

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Wednesday, 23rd March,
2011

MINUTES

Present:

Councillor Diane Thomas (Chair), Councillor Anita Clayton (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Peter Anderson, Andrew Fry, Bill Hartnett, Robin King and Mark Shurmer

Also Present:

Councillor Gay Hopkins

Officers:

H Bennett, M Bough, C Felton and J Godwin

Committee Services Officer:

J Bayley and M Craggs

206. APOLOGIES AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES

Apologies were received from Councillor Brenda Quinney.

207. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND OF PARTY WHIP

There were no declarations of interest nor of any party whip

208. MINUTES

RESOLVED that

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 2nd March 2011 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

209. ACTIONS LIST

Members considered the latest version of the Committee's Actions List.

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Chair

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The Committee was informed that the Joint Worcestershire Scrutiny Chairs and Vice Chairs Network meeting on 21st March 2011 had been postponed. It was therefore not possible for the Joint Worcestershire Hub to be discussed and the Joint Scrutiny Framework to be considered at the meeting.

All of the other actions had been completed.

RESOLVED that

the Committee's Actions List be noted.

210. 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.

211. TASK & FINISH REVIEWS - DRAFT SCOPING DOCUMENTS

There were no draft scoping documents for consideration.

Members noted that a review concerning the information provided by the Council's One Stop Shop service on disability queries might be proposed at the following meeting of the group.

212. TASK AND FINISH GROUPS - PROGRESS REPORTS

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

a) Gritting – Chair, Councillor Robin King

The Committee was informed that Councillor Robin King had been elected as Chair of the Gritting Short, Sharp Review Group following Mr Graham Vickery's recent resignation as a Redditch Borough Councillor. Mr Vickery had subsequently been voted onto the Group as a co-opted member to maintain consistency in the review.

The Group had reviewed Worcestershire County Council's Cabinet Member's response to the *Gritting: Winter Service Policy (2009)* report and had received a number of responses from a range of local stakeholders, including residents and schools, to a consultation on the condition of roads in Redditch during the period of severe winter weather. The Group had also been informed of how local residents' had been affected

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by the heavy snowfall during a public meeting had taken place on 17th March.

The Group was focused on delivering its final report and recommendations for the consideration of the Committee 13th April 2011 as previously agreed. However, disappointment was expressed that the Worcestershire County Council Cabinet Member with responsibility for Transport and Safe Environment had not been available to meet with the Group during the course of the review.

The Chair also informed Members that a full attendance had been achieved on each of the four occasions the Group had met to date.

b) Work Experience Opportunities – Chair, Councillor Peter Anderson

The Chair reported that little progress had been made by the Group since the previous meeting. However, the Chair had been made aware of significant findings within the Wolf Review into Vocational Education which had implications for work experience opportunities on a national scale.

RESOLVED that

- 1) **Officers circulate information on the Wolf Review amongst Committee Members.**
- 2) **the update reports be noted.**

213. PORTFOLIO HOLDER ANNUAL REPORT - LEISURE AND TOURISM

Councillor Gay Hopkins, Portfolio Holder for Leisure and Tourism, provided Members with responses to the Committee's list of questions as detailed below:

a) What information can be provided on the management structure at the Palace Theatre and Forge Mill Needle Museum?

Members were informed that a full service review of the management structures at the Palace Theatre and Forge Mill Needle Museum was being undertaken as part of the Council's shared services programme with Bromsgrove District Council.

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Increasing on-site managerial accountability to help improve standards at both venues was a primary intention of the revised structures.

- i) How do you anticipate that the management structure will contribute to increasing the number of visitors to both venues?

The revised management structure proposed the employment of new members of staff at both venues to specifically focus on achieving increased visitor numbers.

The introduction of a Programme Board for each venue had also been proposed to help to meet with local demand. This included introducing more ambitious and varied approach to programming to attract more visitors to the Palace Theatre, including from more diverse neighbouring areas. Members encouraged the Portfolio Holder to further promote the Palace Theatre as a prime tourist destination in Redditch.

Members were advised that a large play area for children had been installed at the Museum to help attract local families. It was reported also that a wartime exhibition had been very well attended.

- ii) How do you propose to further publicise and promote the Palace Theatre?

A more targeted approach to marketing was being undertaken to further publicise and promote the Palace Theatre. This involved targeting younger age groups through social networks to both promote existing programmes and to obtain a greater appreciation of their programme preferences.

The venue was building its list of email contacts for future marketing and promotional purposes.

- b) What actions are being proposed to attract more young people to the Palace Theatre to perform and to visit?

A large scale youth theatre, to be run in partnership with a London project, had been proposed to take place at the Theatre. There also existed plans to involve considerably more disabled young people in Theatre-based youth productions.

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The Council was looking to attract an external dance choreographer to work with the youth theatre to help increase youth participation.

Members commented that more could be done to attract young people to the Theatre to both visit and to perform. It was suggested that providing discounted Palace Theatre tickets to local schools should be considered as part of this process.

c) What plans are in place to meet financial targets?

The running costs for the Council's visitor destinations had been included within the Council's agreed budget for 2011/12. Any significant changes would require approval via the formal committee process.

The Council was hoping to increase its profit margins at the Palace Theatre through increased attendance figures and more effective procurement. A new manager of the Palace theatre would also be expected to consider how increased revenue could be generated through food and drinks sales.

An income generation plan had been developed for the Council's sports venues and was being monitored on a monthly basis. The introduction of a play area and themed birthday parties was helping to deliver increased revenue at the Forge Mill Needle Museum.

d) What plans are in place to replace the Play Rangers service?

