

# MINUTES OF MEETING OF WHITTLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

11 DECEMBER 2018

## PRESENT:

### Members of the Committee:

Councillors Sandison (Chair), Bearne, Brader, Douglas, Gillias, Leigh Hunt, Mrs O'Rourke, Roberts and Ms Watson-Merret

### Officers:

David Burrows (Regulatory Services Manager), Ruth Barnet (Principal Accountant) and Linn Ashmore (Democratic Services Officer)

## 15. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 15 October 2018 were approved and signed by the Chair.

## 16. REVIEW OF PARKING AT THE QUEEN'S DIAMOND JUBILEE LEISURE CENTRE

The committee received a report (Part 1 – agenda item 4) concerning the draft one-page strategy for the review.

The topic had been included in the overview and scrutiny work programme to be carried out as a light-touch review.

There had been some car parking issues at the Queen's Diamond Jubilee Leisure Centre mainly relating to major events, the availability of parking for staff, and too many spaces for disabled people.

The key challenge was that the leisure centre was run by GLL on behalf of the Council.

It was agreed that a meeting would be held in January to take the form of an on-site visit to view the site and meet staff from GLL. Other relevant interested parties such as Rugby Thornfield Indoor Bowls Club and Rugby and Northampton Athletics Club would also be consulted.

Members commented that if the site visit was held during the day, some of the Committee may be unable to attend and it was agreed photographs would provide useful evidence.

One further meeting would be arranged to discuss the findings and consider possible review recommendations. All relevant officers and consultees would be invited to attend this meeting.

The draft one-page strategy was approved subject to the addition of Rugby Thornfield Indoor Bowls Club and Rugby and Northampton Athletics Club as consultees.

**RESOLVED THAT –**

- (1) the draft one-page strategy be approved, subject to the additions minuted above; and
- (2) the approach to the review be agreed and a site visit be arranged in January 2019.

**16. WORLD RUGBY HALL OF FAME – 12 MONTH UPDATE**

The committee received a report (Part 1 – agenda item 5) concerning a 12-month progress update against the review recommendations.

Members considered the report and raised the following questions and points:

*Recommendation 1 – Marketing Strategy and Action Plan*

- Members questioned how successful the marketing activities had been.
- Anecdotal evidence suggested that visitor numbers had declined. Members were keen to hear more from senior officers on the plans for the future.
- A more detailed report was required to update the Committee on the key actions.
- A question was raised regarding what use was being made of social media to promote the attraction. How does this convert to increased footfall?
- The review report highlighted that the majority of attraction visitors were local. What marketing had taken place specifically for outside of the Borough?
- The target market published in the review report did not include any international elements.
- No signage to promote Rugby was visible at international level. Was any form of pilgrimage to Rugby as part of the Rugby World Cup in Japan being promoted?

*Recommendation 2 – Improve Visitor Numbers*

- Previous reports had indicated that coach tours and block bookings had been difficult to attract until charging had been introduced. Members questioned whether progress was now being made on this.

*Recommendation 4 – Signage for Coach Parking and Drop Offs*

- There was funding available to progress the delivery of brown tourism signs on the main vehicle routes into the town, but no progress had been made.
- Signage at stadiums such as at the Ricoh Arena would help attract visitors. A review of advertising was required.
- A report submitted to the Visitor Economy Working Party on signage had not resulted in any action.

#### *Recommendation 5 – Sponsorship*

- Members asked how and when the £600,000 sponsorship agreement would be released.

The Committee had several unanswered questions and it was agreed that further discussion with officers was needed.

**RESOLVED THAT** – the item be carried forward to the next meeting when the Head of Growth and Investment should be invited to attend.

## **17. TOWN CENTRE HERITAGE – 12 MONTH UPDATE**

The committee received a report (Part 1 – agenda item 6) concerning a 12-month progress update against the review recommendations.

