

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Tuesday, 19th June, 2012

MINUTES

Present:

Councillor Juliet Brunner (Chair), Councillor Simon Chalk (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Andrew Brazier, David Bush, John Fisher, Andrew Fry, Pattie Hill, Gay Hopkins and Pat Witherspoon

Officers:

T Kristunas, J Pickering and P Smith

Democratic Services Officers:

J Bayley and A Scarce

15. APOLOGIES AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES

There were no apologies.

16. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND OF PARTY WHIP

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

17. MINUTES

Members were advised that a minor amendment needed to be made to the minutes to recognise that the Council's Director of Finance and Corporate Resources had attended the previous meeting of the Committee.

RESOLVED that

subject to the amendment detailed in the preamble above, the minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on Thursday 31st May 2012 be approved as a true and correct record of the meeting and signed by the Chair.

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Chair

18. WORK EXPERIENCE OPPORTUNITIES TASK AND FINISH GROUP - MONITORING UPDATE REPORT

Officers introduced the report, provided background information on the Task and Finish group and the recommendations which were endorsed by the Executive Committee on 21st June 2011.

Members were informed that from May 2011 the Government no longer provided funding for Education Business Partnerships (EPB) to support work experience placements for school pupils at Key Stage 4(KS4). However, the Worcestershire EPB had established itself as an independent Company Limited by Guarantee and was focussing on arranging work experience placements. It had retained its schools base and database of employers in order to allow schools to provide 10 days work related training for KS4 pupils, as this continued to be a statutory requirement. The Committee were informed that the recommendations from the Woolf report might remove this requirement in due course.

Officers provided the Committee with updates on the current position of the four recommendations and the following areas were discussed in detail:

- Any indication of when the recommendations from the Woolf report would be implemented and the rise in the participating age for work experience.
- The importance of engaging employers in the scheme in order to provide young people with the opportunity to experience life in the work place.
- The possibility of providing young people with a second opportunity of work experience at a later stage in school life in order to provided a further view of life outside of the school environment.
- The need to match young people with the appropriate placement to ensure the experience was successful.
- The role and relationship between the school co-ordinator and Worcestershire EPB.
- Worcestershire EPB's role in respect of schools with academy status.

Members asked to be provided with example copies of the paperwork provided to employers by Worcestershire EBP regarding work experience placements and the number of local organisation registered for work experience.

RESOLVED that

the Work Experience Opportunities Task and Finish Review Monitoring Report be noted.

19. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN - PRE-SCRUTINY

The Committee considered the *Revisions to the Medium Term Financial Plan 2012-13 and 2014/15* report. Officers informed Members that they had been requested to assess the funding implications of a number of changes to the original budget as currently approved and to advise Members of the financial implications of these changes.

As part of this process Officers had reviewed the potential of granting free swimming for under 16's and over 60's and the benefits of such a scheme to those eligible. The Committee was reminded that a similar scheme had been funded through a Central Government initiative which had covered a 16 month period. The current annual cost to the Council of such a scheme would be £71,000, however, for the purpose of this exercise the figure of £47,000 had been provided on a pro rata basis (and included loss of income and additional costs to the Council).

Officers had been requested to review the option of providing pre 9.30 a.m. concessionary travel. The estimated cost of this enhanced provision was £86,000 per annum, with a pro rata cost of £43,000. The contract for concessionary travel was held with Worcestershire County Council and Officers were currently in discussions with colleagues at the County Council to identify the necessary arrangements that would need to be in place to implement this enhanced provision.

The Committee was informed that it was proposed that as part of the revised budget a further apprentice post be created to undertake PAT electrical testing at the Council, following relevant training. This apprentice would work alongside and be supervised by a qualified electrician employed by the Council's Housing Department. The estimated cost of this new post would be £8,000 per annum.

