



LEISURE, TOURISM & ECONOMY

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

24th January 2007

MINUTES

Present:

Councillor J Cookson (Chair) and Councillors Hunt, MacMillan, Smith and Smithers.

Non-Member:

Councillor Anderson

Officers:

R Cooke, R Egan and D Wheeler.

Overview and Scrutiny Support Officer:

I Westmore.

34. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Thomas.

35. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND OF PARTY WHIP

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

36. MINUTES

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting of the Leisure, Tourism and Economy Overview & Scrutiny Committee held on the 28th of November 2006 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

37. REDDICARD REVIEW

Officers had been requested to respond to proposals made by Members at the previous meeting of the Committee, and these responses were set out in detail within the report.

The proposals concentrated on three major themes, these being hard to reach groups, marketing Reddicard and partnership working.

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CHAIR

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The first proposal was to simplify the pricing structure for Pitcheroak Golf Course based upon people's ability to pay. Officers had provided less headings under which users would be charged in order to rationalise the pricing system. Prices were rising relatively moderately but the Council was still looking to achieve acceptable income levels. The user group at the course and the golf club were aware of the proposed prices and were pleased with the plan to simplify the structure.

Plans had been developed to increase participation for hard to reach groups. It was proposed to work in partnership with the relevant groups to meet the needs of these users but also utilise the quieter times at the leisure centres during off-peak times. One implication of the proposal was the requirement for additional resources in terms of Officer time to implement this development.

It was suggested that income derived from Reddicard could be directed towards the marketing of the scheme. Officers did not consider it sustainable to put an additional price on Reddicard and this alternative proposal would require a diversion from normal Council policy of returning revenue from the scheme to the general fund.

The objectives of Reddicard had been revisited by Officers as it was recognised that the aims and objectives of the scheme had been lost sight of to an extent. SMART criteria had been applied to the original aims and objectives and those that were no longer fit for purpose and amendments had been suggested where it was considered necessary.

Members considered that a strategic review of the concessionary element of the Reddicard scheme should be undertaken every two years as was suggested within the report; this did not preclude a more regular review of the Reddicard scheme as a delivery mechanism.

The additional resources that had been identified within the report for marketing were an acknowledgement that current levels of promotion in the leisure team were lower than were found in the majority of similar authorities. Members had seen that the Borough of Telford and Wrekin had invested to gain and it was proposed that a similar investment might be made in Redditch. Sure Start had been approached to part fund the additional post but it was hoped that a marketing post could be made self-financing after year one in any event. Members suggested that small price increases for service users could be maintained as an alternative should a revenue bid be unsuccessful.

A number of other suggestions were made as to how the proposals could be refined. These included the rounding up of certain fees and charges in order to increase charges by 10 pence rather than 5 pence increments. Members wished to forward the Reddicard proposals to the forthcoming meeting of the Executive Committee.

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RECOMMENDED that

- 1) the proposed revisions to the fees and charges for 2007/08, as listed in (i), be approved;**
- 2) an additional post of Marketing Officer (approximately Scale 6) and appropriate operational budget be approved;**
- 3) should an additional post of Marketing Officer not be approved through the Revenue budget, approval be given for the ring-fencing of particular additional income-streams to fund the proposed marketing scheme as noted in (vii)(i);**
- 4) the necessary amendments be made to the Scheme of Delegation to Officers to allow for the implementation of short term and one-off promotions by the managers of sports and leisure facilities and senior Officers as noted in (iv);**
- 5) the strategies for marketing and promoting the Reddicard as set out in (vi) be endorsed; and**
- 6) the application of SMART criteria to the original aims and objectives of the Reddicard and the amendment and deletion of those that do not meet the standard be endorsed.**

38. WEST MIDLANDS ECONOMIC STRATEGY – CONSULTATION ON POLICY OPTIONS

Officers explained that, in order for the proposed response to carry more weight at a regional level, it was intended to incorporate the Redditch response within a county response to be co-ordinated by the Worcestershire Partnership.

A brief overview was given of the content of the proposed response. A key consideration was ensuring that the response was in line with that being prepared for the consultation on the Regional Spatial Strategy.

Members had a number of concerns over economic development within the Borough and these in part reflected the findings of the Committee's earlier report into Jobs, Employment and the Economy. The diminution in the size of the Economic Development Unit of the Council was regarded as a retrograde step and business support to local businesses had, as a consequence, not been as comprehensive as was considered desirable. There was perceived to be a weakness in the opportunities available for existing businesses to promote themselves and share expertise and good practice. The position of the Borough on the fringes of the West Midlands Technology Belt was a further area of concern. Members were strongly of the opinion that for

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existing industries within Redditch to flourish and for aspirations for diversification to be met, the town needed to be placed within the belt. It was, however, recognised that the Borough was limited in the amount of land that could be designated for high-technology use and that further high-technology employment would not necessarily assist in employing local people.

The Committee had some concerns also over the incorporation of the Redditch response to the consultation within a wider response from Worcestershire. Particularly given that the Borough was very different in nature from the remainder of the County, it was proposed that Redditch prepare its own appendix to be submitted alongside the Worcestershire Partnership response as was allowed under the consultation guidelines. Officers agreed that this would, at the least, be a useful exercise in determining exactly what the Borough required or wanted. It was agreed that the Executive Committee should be recommended to allow a group of Overview and Scrutiny Members to prepare such a Redditch appendix.

RECOMMENDED that

- 1) the Council respond to the consultation process, in conjunction with the Worcestershire Partnership;**
- 2) the key issues as detailed in Section 5 of the report be included in the Council's response to consultation;**
- 3) the Council make an individual submission, to be submitted as an appendix to the response from the Worcestershire Partnership; and**
- 4) a Task and Finish Group comprising Councillors Cookson, Hunt and MacMillan produce, in conjunction with Officers, the draft individual submission from the Council, to be submitted to the Executive Committee for approval at its meeting on 21st February 2007.**

39. TOWN CENTRE VITALITY

The Committee discussed the decision that had been made at an earlier meeting that town centre vitality be adopted as a topic for review by the Committee. Members considered this again in the terms set out in the overview and scrutiny training session earlier in January. It was suggested that a number of bold objectives could be set out in order to raise the bar and provide an aspirational target. For example, the Committee could look at ways to increase footfall in the town centre by 15%, increase time spent in the town centre by visitors by 25% and increase the number of tourists by 30%, and so on.

In the immediate term, it was recognised that this piece of work was unlikely to be progressed.

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40. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

RESOLVED that

The programme of future work be noted.

The meeting commenced at 7.05 p.m.
and closed at 9.07 p.m.

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CHAIR