Members considered the report and raised the following questions and points on the key actions:

#### *Recommendation 2 – Heritage Publications and Branding*

- The Real Ale Trail does not include any historic detail or information. This could be expanded to create wider public interest and attract visitors.
- A joined-up approach was needed to link the heritage interest to the World Rugby Hall of Fame, so it is not a stand-alone attraction.

#### *Recommendation 3 – Mobile App*

- This was a key recommendation from the review, based on giving users a level of detail far beyond a Blue Plaque or interpretation board.

#### *Recommendation 5 – Heritage Lottery Fund*

- Members would like to learn more about the proposals for funding.
- It was understood that the funding would be used to provide additional storage and display materials for current exhibits and members questioned how this would help reach out and connect to the rest of the town. However, it was noted that the funding bid would have been submitted before the next meeting.

#### *Recommendations 6 and 7 – Blue Plaque Scheme*

- The current plaques had not been installed in line with guidance and some were difficult to read.
- The scheme was not very diverse, for example women of note were not well represented.
- It was suggested that an annual review of the scheme should be introduced

#### *Recommendation 8 – Register of Public Buildings and Monuments*

- There were major conversation areas in the town and it was surprising there was no register of heritage assets in place.
- Concerns were raised that heritage assets could be lost, or damaged, and proper care and protection was needed. An example of this was the removal of cast iron window frames that had been removed during building renovation.

- The Council no longer had a dedicated conservation officer, although planning officers worked with English Heritage.
- A register would support the planning team in making decisions.

Other points made included:

- A Wikipedia style database or repository could be created and the public could be invited to add into this using their own personal knowledge of local history. The result could be used to produce an app that could also be beneficial for planning officers.
- Rugby History Group would be a valuable source of information.
- More work was needed to identify Rugby as a visitor destination and create a greater footfall, that should include international visitors.
- Rugby's Victorian architecture should be celebrated.

Due to the number of questions raised by the Committee it was agreed that the item should be carried forward to the next meeting. The Head of Service should be invited to attend, and also the new Tourism and Town Centre Team Leader, if an appointment had been made to fill the soon to be vacant post.

**RESOLVED THAT** – the item be carried forward to the next meeting and a more detailed report be requested.

## 18. FINANCE AND PERFORMANCE MONITORING 2018/19 QUARTER 2

The Principal Accountant gave members an overview of the key points of the Cabinet report from 3 December and the following points were made:

- Financially, the Council was in a favourable position with a variance of £225,000 General Fund Revenue forecast for the end of the year.
- There had been a couple of large underspends and budgets had been set aside to manage provision and support the housing benefit payments during the move across to Universal Credit. An allowance to support the reduction in the overall level of bad debt was forecast to be reduced by £166,000.
- There were several vacancies across the Council, particularly within the Environment and Public Realm service area resulting in a significant favourable variance.
- To manage the pressures of dealing with homelessness and temporary accommodation mitigation measures had been implemented to lessen the impact on the budget. One piece of good news was that assessments were carried out more quickly.
- A separate report was submitted to Cabinet in December to approve a Housing Acquisition Fund designed to manage stock and help manage the consequences of temporary accommodation due to the Homelessness Reduction Act. This forms part of the budget papers.
- There has been an underspend on borrowing and there has been slippage on capital schemes, particularly relating to the procurement of vehicles.

During wider discussion the following questions and points were raised:

- Members asked about match funding for housing associations to enable more permanent homes to be built. Housing stock was under pressure and needed to be managed alongside the decanting of residents from Biart Place. This was reflected in the short-medium term financial strategy.

