

Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Performance Board

Town Hall, Redditch

Tuesday, 25 October 2022, 2.00 pm

Present:

Cllr Tom Wells (Chairman), Cllr Alastair Adams, Cllr Brandon Clayton,
Cllr Steve Mackay, Cllr Emma Stokes, Cllr Shirley Webb and Cllr Richard Udall

Also attended:

Cllr Marcus Hart, Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Communities
Cllr Matt Dormer, Leader, Redditch Borough Council

Hannah Perrott, Assistant Director for Communities
Samantha Morris, Overview and Scrutiny Manager
Sheena Jones, Democratic Governance and Scrutiny Manager

Available Papers

The members had before them:

- A. The Agenda papers (previously circulated);

(A copy of document A will be attached to the signed Minutes).

1284 Apologies and Welcome

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Apologies were received from Cllr Alan Amos, Cllr Matt Dormer, Tim Reid
(Church Representative and Mark Hughes (Parent Governor Representative)).

1285 Declaration of Interest and of any Party Whip

Councillor Brandon Clayton advised that he was a Member of Redditch
Borough Council but was attending today's meeting in his capacity as a
Worcestershire County Councillor.

1286 Public Participation

The public participants in attendance made comments, asked questions and presented a petition relating to Item 4 – the relocation of Redditch Library. The participants were Councillor Joe Baker, Redditch Borough Council (presenting a petition and reading out a statement from Councillor Juma Begum, Redditch Borough Council), Sharon Burton Fletcher, Emily Tyrell, Oliver Hale, Ronnie Webb, Phil Berry, Councillor Saheed Khan, Redditch Borough Council (reading out statements on behalf of Andrea Berry and Katie Hackett), David Munro, Derek Coombes and Councillor Juliet Smith, Redditch Borough Council.

The main points made by the public participants were around the reasons why Redditch Library should stay in its current location, including:

- a recent refurbishment costing £1m
- the financial implications of the relocation to the Borough Council, which was irreversible
- doubt that the plans would stimulate economic growth when existing pubs and restaurants were under threat of closure and Redditch already had too many café's
- The demolition of a functioning building, the disposal of the waste material and the effect on the carbon footprint
- The need for the library to be purpose built rather than being part of another building and the effect of moving the library on the existing footfall
- Concerns that the existing staff may lose their jobs
- Continuity of the Library service whilst the new library was being built
- The possible negative effect on the footfall of the Kingfisher Shopping Centre by moving the library
- The need for a sensory room in the new library going ahead
- Accessibility issues associated with moving the library
- Concern about moving some of the town's archives to the Hive, Worcester and the potential impact on access to them for Redditch residents
- The need for the consultation to be accessible to all and be multilingual.

The Chairman thanked the members of the public for their participation. As some of the comments and questions related to Redditch Borough Council, the Chairman advised the public that they would receive a written response to the relevant part of their submission which related to Worcestershire County Council.

1287 Relocation of Redditch Library

The Board considered the Report on the proposed re-location of Redditch Library, which was being considered by Cabinet on 27 October 2022.

The Chairman explained that the focus of the meeting was to consider the proposed library relocation from Worcestershire County Council's (the Council's) perspective, in particular whether this was the best solution to ensure long term sustainability.

Cllr Dormer, a Member of the Board was attending the meeting in his capacity as Leader of Redditch Borough Council (RBC). Cllr Dormer was invited to address the meeting and made the following points:

- Following the Government's major Town Deal investment in Redditch, the relocation of the library was one of three key projects (which had been prioritised as a result of public consultation) that the Town Deal Board had agreed to progress.
- The intended aims of the Project included the economic benefits from revitalising the area, increased footfall to the Kingfisher Shopping Centre, creation of an open public plaza space and improved connectivity to the historic centre.
- The relocation of the library would not result in any loss of library services and therefore there would be no disadvantage for local people.

The Cabinet Member with Responsibility (CMR) for Communities highlighted that the RBC and the Council had different roles in this process. The Overview and Scrutiny Performance Board (OSPB) was focussed on the role of the Council and the fulfilment of its statutory duty regarding library services. The CMR reassured Members of the OSPB that the proposed relocation of the library would not result in any loss of facilities for residents. The Council was being open and transparent and would, if agreed by Cabinet, carry out a major consultation process from 7 November 2022 to 24 February 2023. This process would be accessible to all local residents via online, paper and face to face means. The results would be published in May 2023.

The Assistant Director for Communities drew attention to the proposed technical requirements in the report, including the commercial arrangements, operational/ service conditions and collaboration opportunities which would be used to protect the Council's interests. Redditch library was the second most popular library in the County and the Council was keen to develop it further by exploring collaborative arrangements with other partners to enhance the provision of services available to Redditch residents. The proposed relocation plans and commercial arrangements set out in the Report and the assurances that they contained was highlighted.

