

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Wednesday, 2nd March,
2011

MINUTES

Present:

Councillor Diane Thomas (Chair), and Councillors Peter Anderson, Bill Hartnett, Robin King, Brenda Quinney, Mark Shurmer, Graham Vickery and Roger Hill (substituting for Councillor Anita Clayton)

Also Present:

Councillors Andy Fry, Jinny Pearce and Derek Taylor.
Mr Peter Fryers, (Worcestershire PCT)
Mr Michael Collins, (Vice Chair of the Standards Committee)

Officers:

H Bennett, Helen Broughton, C Felton, L Hadley, A Marklew and R Bamford

Committee Services Officer:

J Bayley and M Craggs

191. APOLOGIES AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES

Apologies were received on behalf of Councillor Anita Clayton. Councillor Roger Hill was named as his substitute.

192. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND OF PARTY WHIP

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

193. MINUTES

The Chair requested that minute item 184 be amended to reflect comments expressed during discussions about schools that success could be attributed to both a high quality of teaching and to an appropriate level of parental input in addition to the effectiveness of school governors.

The Chair also requested that under item 184 it be stated that very similar educational outcomes were achieved at GCSE level by a

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Chair

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two tier system and a three tier system as commented at the meeting.

RESOLVED that

subject to the inclusion of the amendments stated in the preamble above, the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 9th February 2011 be held as a true and correct record and be signed by the Chair.

194. ACTIONS LIST

Members considered the latest version of the Committee's Actions List. Officers advised Members that all the actions had either already been completed or were in the process of being completed. In particular, Members were advised that Councillor Bill Hartnett was awaiting a response from the Worcestershire Drug and Alcohol Action Team to a letter concerning alcohol related hospital admissions before submitting a subsequent letter to the relevant Government Minister as agreed at the previous meeting.

RESOLVED that

the Committee's Actions List be noted.

195. CALL-IN AND SCRUTINY OF THE FORWARD PLAN

There were no call-ins and no items were identified on the Council's Forward Plan as suitable for further scrutiny.

196. TASK & FINISH REVIEWS - DRAFT SCOPING DOCUMENTS

There were no draft scoping documents for consideration.

197. TASK AND FINISH GROUPS - PROGRESS REPORTS

The Committee received the following reports in relation to current reviews:

a) Gritting – Chair, Councillor Graham Vickery

The Chair informed the Committee that the first meeting of the review Group had recently taken place. The Group was actively seeking the views of local residents regarding the condition of the roads in Redditch during the period of inclement weather in December 2010. A public meeting was to take place on Thursday 17th March where local people would be able to meet directly with members of the Group and

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share their views on road conditions in December. It was also explained that the Group was to invite evidence from other local stakeholders including schools, West Mercia Police, and the Kingfisher Shopping Centre.

The Group was intending to meet with an Officer from Worcestershire County Council after it had collected and reviewed its evidence to discuss its findings.

b) Promoting Redditch – Chair, Councillor Graham Vickery

The final report of the Promoting Redditch Task and Finish Review was considered under a later item.

c) Work Experience Opportunities – Chair, Councillor Peter Anderson

The Chair suggested that increasing numbers of young people not in education, employment, nor training needed to be sufficiently addressed.

RESOLVED that

the update reports be noted.

198. PORTFOLIO HOLDER ANNUAL REPORT - PLANNING, REGENERATION, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND LOCAL TRANSPORT

Councillor Jinny Pearce, Portfolio Holder for Planning, Regeneration, Economic Development and Local Transport, provided Members with responses to the Committee's list of questions as detailed below:

1) What proposals for investment in economic development do you have?

Members were advised that it was not expected that the Council would be committing any additional resources for economic development. The current focus instead was on maximising the most out of current resources and increasing dialogue with local businesses to ensure that the Council was working in their best interests.

A new business guide, *The Redditch Guide to Business*, had been produced which advertised how the Council could assist new businesses. The Council was keen to provide support for

local businesses that had particularly struggled during the recession by helping them to up-skill and diversify.