- No guidance had been received from the Housing and Communities Agency on changes relating to borrowing. Members commented that a wider understanding of the financial strategy and housing in Rugby was needed based on the evidence used to support the decision-making process.
- The Growth and Investment Portfolio Holder would be attending the next meeting and questions could be raised about the amount of affordable housing coming forward through Section 106 agreements. An average figure of 30 per cent over a two-year programme period was reported but members commented that at the end of this period results were negligible in terms of affordable housing provision.
- The building supply situation was determined by market forces and was outside of the control of the Council.
- National Planning Policy Guidance sets out the methodology for the assessment of land supply and was based on economic viability.
- There were a number of factors to managing the market and avoiding homelessness.
- There was a need to be more creative in the approach to increasing housing stock and prefabricated style housing was one option.
- The Council owns very little land, but councillors had put forward a suggestion to Warwickshire County Council (WCC) to request that it look to freeing up its land.
- In response to a question about business levy, members were informed that the approach and methodology was complex, and it was a matter of timing. The levy was paid immediately, and the benefit was not seen until future years. There was a partnership agreement in place for Coventry and Warwickshire to pool business rates. The dividend expected this year was estimated at around £340,000.
- Rugby was a fast-growing town and this economic growth was reflected in the sound financial position. There was a reserve in place for business rates to manage the timing delay.
- The Benn Hall was making progress in the management of events and extra income had been included in the projections for next year.
- There was a high volume of revaluation issues and the Valuation Office had a backlog of cases which has an impact on the forecast business rates.
- Section 31 (S31) grants were given to local authorities to compensate them for the business rates reliefs offered to small businesses. The Autumn Statement outlines proposals to help small businesses, but this has been financed through government grants and transferred to local authorities.
- It was anticipated that the process for collecting business rates would change from 2020/21 and finance were currently trying to predict income streams. This would result in a significant drop in revenue of around £3m. However, it was noted that current thinking was that it would not be possible to impose that fall within the first year and careful management of any estimated transitional arrangements would be needed. It was noted that the changes were likely to have a greater impact on district councils.
- It was acknowledged that WCC would be going through a difficult financial period over the next two to three years.
- Members questioned the reported higher than average costs in the current charges for recycling asking for more information on the base figure for the reported increase of 43%. There were higher levels of waste going to landfill rather than incineration and members asked what had caused this level of increase. The Principal Accountant offered to come back to members on this point.
- More education on recycling was needed as there were still a high level of recyclables being placed into black bins.

- Members agreed that the e-newsletter produced by WCC was very informative and should be circulated to all councillors and published on the council website.
- Waste and recycling remained a continuing topic for review, particularly in relation to the budget setting process to maximise efficiencies.

**RESOLVED THAT** – the Principal Accountant be thanked for attending the meeting.

## **19. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME 2018/19**

The committee received a report (Part 1 – agenda item 6) concerning the progress of scrutiny reviews and the overview and scrutiny forward work programme for 2018/19.

### *Informing and Engaging our Communities*

The Chair informed the Committee that he was addressing the lack of progress and it was hoped that the review would still report to the next meeting in March. The Executive Director had been informed of the situation.

### *Future Work Programme*

The Portfolio Holder for Growth Investment would attend the next meeting to answer supplementary questions members had not been able to raise at the joint meeting in November, when the portfolio holder had been unable to attend.

The next joint was scheduled for 28 January with the Leader and Executive Director. Members were invited to submit questions in advance. It was agreed the questions and answers would be circulated before the meeting and members would ask supplementary questions on the night.

Councillors would be given the opportunity to put forward suggestions for review topics for the 2019/20 municipal year. A formal selection process was needed to filter and prioritise topics and a new approach to determining the work programme was being taken for next year. This would replace the annual overview and scrutiny workshop with a focus on social media to engage with the public and community groups/organisations. Councillor listening posts would be arranged for members to meet with residents and discuss areas of concern, and a joint meeting or member workshop was also planned.

Any member of the committee may make suggestions for agenda item topics. The future work programme was determined by the scrutiny chairs who meet on a regular basis. The next chairs meeting was scheduled for mid-January 2019.

### **RESOLVED THAT –**

- (1) progress in the task group reviews be noted;
- (2) the future work programme be noted.

**CHAIR**