During the opportunity for Members questions, the following main points were made:

- The Assistant Director confirmed that following successful trials at Stourport and Droitwich libraries, an out of hours open library service was proposed for the new library to extend the opening hours.
- With regard to a sensory room, the Board was informed that this was not currently available at Redditch library, however, funding options were being explored and if this proved viable, this facility would also be included in the proposed move.
- The questions relating to (i) how the rubble from the proposed demolition of the existing library would be handled and (ii) if there were proposals for the Town Hall to be demolished were questions that would need directing to the RBC.

- The Assistant Director confirmed that the results of the Consultation would be brought back to the Corporate and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel when published.
- The estimated cost of the demolition was £4.2m, a Member questioned whether there were any guarantees that costs would not increase. The Leader of RBC advised that this figure had recently been costed and that there were no guarantees that it wouldn't increase but that was an issue for RBC.
- Equality issues were raised as a concern as was the impact on the carbon footprint from demolishing the current library building. The Assistant Director explained that as the detail of the proposals developed, so would the detail of the equality impact assessment which would be factored in accordingly. The impact on the carbon footprint was an issue for RBC.
- A Member questioned what the real estate value was of the capital assets and whether break clauses had been included in the lease as it was for 125 years. The Assistant Director explained these were issues which would be looked at in detail as the commercial arrangements were worked on in the coming months but break clauses would be included.
- The Assistant Director advised that the responsibility for carrying out a risk assessment for the possibility that planning permission was not granted was a matter for RBC.
- A query was raised as to which organisation would be paying for the consultation exercise, and whether it was being independently managed. The Board was informed that the County Council would be funding its own consultation process, as it had instigated it in response to its own statutory responsibility.
- The specific dimensions of the proposed new library space were revealed to be an overall increase of 11sqm.
- The Board was informed that the initial proposal for leases would result in the Council granting RBC a 125 year lease for use of the current library site, meanwhile RBC would grant a similar lease to the Council for use of the Town Hall site, both leases would be at a nil rent.
- In terms of the proposed facilities for children in the new library site, the Assistant Director advised that the children's library would be located in the ground floor area where this meeting was currently being held, so that it was easily accessible for families. The views of children would be sought as to the design and layout of the area.
- The Board was informed that some of the archives which were currently based at Redditch Library would remain within the library, but that others would be relocated to the Hive, where it was felt they could be stored more appropriately. Advice was being sought from the County's archivists about this.
- The Board was assured that the proposed library would be of the same size, with the same services, have the same employees and also have the benefit of an additional enhanced open libraries service. The Assistant Director also confirmed that there would be no cost to the County Council from the proposal, except for the cost of the consultation exercise and the implementation of the open libraries

service. It was also confirmed that the results of the consultation exercise would be made available to the public.

- In terms of the economic rationale for the project, it was explained that the money to fund this project was not coming from RBC reserves, instead it was from the Central Government £15.6m Town Deal secured in 2021 as part of the submission to transform Redditch, as summarised in the Town Investment Plan.
- A Bromsgrove Member was keen to highlight that a library complex offered a space for a range of partnership services which was very convenient for residents, as seen when Bromsgrove library was relocated.
- The Assistant Director agreed that signposting within the town was an important issue to address and also welcomed suggestions for initiatives that would enable residents to view the archives at the Hive.
- When asked about the vision behind the proposal, the Leader of RBC explained that he had witnessed the town centre degenerating for many years, with a decline in the night-time economy and younger residents moving away. He wanted to improve the vibrancy and flow of the town centre and to draw people into the town centre for a range of activities.
- The arrangements for transition of the library to its new location would aim to keep disruption to a minimum. The new provision would be made ready for occupancy first and then services would be relocated with the continuity of services being maintained as far as possible.

The CMR set out the benefits of the proposed relocation, the enhanced service that would be on offer to residents and the possibilities for the future. The Chairman wanted to understand the risks that were involved and what needed to be factored in. The Assistant Director explained that there were always risks involved, and for the library relocation, the implementation plan would be crucial to ensure that footfall was maintained, and the service offer remained high.

A Member reiterated some of the earlier points made about the consultation process and risk analysis.

The Chairman, in summing up stressed the importance of the consultation being genuine, meaningful and extensive in its reach to those taking part and achieving the best outcome for the residents of Redditch. He hoped this would encourage the residents in Redditch to fully engage with the process and share their views.

The view of the Board would be presented to Cabinet on 27 October 2022.

The Chairman thanked everyone for attending the meeting.

The meeting ended at 4.05 pm

Chairman