Efforts were being made to strengthen the link between education and industry, which included encouraging local schools to help school pupils develop the skills required by the local manufacturing base.

2) What measurements will the Council use to gauge the effectiveness of the Economic Development Strategy?

The Economic Development Strategy was focused on accruing long term benefits through a slow process of change. It was therefore difficult to measure the effectiveness of the Strategy in the short-term as in many cases this was neither possible nor appropriate. However, it was commented that positive progress had been made during the previous twelve months.

3) What steps does the Council plan to address:

a) Changes in bus pass provision?

Members were informed that Worcestershire County Council were now co-ordinating the bus scheme. Concessionary bus fares would only apply from 9.30am onwards across the County. Members were informed that elderly local residents, contacted during preliminary consultation, did not consider retention of a pre 9.30am service to be essential.

The Council was considering utilising the Dial-a-Ride service to transport bus pass holders to medical appointments that took place before 9.30am. It was currently uncertain what level of resource would be provided to run the service.

b) Changes in bus pass subsidies and the impact on routes in Redditch?

The County Council's proposals for bus services across the county were out for consultation until April 2011. It was not expected that any changes to services in Redditch would take effect until the County Council considered the changes in May. However, it was thought that Redditch services would be affected by the significant reduction in the County Council's bus subsidy.

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Members expressed concern about the threat of a reduction of bus services in Redditch. It was suggested that vulnerable groups could be particularly badly affected.

- 4) How many actual jobs have been created by the Economic Development Unit? Do we have mechanisms for counting these jobs?

Members heard that the Economic Development Unit (EDU) was not primarily focused on the creation of new jobs. Instead, the purpose of the EDU strategy was to raise the aspirations of local people to develop their skills; to support local businesses to help them to grow and diversify; and to promote Redditch as a business location.

- 5) What problems do you foresee in the future for your service areas?

The recent recession had made it more difficult to obtain sufficient funding to deliver on the Council's aspirations for the services within this portfolio. This particularly affected potential regeneration projects and securing necessary planning infrastructure.

- 6) Why is it taking so long for town centre landscaping improvements to be implemented?

Additional time had been allocated to a public consultation that was currently taking place on improvements to the town centre landscaping. One of the main proposals being consulted involved a possible relocation of the war memorial to the other side of St Stephen's Church. The Committee heard that a proposal to relocate the bandstand had attracted a mixed response.

- 7) Is the Town Centre Strategy overly ambitious?

Councillor Pearce expressed the view that the Town Centre Strategy was appropriately ambitious. It was noted that the strategy represented a long-term plan for the town centre and the present focus was on delivering some of the less expensive parts of the strategy.

- 8) How are we placing Redditch on the map in terms of business tourism?

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Members heard that a specific section on business tourism had been included within the *Redditch Guide to Business*. The Council had also made a contribution to an accommodation guide being produced by the North Worcestershire Tourism Association (NWT) to help promote Redditch for business.

It was expected that the establishment of the new North Worcestershire Economic Development Unit would enable the Borough to benefit from the experience of other councils in terms of promoting tourism.

9) What success has the Learn Direct service that replaced the REDI Centre had so far to date?

It was suggested that it would be more appropriate for Councillor Gay Hopkins to address this question when she attended the next meeting of the Committee in her role as Portfolio Holder for Leisure and Tourism.

RESOLVED that

- 1) **question 9, as detailed in the preamble above, be referred to the Portfolio Holder for Leisure and Tourism to address in her annual report before the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 23rd March 2011; and**
- 2) **the report be noted.**

199. REDDITCH SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY STRATEGY – PRE-SCRUTINY

The Committee received the Redditch Sustainable Community Strategy 2011-14 for pre-scrutiny.

Members were advised that the four priorities contained in the strategy in part reflected the issues identified in the 2009 Comprehensive Area Assessment where Worcestershire had been given a 'red flag' for differences in the quality of life for people living in Redditch compared to the rest of the County. Redditch had been performing particularly poorly against the rest of the county in terms of health inequalities and educational attainment. The Council had also undertaken two consultation events in 2010 which had informed the development of the refreshed strategy.