Officers provided Members with details of a number of budgets which would be reduced in order to provide the funding required for these additional services. This included a reduction in the consultancy budget of £89,000, the removal of the budget for Leisure options appraisal of £15,000 and a reduction in the advertising budget for events and leisure facilities of £10,000. A reduction of £50,000 for the funding of capital repairs to public buildings, as well as a reduction in spending on security fencing at

the depot and the patching of the footpath at Morton Stanley Park, had also been proposed.

Officers also provided Members with information on the impact of the proposed revisions to the Medium Term Financial Plan for 2012/13 - 2014/15 and the reduction in the current requirement for a transfer from balances of £259,000 to £192,000. In addition, details were provided of the savings which would need to be delivered over the three year period and the expected further 5 per cent cut in Government Grant. The Council continued to be committed to making savings through the transformation programme over the next three years.

Following the presentation, Officers responded to Members' questions and concerns and the following areas were discussed in detail:

- Questions were raised as to whether any additional passes would be needed to ensure the pre 9.30 a.m. concession was used only by Redditch residents, whether the use of services before 9.30 a.m. would be monitored and if so, how this monitoring would be carried out.
- The reduction in consultancy fees and the £65,000 which related to the local plan enquiry. It was confirmed that if funds were needed for this purpose at a later date it would need to be taken from balances.
- The net return to balances for 2012/13 of £67,000 which would increase in the following two years to £80,000.
- Members raised concerns as to how the free swimming for under 16's and over 60's would be implemented and monitored.
- The Committee was also concerned that there would be an increase in demand for use of the facilities, which could lead to over capacity of the pool and therefore to a reduction in income received (including an effect on income received from vending machines).
- The reduction in the advertising budget was also discussed and Members raised concerns that this followed identification of poor advertising of events as a problem at the Council during recent Task and Finish reviews.
- Questions were raised as to whether a risk assessment had been completed of the impact of a reduction of capital schemes on capital repairs, and the effect that resulting delays to work would have on the condition of public buildings in the long-term.

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- The consequences of the removal of the leisure option appraisals funding and what, if any, of this work could be undertaken in house.
- Members were concerned that the expense of a trained electrician's time had not been taken into account when calculating the cost of the additional apprentice post. Concerns were also raised that there was a lack of clarity as to whether there would be a permanent position for the apprentice on completion of the training. Clarification was also requested in respect of the current contract for PAT Testing and any cancellation charges that the Council would incur as a result of introducing this apprenticeship.
- In respect of *Redditch Matters*, Members were concerned that by only making it available online, some residents would be unable to access the information about public services that were provided in the publication.

The Committee put forward further questions which related to operational issues and requested detailed information before reaching any conclusions on the subject.

RESOLVED that

- 1) **Officers provide responses to the questions raised for Members' consideration; and**
- 2) **a special meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee be arranged as soon as possible to consider the additional information provided in Officers' responses and to provide the Committee with an opportunity to make recommendations to the Executive Committee on this subject by 26th June 2012.**

20. FINANCIAL BORROWING REPORT

The Committee considered a report and received a presentation which set out the Council's current position with regard to borrowing.

Officers provided Members with details of the Council's total borrowing, both long term and short term, as detailed at Appendix 1 of the report. Members were informed that short term borrowing referred to items up to 1 year and long term borrowing were for items over 1 year.

Members were provided with information on the reasons for borrowing, the interest rates and what the Council had the authority

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to fund through borrowing. Officers informed the Committee that the Council was no longer able to borrow to fund the Housing Capital Programme due to the debt cap imposed as part of self-financing.

Officers responded to Member questions and discussed the following in more detail:

- It was confirmed that short term interest rates were overnight rates.
- The Barclays capital borrowing was discussed and whether there was a provision to reduce or pay back this loan.
- The cap on borrowing and the “knock on” effect on repairs and maintenance in the future was debated.

Members requested that a copy of the presentation be provided.

RESOLVED that

the Council’s Current Borrowing Position report be noted.

