

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Tuesday, 24th January, 2012

MINUTES

Present:

Councillor Phil Mould (Chair), Councillor Mark Shurmer (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Peter Anderson, Andrew Brazier, Simon Chalk, Andrew Fry, Bill Hartnett, Gay Hopkins, Brenda Quinney, Alan Mason and Luke Stephens

Also Present:

Mr P Mitchell, Mr D Corrigan and ??? (petitioners representing the short-stay car parking petition).

Officers:

R Dunne, J Godwin, L Hadley, S Morgan, J Staniland and L Tompkin

Committee Services Officer:

J Bayley and M Craggs

146. APOLOGIES AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES

No apologies for absence were received.

147. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND OF PARTY WHIP

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

148. MINUTES

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on Tuesday, 10th January 2012 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

149. PETITION - SHORT STAY PARKING - TOWN CENTRE

The Committee considered a petition regarding short-stay car parking in the town centre.

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Chair

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Prior to the lead petitioner and other members of the public being invited to speak to the petition, Officers confirmed that the Council's petition arrangements had been revised since this particular petition was first received by the Committee on 29th November 2011. The threshold for the consideration of any petition by Council had since increased to 1,000 signatures. However, it was explained that as this petition had been received prior to the new arrangements being established, it had retrospectively met the threshold required for consideration by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The lead petitioner and other members of the public invited to speak expressed concern that the absence of a short stay car parking facility on Unicorn Hill and Church Green West was compromising the function of local businesses. It was felt that this was having a negative affect on business, particularly as suppliers were currently unable to park outside a particular unit for a short period to drop off supplies. The petitioners did not feel that the facility for short stay car parking on Bates Hill was sufficient to meet the needs of local business and customers. Members of the public invited to speak commented that not only did they represent the views of their business colleagues on Unicorn Hill on this issue, but also their customers.

Officers explained that a town centre parking meeting had been convened on 2nd December 2011 to facilitate further discussion on the matter. It was the opinion of relevant agencies, including the Police and the County Council, that there were no other suitable locations in the town centre for short-stay car parking.

Members suggested that the petition be referred to an appropriate decision making body. It was also proposed that Officers facilitate a further meeting with the relevant stakeholders, including business representatives and town centre agencies, the outcome of which could inform the decision making body to most appropriately resolve the issue.

RECOMMENDED that

- 1) the Executive Committee refer the issue of short-stay car parking in Redditch town centre for consideration to the Worcestershire County Council's Highways Forum; and**
- 2) the Executive Committee ask Officers to facilitate a meeting with relevant agencies and stakeholders, including the petitioners, to obtain further information on proposals for**

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short-stay car parking in the town centre prior to its consideration at the Highways Forum.

RESOLVED that

the petition be noted.

150. PORTFOLIO HOLDER ANNUAL REPORT - LEISURE AND TOURISM - COUNCILLOR DEREK TAYLOR

Further to consideration of the Portfolio Holder for Leisure and Tourism's written report at the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 29th November 2011 and Members' agreed questions to be put to the Portfolio Holder, Councillor Derek Taylor provided the following responses as part of his annual report.

1) What process does your department have in place for promoting community liaison?

A variety of methods and techniques had been used to promote community liaison to help improve service delivery or shape new services based on the needs of residents', including: relevant forum groups – including the Parks Forum; social media and a dedicated website to promote the AiR Partnership; volunteer programmes; and obtaining feedback through questionnaires and feedback forms. The Committee received a case study example of how these consultation methods had shaped service delivery at Morton Stanley Park.

The Committee was also informed of the department's plans for 2012/13 to build on its good work around engaging with the local community. This included developing the department's section of the Council website and promoting its work through electronic marketing methods. The department was also setting up an events facilitations pack to enable local voluntary groups to set up their own events.

Members encouraged the Portfolio Holder and relevant Officers to continue to facilitate and promote events for the Redditch youth. Officers confirmed that discussions on this subject were ongoing with the Youth Services Provision Task and Finish Group.