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Members suggested that the Plan needed to have a focus on the growing problem of young people being in neither education, employment nor training (NEET). Officers acknowledged the concern and suggested that further discussion was required with local education providers. Schools had stressed during consultation that raising levels of attainment and aspiration was very important. Members further suggested that putting a greater emphasis on the equal value of vocational learning and academic learning could help stem the rising number of NEETs.

Members further suggested that the strategy should address issues around mental health and old age to sufficiently prepare for an ageing population. It was acknowledged that the general population of Redditch was ageing gradually. However, it was not felt that this had become a pertinent issue in the Borough, especially in comparison to neighbouring areas.

The Committee raised concerns that the four action plans that formed appendices to the strategy contained insufficient information regarding the allocation of resources and where responsibility for delivery was located. It was felt that the lack of available information might imply either a lack of ownership or accountability for delivery. However, it was recognised that the action plans were working documents and therefore it had not been possible for all of the suggested information to be provided at the date of publication.

The appropriate measures for the actions to tackle obesity were discussed. Due to the nature of the subject and the actions involved it was accepted that it would be difficult to measure success. In these circumstances it was suggested that the actions should be regarded as aspirations rather than as deliverables.

Members urged all members of the Redditch Partnership to ensure that key organisational policies aligned with the strategy's aims and planned actions. This would help to meet the Local Strategic Partnership's core objectives.

Finally, reference was made to Appendix D to the report, the Winyates Areas of Highest Need (AOHN) Action Plan. Members suggested that the precise streets and locations referred to as the Winyates Centre for the purposes of the project should be specified.

RECOMMENDED that:

subject to noting the Committee's comments, the Redditch Sustainable Community Strategy be approved.

200. PROMOTING REDDITCH TASK AND FINISH REVIEW - FINAL REPORT

The Committee received the Promoting Redditch Task and Finish Group's Final Report and Executive Summary for consideration

A number of comments were returned on the recommendations. In relation to recommendation 1b the Committee heard that a specific budget already existed within the Economic Development Unit to promote Redditch as a business location. An alternative strap line to that developed by the Group to market the Borough as a business location had been drafted by an external company. The Chair of the Group, commented that the agreed slogan should reflect the Borough's vibrancy and modernity. Under these circumstances, it was agreed that recommendation 1b should be amended by the Chair of the Group to reflect these considerations accordingly.

Members heard that Worcestershire County Council already produced a publication that advertised events taking place in Redditch. This material was distributed through local libraries. However, Members felt that further promotional materials could be produced to advertise local events and activities more effectively throughout the Borough.

Recommendation 9, regarding the promotion of hotels based in Redditch, was also discussed. Members commented that whilst hotels represented a key business resource the Council should not necessarily be expected to commit resources to promoting hotels. The Committee agreed that the wording of this recommendation should be amended to reflect this consideration.

Recommendation 14, relating to the use of electronic promotional tools, was also considered. Members noted that this recommendation should be altered to reflect the need for there to be consistent provision of card payment facilities both online, in all promotional materials and at all venues.

Finally, in relation to recommendation 12, regarding road signage, the condition of the information shelters located throughout the town was discussed. Whilst Members agreed that these information shelters represented useful guides they conceded that the continued lighting of the shelters at night had implications for climate change. The Committee therefore agreed that the content of the report should be altered to incorporate a suggestion that the shelters should not continue to be lit at night.

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The Chair thanked the Group on the behalf of the Committee for a thorough piece of work.

