that some tenants had been present at the Centres in excess of 15 years. By way of explanation, Officers added that there was still a constant turn-over of tenants and the Centres had reached a state of equilibrium with few

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CHAIR

vacancies and short waiting lists. The existence of a number of longer term tenants provided a degree of stability to the operation.

The Committee was informed that the Centres catered for small businesses generally and not just business start-ups. There was a limit put on the numbers of units operations were allowed to expand into before it was deemed that they were too large to remain at the Centre. Another advantage offered by the Centres was the flexibility to allow businesses to expand and contract dependant on economic conditions which often enabled businesses to remain trading.

The Committee was interested to hear what was being done to encourage businesses to either relocate to or remain in Redditch. Officers confirmed that the Council actively monitored the reasons businesses provided for not taking up units at the Business Centres. It was also stated that prospective tenants were proactively targeted with offers of new or alternative business accommodation. The different nature of the businesses catered for at the three Centres was taken into account when allocating businesses to Centres.

In terms of the costs to businesses of locating at the Centres and the service provided, it was noted that the charges levied by the Council were very close to those on the open market. However, the tenancy agreement did provide greater flexibility in that it allowed for two-month termination on either side.

Generally Members were content with the mixture of stability and new starters at the Centres and the flexibility provided by the Centres to tenants, given the constant turn-over and low level of vacancies.

RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

64. CIVIL (DECRIMINALISED) PARKING ENFORCEMENT TASK AND FINISH GROUP - REPORT

Councillor Pulsford, Chair of the Task and Finish Group introduced the draft report that had been produced. It was noted that the Committee had given the Group the task of investigating the advantage of introducing CPE at no additional cost to the Council and this objective had been achieved.

The Group considered the present situation unsatisfactory. Traffic Regulation Orders (TROs) were routinely ignored, residents' parking schemes were largely worthless and there was no prospect of any further measures such as additional double yellow lines whilst enforcement was not being carried out. However, it did appear from the comments of local residents through forums such as the Neighbourhood Groups that inconsiderate and illegal parking was a

significant issue for people. The Group was also concerned that CPE be introduced before the Council was forced to do so through compulsion from central Government.

Further detail was provided of the background research that had been undertaken in producing the report, including the meetings between the Group and representatives of the County Council and Wychavon District Council. Contact with these authorities had resulted in them agreeing in principle to meet the Council's initial start-up costs and first year's operating deficit. The financial risk in the proposal for the Council lay in Wychavon District Council not being able to recoup its contribution to the start-up costs over a five year period after which the Council would be liable to make up the shortfall, but it was considered unlikely that such an eventuality would occur.

Members discussed the proposal and raised a number of concerns at the recommended course of action.

The lack of off-street car-parking provision within the Borough was highlighted as a weakness when ensuring that the scheme was self-financing, as this was generally a significant revenue source for authorities which had assumed these powers. There was concern that improved parking behaviour by local residents could not therefore result in an increase in off-street income. In a similar vein, it was feared that the need for Wychavon to recoup their contribution would lead to an aggressive enforcement regime across the Borough.

There was some debate over the public reaction to the introduction of CPE with a divergence of opinion as to whether local residents might either welcome or be against these new powers. It was generally accepted that the Council was unaware of the opinions of its residents on this matter and it was therefore suggested that public consultation be undertaken before any further decision was made as to the introduction of CPE.

The Committee was unable to come to a consensus over the form of any recommendation to the Executive Committee. It was agreed that further public consultation should be recommended, with this consultation taking place through local newspapers. The outcome of the consultation was to be fed back to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

RECOMMENDED that

- (1) the findings of the Task and Finish Group be carefully considered; and, subject to the outcome of this consideration;**
- (2) public consultation be undertaken on the introduction of Civil Parking Enforcement.**

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65. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The programme of future work was noted by Members. It was suggested that the remaining three District Centres other than Church Hill be discussed further at the next meeting of the Committee.

RESOLVED that

the Work Programme be noted.

The meeting commenced at 7.00 p.m.
and closed at 9.10 p.m.

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CHAIR