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2) In relation to the Palace Theatre:

- a) has the introduction of a new management structure and changes to the Theatre's productions generated the savings and additional income expected?

Members heard that the anticipated saving of £40,000 to the 2012/13 revenue budget through restructuring would be achieved.

There had been a 15% increase in the number of performances in the Palace's Autumn/Winter period compared to the same period twelve months before. Attendance figures and the Palace's audience market share remained stable.

The income targets will be revised upwards from 2013/14 once the final changes to the management structure had been implemented.

- b) what work has been done to ensure that the new productions are attracting as wide a section of the local community to the Theatre?

It was hoped that forthcoming new productions, as part of the Palace's rolling eighteen month production programme, would attract a more diverse audience to the Theatre. A more targeted approach had been utilised to use market segmentation to identify key target groups that would be interested in a certain aspect of the programme. Social media, especially Twitter, was also being utilised to promote the Theatre's productions to a wider audience. The Palace was also advertising its productions in nearby restaurants to attract more families and couples to the Theatre. Finally, it was explained that external funding had been sourced, including from County Council grants, to develop audience development performances for harder to reach audiences, such as members of black, minority and ethnic communities.

The Committee heard that incremental improvements had been made to the Palace since the new post of Palace Theatre Manager had been created and filled as part of the new management structure.

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Members very much welcomed the improvements that had been made to the Palace Theatre and encouraged a more diverse range of productions being put on.

3) How well is the new contract at the Arrow Valley Countryside Centre working for people in Redditch?

The new contract had produced the savings expected and provided additional resources to cover the Parks and Open spaces at weekends. This had also provided additional resources for improvements to the events service.

Members heard that water sports activities would soon be provided from the site. The initial activities were to include canoeing, wind surfing, raft building and general water skills. There had also been an increase in angling competitions taking place on the lake. Members also were informed that the Council remained responsible for providing children's activities at the Centre.

No formal complaints about the new operator had been received, although a couple of negative letters has surfaced in the local press.

4) What events have been arranged around the Olympic Torch coming through Redditch in the summer?

It was explained that legal restrictions were in place around what can and could not be published at the present time. However, the Committee was informed that the Community Task Force was soon to a devise plan which complied with the obligations around the National Torch Relay agenda.

The ethos of the Olympics was to be celebrated, with a specific focus being placed on community involvement. A communications plan would soon be developed around this and presented to the Committee for its consideration.

5) What impact has the new shared service arrangements in your department made upon the Council's revenue?

Members received a breakdown of the cost savings that had been generated by the new shared service arrangements. The projected saving for 2011/12, pending actual outturn figures, was approximately £44,000.

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- 6) How is the additional income that is being generated from the sale of timber through the Parks and Open Spaces Policy being used elsewhere in the Council?

Members were informed that no additional income is raised from the timber sale. Income is instead reinvested into the Woodland Management Scheme which generally operates to a balanced budget.

Members were referred to Environmental Services for further information.

On behalf of the Committee, the Chair thanked Councillor Taylor for his annual report.

RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

151. CORE STRATEGY - POST-SCRUTINY

As requested, the Committee received a summary report on the subject of the Core Strategy.

The Committee heard that the Council had received over 300 responses as a result of the consultation which helped inform the Executive Committee's consideration of individual assessments. Of these, a decision on the Transport Assessment had been deferred to a later date. The Council also received three petitions in response to the consultation material.

Officers were encouraged to ensure that the planning arrangements remained specifically focused on Redditch. It had been acknowledged that the receipt of new planning guidance from Government had complicated the local planning arrangements after significant progress had been made with the Core Strategy.

Members were supportive of the decisions that had been reached at the Executive Committee and Full Council regarding the Core Strategy.

RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

152. EXTERNAL REFURBISHMENT OF HOUSING STOCK SHORT, SHARP REVIEW - MONITORING UPDATE REPORT

The Committee received a progress update on the approved recommendations of the External Refurbishment of Housing Stock Short, Sharp Review Group.