21. ACTIONS LIST

Officers provided the following updates to the Committee’s Action List:

a) Outcomes of Transformation

The committee was advised that a presentation would be received on the outcomes of transformation and the implications for the recommendations detailed in the final report of the External Refurbishment of Housing Stock Short Sharp Review on 17th July 2012.

b) Worcestershire Hub Scrutiny

A letter had been sent on behalf of the Committee to the Chair of the Worcestershire Overview and Scrutiny Performance Board regarding the Worcestershire Hub.

c) Monitoring Update Report: ASB

Due to changes in legislation a monitoring update report on the impact of the ASB review recommendations was not due to be received until later in the year.

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d) Dog Fouling Campaign

A request had been sent to relevant Officers for a presentation to be delivered on the subject of the dog fouling campaign and the impact this had had locally.

e) Civil Parking Enforcement

A briefing note was provided to Members in respect of a report on civil parking enforcement and Members confirmed that no further action was necessary.

f) Roundabouts

The Committee received a briefing note in respect of the proposed plans for advertising on roundabouts located in Redditch and Members confirmed that no further action was necessary.

g) Sales of vehicles on grass verges

The Committee was advised that Members would receive a presentation on the current policy for sales of vehicles on grass verges at the meeting on 17th July 2012.

RESOLVED that

the Committee's Action List be noted.

22. EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MINUTES AND SCRUTINY OF THE FORWARD PLAN

The Committee received the minutes of the Executive Committee meeting held on 29th May 2012 and considered the latest edition of the Forward Plan.

Members noted that reports on the subjects of Co-location of the One Stop Shop at Woodrow Library, the Adverse Weather Policy Review, the Tenancy Strategy and Policy 2012-14, the Sickness Policy Review and Fees and Charges 2013/14 were scheduled to be presented for the Executive Committee's consideration during forthcoming meetings. Members agreed that these reports were suitable for pre-scrutiny.

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RESOLVED that

- 1) the report on the Co-location of the One Stop Shop at Woodrow Library be added onto the Committee's Work Programme for its meeting on 17th July 2012 for pre-scrutiny;
- 2) the report on Adverse Weather Policy Review be added onto the Committee's Work Programme for its meeting on 14th August 2012;
- 3) the report on the Tenancy Strategy and Policy 2012-14 be added onto the Committee's Work Programme for its meeting on 11th September 2012;
- 4) the report on the Sickness Policy Review be added onto the Committee's Work Programme for its meeting on 11th September 2012; and
- 5) the report on the Fees and Charges 2013/14 be added onto the Committee's Work Programme for its meeting on 8th January 2013.

23. TASK & FINISH REVIEWS - DRAFT SCOPING DOCUMENTS

There were no draft scoping documents.

24. TASK AND FINISH GROUPS - PROGRESS REPORTS

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

- a) Access for Disabled People Task Group – Chair, Councillor Andrew Fry

Members were advised that the next meeting of the group would be taking place in early July 2012 and that the group was also due to visit the Shopmobility service's base in the town centre.

- b) Redditch Market – Chair, Councillor Andrew Brazier

The Chair advised that the first meeting of the group was due to take place on Monday 25th June 2012.

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RESOLVED that

the update reports be noted.

25. HEALTH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Councillor Witherspoon had been unable to attend the Worcestershire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC) meeting held on 19th June 2012. However, Councillor Yvonne Smith had attended on her behalf and had provided her with a brief update.

It was understood that the Ambulance Trust had now agreed to introduce a second hub which would be located either in Redditch or north Bromsgrove. Councillor Witherspoon had received no further information on the Alexandra Hospital as the work of the consultation groups was still being carried out.

RESOLVED that

the update report be noted.

26. REFERRALS

There were no referrals.

27. WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee was advised that Councillor Witherspoon had volunteered to attend the following meeting of the West Midlands Regional Scrutiny Network on Friday 22nd June 2012 on behalf of the Committee.

RESOLVED that

the Committee's Work Programme be noted.

The Meeting commenced at 7.00 pm
and closed at 9.15 pm