Funding for the Play Rangers service was due to cease on 31st March 2011. Worcestershire County Council was currently reviewing its services for young peoples' leisure activities.

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

Members were informed that the introduction of the Learn Direct service had been well received by local users. Positive feedback had been received regarding the new centre and learner numbers had increased by eighteen per cent since the switch from the REDI Centre. A customer satisfaction survey was soon to be undertaken to further inform the Council on how the Learn Direct service had been received by local users.

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- f) What problems do you foresee in the future for your service area?

The Portfolio Holder identified a number of challenges that needed to be overcome. This included delivering on the health agenda and providing sufficient sport and leisure provision. The Council was also working to attract English Heritage funding to support Bordesley Abbey.

Concern was raised that the Council currently possessed a lack of sports coaches and volunteers to deliver its services. Members were informed that the Council had struggled to attract more sufficiently qualified sports coaches who might be available to provide after school services.

The Chair thanked Councillor Hopkins and relevant Officers for the annual report.

RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

214. DISABLED FACILITIES GRANTS AND LIFETIME GRANT - SCRUTINY OF THE COUNTRYWIDE SCHEME

Members received an update on the Worcestershire Care and Repair Home Improvement Agency (HIA) that processed Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG) and Home Repairs Assistance (HRA) on behalf of the Council through the Festival Housing Group.

The Committee was informed that the establishment of the HIA had resulted in the Council accruing a two per cent saving against the fee for the superseded North Worcestershire Care and Repair Agency. Savings were also expected to be realised through transferring the HIA to the Festival Housing Group's offices and increased staff mobile working.

Officers reported that more DFG applications had been received during 2010/11 compared to 2009/10, whilst DFG completions had experienced minimal delays. The work of HIA staff and contractors had achieved a one hundred per cent satisfaction rating.

Members queried whether installed stairlifts could be recovered and recycled from households where the user had unfortunately recently passed away. It was explained that the Council could not insist on this as users of stairlifts became the owners upon installation.

Members were informed that the majority of the approved DFG applications had been received from owner occupiers. Council house tenants' applications were made through the HRA process.

It was anticipated that a common procurement framework would help to reduce the current twenty-one week average waiting time for a DFG case.

RESOLVED that:

the report be noted

215. BUS SERVICE - CONSULTATION

The Committee received a summary of responses from local residents to a survey regarding Worcestershire County Council's proposed reduction to local bus services.

Members expressed concern that the potential withdrawal or reduction of school bus services would lead to increased congestion during the busy morning and afternoon periods.

Members were advised that a letter had been received from the Chairman of Bromsgrove, Redditch and Droitwich Mencap who had expressed concern that the withdrawal of the concessionary pass prior to 9.30am discriminated unfairly against people with learning difficulties. It was suggested that the letter should be added to the list of local responses.

The Committee was informed that the Mayor had allowed a cross-party Notice of Motion concerning the proposed changes to bus services to be received at the following Council meeting on 28th March subject to an agreed version being reached before the meeting.

Members requested further information regarding the criteria used by Worcestershire County Council to propose changes to bus service. It was also suggested that the County Council be asked whether an equality impact assessment on the proposed changes had been undertaken.

RESOLVED that:

the survey responses be noted.

216. PERFORMANCE REPORT FOR THE SERVICES WITHIN THE COMMUNITY SAFETY AND REGULATORY SERVICES PORTFOLIO

The Committee received a written report which detailed the performance of services within the remit of the Portfolio Holder for Community Safety and Regulatory Services, Councillor Juliet Brunner. Members requested that the following questions based on the information contained within the report be addressed by the Portfolio Holder in her Annual Report to the Committee, scheduled to be delivered on 13th April 2011.

- a) What is being done to address drugs misuse and its implications for community safety in Redditch?
- b) How is the Council working with the Police to mitigate the effects of police budget cuts and an expected reduction in police force numbers on community safety?
- c) How is Redditch's CCTV system to be protected from funding cuts? What are your plans for CCTV in Redditch going forward?
- d) Do you have plans to review the licenses of alcohol retail outlets in the town centre? If so, to what extent?
- e) What challenges do you foresee in your service area in future?
- f) To what extent does the night-time economy in Redditch impact on levels of crime and disorder? What is being proposed to address this?

RESOLVED that

the content of the written performance report be noted.

217. JOINT WORCESTERSHIRE CHAIRS AND VICE CHAIRS NETWORK MEETING

Members were informed that the Joint Worcestershire Chairs and Vice Chairs Network meeting, scheduled for Monday 21st March, had been postponed. The new date of the meeting had not yet been confirmed. No update could therefore be provided.

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218. REFERRALS

There were no referrals.

219. WORK PROGRAMME

Members were informed that a petition had been received and was due to be considered at the following meeting on 13th April 2011. There were also numerous other items scheduled for consideration during the meeting.

Members therefore considered rescheduling the Committee's work programme to ensure that there was a more manageable agenda for the following meeting of the Committee.

RESOLVED that:

- 1) the following items be deferred for consideration at a later date by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee:**
 - a) Youth Employment at Redditch Borough Council;**
 - b) Private Sector Home Support Service for post scrutiny;**
 - c) Council Flat Communal Cleaning Task and Finish Group - update on implementation of recommendations Stage Two; and**
 - d) update on fly tipping and progress with the Worth It campaign; and**
- 2) the Committee's Work Programme be noted.**