Members heard that appropriate actions for around half of the recommendations had already been completed. Progress on a number of the outstanding actions was already well underway.

The gratitude of the Chair of the Task and Finish Group, ex Borough Councillor Graham Vickery, was passed onto Officers.

RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

153. ENERGY ADVISOR - REVENUE BID 2012/13 - UPDATE REPORT

As requested at the previous meeting of the Committee, Members received further information on the revenue budget bid for an Energy Advisor to be employed to service Redditch Borough Council and Bromsgrove District Council (Appendix 1).

Members heard that the cost of the bid amounted to approximately 1% of both Councils' combined expenditure on gas and electricity. An important aspect of the role would be to identify appropriate locations where Solar Panels could be installed to help realise additional savings for both local authorities. It was the intention that, should the bid be approved, the Council would tender external consultants to undertake the work. Indeed, Members were very keen that the Council should continue to draw upon available expertise.

RECOMMENDED that

the revenue bid for the Council to invest with Bromsgrove District Council in an Energy Advisor be supported as a high bid in the budget bids process for 2012/13; and

RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

154. QUARTERLY BUDGET MONITORING REPORT - QUARTER 2 - JULY - SEPTEMBER 2011

The Committee considered the quarterly budget monitoring report for the period July to September 2011. Of particular note, projected savings of £408,000 had been identified for the Council's budget.

Members returned a number of comments and requested clarification on expenditure levels detailed in the report in relation to the Home Repairs Grant; and the projected variance figures for Audit Services.

RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

155. QUARTERLY PERFORMANCE REPORT - QUARTER 2 - JULY-SEPTEMBER 2011

The Committee considered the quarterly performance monitoring report for the period July to September 2011.

It was explained that the performance indicator set used to measure the Council's performance had been rationalised – therefore the number of indicators included in subsequent quarterly reports was to reduce. With no current legal requirement for local authorities to produce specific performance data, a fresh emphasis was being placed on collecting and reporting data that were of greatest relevance for Redditch.

Members received an overview of the report. Performance in several indicators had improved, including around the amount of household and residual waste the Council had collected. Of those indicators of concern, the Committee heard that over 22% fewer people had attended sports development sessions compared to the same quarter in 2010/11.

Members welcomed the more streamlined approach that would be used to report on the Council's performance.

RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

156. ACTIONS LIST

Members were referred to progress that had been made to remove a number of bin cupboards from council properties to deter fly-tipping in Mickleton Close, Oakenshaw. Discussions were ongoing between housing and legal services in relation to the removal of bin stores belonging to owner occupiers. Affected residents were also to be consulted.

The Committee was also notified that the date of the next West Midlands Regional Scrutiny Network meeting had been brought forward by a week to 8th March 2012.

RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

157. EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MINUTES AND SCRUTINY OF THE FORWARD PLAN

Members were referred to the Executive Committee's decision for Budget Setting 2012/13, most notably that the capital budget bid to improve footpaths in Morton Stanley Park be retained as a high priority.

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee held on 10th January 2012 be noted.

158. TASK & FINISH REVIEWS - DRAFT SCOPING DOCUMENTS

There were no scoping documents.

159. TASK AND FINISH GROUPS - PROGRESS REPORTS

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

a) Facilities for Disabled People – Chair, Councillor Alan Mason

Councillor Mason informed Members that the Group had made excellent progress and was approaching the stage when it would be in a position to make its final recommendations. The Group had held a number of recent meetings with relevant stakeholders and had collected a significant amount of evidence in the process.

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The Chair expressed his thanks to Jess Bayley, Overview and Scrutiny Support Officer, for all the support she had provided on the review to date.

b) Improving Recycling – Chair, Councillor Gay Hopkins

Members were advised that two meetings had been held since the last update had been provided. The Group had interviewed Councillor Anthony Blagg, County Council Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Environment and Waste Management, around the recycling process in Worcestershire and how recycling rates could be increased in the Borough. Members had also met with Officers who had recently undertaken their own min-review of recycling to obtain their thoughts, including how best to engage non-English speaking residents on recycling.