RECOMMENDED that

- 1a leisure tourism marketing should be targeted at families of all cultures within Redditch and a radius of 20 miles, highlighting the attractions of the Arrow Valley Lake and Countryside Centre and the shopping opportunities;**
- 1b business marketing should promote Redditch's strategic and rural location, being vibrant and modern and using an appropriate strap line (a recommended form of words for which will be agreed in consultation with the Chair of the Group and incorporated in the final report to the Executive Committee);**
- 2) a significant festival and events programme should be developed and marketed cohesively to raise the profile of the town in the region;**
- 3) promotional material should be developed in partnerships and through Redditch Matters;**
- 4) the Palace Theatre, Forge Mill Needle Museum, Bordesley Abbey Visitor Centre and a public arts programme should be developed with increased management resource to provide increased audiences, more events and significant installations;**
- 5) the Redditch Town Centre Partnership should work to create a more rounded shopping experience in the Kingfisher Shopping Centre and Church Green, with event based programmes to refresh the offer and a cohesive marketing strategy incorporating recognisable branding, key qualities and identifiers;**
- 6) Redditch market should be developed to provide again a substantial marketing strategy for the town centre and develop opportunities for new entrepreneurs;**
- 7) the Council should ensure that business promotion receives appropriate investment and provide an information resource fit for purpose;**
- 8) the new North Worcestershire Economic Development Service and Strategy should recognise the importance of**

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tourism to the local economy and ensure that adequate resources are allocated to the promotion of tourism in the area;

- 9) the need for the promotion of Redditch hotels as a business resource, not necessarily by the Council, should be recognised;
- 10) consideration should be given to devising a Visitor Ambassador Scheme;
- 11) the Council should endorse the Redditch Advertiser's proposal to introduce a Redditch Community Awards programme and should work with the newspaper and other partners to deliver the scheme;
- 12) the Council ensure that deficiencies in road signage are addressed: location naming, systemic effectiveness and physical cleanliness;
- 13) the Council should actively seek to establish promotion partnerships and ensure that commercial interests have a full and effective voice; and
- 14) the Council should ensure that electronic promotion tools are constantly developed and exploited to the full. This should include introducing a virtual business centre and consistent provision of card payment facilities both online, in promotional materials and at all venues;

RESOLVED that

- 1) subject to the Chair of the Group amending the wording, recommendation 1b contained within the report be forwarded for the consideration of the Executive Committee; and
- 2) the report be noted.

201. PERFORMANCE REPORT FOR THE SERVICES WITHIN THE LEISURE AND TOURISM PORTFOLIO

The Committee received a written report which detailed the performance of services within the remit of the Portfolio Holder for Leisure and Tourism, Councillor Gay Hopkins. On the basis of the information contained within the report Members requested that the following questions be addressed by the Portfolio Holder in her

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Annual Report to the Committee, which was scheduled to be delivered on 23rd March 2011.

- 1) What information can be provided on the management structure at the Palace Theatre and Forge Mill Needle Museum?
 - i) How do you anticipate that the management structure will contribute to increasing the number of visitors to both venues?
 - ii) How do you propose to further publicise and promote the Palace Theatre?
- 2) What actions are being proposed to attract more young people to the Palace Theatre to perform and to visit?
- 3) What plans are in place to meet financial targets?
- 4) What plans are in place to replace the Play Rangers service?
- 5) What success has the Learn Direct service that replaced the REDI Centre had so far to date?
- 6) What problems do you foresee in the future for your service area?

RESOLVED that

- 1) **the Portfolio Holder for Leisure and Tourism be invited to answer the questions detailed in the preamble above when delivering her Annual Report before the Committee; and**
- 2) **the report be noted.**

202. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT - DRAFT

The Committee received the draft Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2010/11 for consideration. The Annual Report was due to be presented at the final full Council meeting of the municipal year on 28th March 2011.

Members suggested that the more photographs could be incorporated into the final report to improve the presentation of the document.

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RESOLVED that

subject to the incorporation of additional photographs promoting the work of the Committee the Overview and Scrutiny 2010/11 Annual Report be approved.

203. JOINT WORCESTERSHIRE SCRUTINY FRAMEWORK

The Committee considered amendments to the Joint Worcestershire Scrutiny Framework as proposed by Councillor Peter Anderson.

RESOLVED that:

the amended Framework be presented for consideration at the next Joint Worcestershire Scrutiny Chairs and Vice Chairs meeting on Monday 21st March.

204. REFERRALS

There were no referrals.

205. WORK PROGRAMME

RESOLVED that

the Committee's Work Programme be noted.

The Meeting commenced at 7.00 pm
and closed at 9.40 pm