The Group had also looked at a map of recycling in Redditch which illustrated the recycling rates in different parts of the Borough based on a single run. Members felt that this was especially useful in helping to determine how recycling rates varied between different areas.

Finally, the Committee heard that the Group had also undertaken a very useful trip of local recycling sites that were part of the *100% Project*. This referred to installing new facilities for recycling at sites that previously did not have any provision.

c) Promoting Sporting Participation – Chair, Councillor Luke Stephens

Members were advised that the Group had not met since holding a joint-meeting with the Youth Services Provision Group to discuss communications matters. It was increasingly evident that helping to publicise and communicate the sporting activities in Redditch was a fundamental aspect of the review.

Officers from ICT and the Sports Development Unit had been invited to the Group's next meeting on 25th January 2012, where, amongst other matters, the feasibility for establishing a new website to promote sport in Redditch would be discussed.

Concern was expressed that progress on the review had unfortunately been hampered by Members lack of availability.

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d) Youth Services Provision – Chair, Councillor Simon Chalk

Councillor Chalk informed the Committee that the Group was expecting to soon make its final recommendations. A number of meetings had recently been held with good progress made. Members especially enjoyed a recent trip to The Trunk, a centre that provides youth services in Bromsgrove.

The Group was to take its preliminary recommendations to the Student Council meeting on 30th January 2012 to invite feedback.

RESOLVED that

the update reports be noted.

160. HEALTH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Councillor Quinney provided an update on the work of the Worcestershire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC), as Redditch Borough Council's representative.

Members heard that the HOSC were continuing to monitor the potential location of central ambulance hubs within areas served by the West Midlands Ambulance Service NHS Trust as part of *Worcestershire Make Ready*. A good practice report of how these hubs had been established in Staffordshire was to be received.

The HOSC was also reviewing the plans to create a centralised stroke unit for Worcestershire. Care for patients was currently provided at both the Alexandra Hospital and Worcestershire Royal Hospital.

RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

161. CRIME AND DISORDER SCRUTINY PANEL - CHAIR'S UPDATE

The Chair of the Redditch Crime and Disorder Scrutiny Panel, Councillor Bill Hartnett, delivered a presentation on the subject of the most recent meeting of the Panel that took place on Tuesday 17th January 2012.

Members heard that the Panel had had another productive meeting. It had been informed that two Officers had recently been invited to attend a specialist training course in crime prevention. This had

been the first time that non-Police officers had attended. It was expected that the Officers would utilise their new expertise to give additional support to the planning and licensing teams. A question around what benefits the Borough would accrue through this had been phrased and submitted to the Chair of the Community Safety Partnership ahead of her appearance at the next meeting to deliver her annual report.

The Panel had also been made aware of how the Community Payback Scheme was leading to recent offenders to put something back into the community; and how the Victim Support Scheme was giving invaluable support victims of crime during the process of giving evidence as a witness. Questions about how the greater awareness could be raised were also submitted to the Chair of the Community Safety Partnership.

The Panel also received the 2011/12 quarter two performance tables for the Redditch Community Safety Partnership Framework. It was explained that there was a balanced mix of crime figures going up, staying the same, and decreasing. However, Members heard that for crime types where there had been a rise in offences, this was largely attributed to increased public confidence in reporting incidents of crime.

On a related matter, the Committee heard that Worcestershire County Council was very satisfied with the response to the introduction of the non-emergency 101 number, and felt that an excellent service had already been established.

RESOLVED that

the report be noted

162. REFERRALS

There were no referrals.

163. WORK PROGRAMME

RESOLVED that

the Committee's Work Programme be noted.

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The Meeting commenced at 7.00 pm
and closed at 9.40 pm