

Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Performance Board

Council Chamber, County Hall, Worcester

Monday, 26 June 2023, 10.00 am

Present:

Cllr Tom Wells (Chairman), Cllr James Stanley (Vice Chairman),
Cllr Alastair Adams, Cllr Brandon Clayton, Cllr Matt Dormer, 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 Emma Marshall, Observer

Andrew Spice, Strategic Director of Commercial and Change
Mark Fitton, Strategic Director for People
Hannah Perrott, Assistant Director for Communities
Steph Simcox, Deputy Chief Finance Officer
Carol Brown, Head of Libraries, Archives and Archaeology
Samantha Morris, Interim Democratic Governance and Scrutiny Manager
Alison Spall, Overview and Scrutiny Officer

Available Papers

The members had before them:

- A. The Agenda papers (previously circulated);
- B. The Minutes of the Meeting held on 28 April 2023 (previously circulated).

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

1321 Apologies and Welcome

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Apologies were received from Church Representative, Tim Reid.

The Chairman highlighted that Councillors Matt Dormer and Brandon Clayton were Executive Members of Redditch Borough Council and for Agenda item 5 (Update on the proposal to relocate Redditch Library) they were in attendance in their capacity as witnesses rather than Board Members.

1322 Declaration of Interest and of any Party Whip

None.

1323 Public Participation

There were 3 public participants, Ronnie Webb, Emily Tyrrell and Oliver Hale who made comments in relation to Agenda item 5 - The Update on the proposal to relocate Redditch library.

The Chairman thanked the speakers for their comments and advised that they would each receive a written response.

1324 Confirmation of the Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 28 April 2023 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

1325 Update on the Proposal to Relocate Redditch Library

The Chairman introduced the report and in doing so reminded Members of the Board that the discussion and questions should focus on the Worcestershire County Council perspective.

The Chairman of the Corporate and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel (C&C Panel) was invited to provide an update to the Board following the C&C Panel's consideration of this matter on 8 June.

The C&C Panel Chairman advised that the Panel had thoroughly scrutinised the 4 key areas: the consultation process, commercial arrangements, operational conditions and collaboration opportunities (detailed in the minutes of the meeting and referenced in the Agenda report). In addition, Appendix 1 to the Agenda report included a summary of the key points made by the Panel (which would be submitted to Cabinet), the comments also included those matters that were still outstanding at the time of the C&C Panel meeting. It was confirmed that the floor plans were now available and had been included in the Agenda (with large-scale versions available for viewing at the meeting). The C&C Panel Chairman believed that the Panels work in relation to the proposal to relocate Redditch Library had been a good example of pre-scrutiny and that the Panel had not received any evidence to suggest that the proposal would lead to a reduction in the service offer to the residents of Redditch or that there would be increased costs incurred by the County Council.

The Cabinet Member with Responsibility (CMR) for Communities commented that he was grateful for the Scrutiny carried out and for the feedback received through the consultation survey. The Cabinet would make a decision on 20 July. The CMR reassured the Board that he had an open mind and was in listening mode.

The Chairman invited Councillor Dormer to provide an overview of the proposal from the perspective of Redditch Borough Council. Councillor Dormer

explained that the background to the successful Town Deal bid had 3 main elements: the digital innovation skills hub, public realm improvements and a plaza area to enable connection and flow in the Town Centre. The relocation of the library was fundamental to acquiring a space to be able to create the new plaza. Consultants had advised that the library building was the major block to opening up the town centre. Councillor Dormer understood the concerns but there were huge benefits for the Town Centre which included opening up the side of the Kingfisher Shopping Centre which would encourage food and beverage outlets to locate in this area, which they were keen to do. The plaza would add vibrancy to the town centre and boost the evening economy, which was greatly needed, especially to encourage younger people to remain in the town. In summing up, Councillor Dormer indicated that Redditch Borough Council felt that this project was a catalyst for improving the future of Redditch. The Government grant meant that the huge benefits to be gained for Redditch residents would be achieved at no cost to Redditch Borough Council taxpayers, except in relation to the Community Hub. There would also be no financial cost to the County Council.

During the discussion, the following main points were made:

- In respect of a query concerning the potential loss of value of a capital asset, the Strategic Director of Commercial and Change reminded the Board that the County Council owned the freehold to the current library site. The proposal involved a 125-year lease exchange arrangement between the County Council and Redditch Borough Council, at the end of which the County Council would inherit whatever was located on the site at that time. If the County Council wished to sub-let the space at the Town Hall, the ability to assign was being sought, which would give the Council the same rights as ownership. There would be no financial detriment to the County Council.
- The library building was built in 1976 and was in need of further building maintenance. Redditch Borough Council would be planning to demolish the building should the relocation proposal be approved. It was confirmed that plans for the site would be subject to the usual planning controls and protections.
- In response to a follow up question, the Deputy Chief Finance Officer explained that the library site would remain as an asset on the County Council's balance sheet as the County Council retained the freehold and would lease the existing site to Redditch Borough Council. The County Council would occupy the new library site at zero rent for as long as a library was operated on the site.
- The Board was informed that scaffolding was currently in place at the existing library as a safety precaution, due to some concrete defects having been detected and remedial works being assessed. The cost of the scaffolding was approximately £1k per month, with £20,139 having been spent as at the end of May. The cost of the immediate remedial works was in the region of £77k, with further maintenance works to be assessed going forward.
- The Assistant Director for Communities set out details of the approach taken to engage the public in the consultation survey. This had involved social media activity, press releases, public meetings and direct emails

to library members. Initial plans had been displayed in the current Redditch library and were replaced in January with simpler plans, following feedback from the public.

- Whilst the Council's library staff had been advised to remain impartial with regard to the consultation process, they were able to provide support to residents who needed help to access the survey. The Board was informed that 92 paper copies of the survey were returned.
- A Member drew attention to the fact that overall, 72.3% of the 1467 respondents had disagreed with the proposed new location to some extent (with the response for library members being higher at 77%). The Cabinet Member gave assurance that these matters would all be given careful consideration when Cabinet came to form a judgement. It was highlighted that less than 10% of library members had responded to the survey and a Member sought assurance that assumptions would not be made as to the views of the 'silent majority'. The Cabinet Member commented that as with all aspects of the consultation process, due regard would also be given to this.
- With reference to the overall response rate to the survey, the Chairman asked that the Business Intelligence team, who had carried out the independent analysis, be asked to confirm, in advance of the July Cabinet meeting, whether a 2.2% response rate from the Redditch population aged over 19 years, was statistically valid.
- The Assistant Director confirmed that the County Council had received new floor plans and had checked these in detail. They were confident that the library service could be run on a comparative basis in the proposed location. The next step was for library staff to review the plans further.
- The space available for the children's library was slightly larger than the current space and it would be a suitable provision for a service equal to what was currently delivered. Reassurance was provided that all the current children's clubs and activities would be continued regardless of location. In due course there would be opportunities for service users to get involved in the design aspect of the new space.
- The Head of Libraries, Archives and Archaeology advised that space had been identified on the plans for a sensory room. Work would be carried out in due course with partners to look at how this could be developed. The Assistant Director highlighted that Redditch Borough Council would bear the costs regarding works required at the Community Hub.
- The Board was informed that access concerns for the new site were being worked on with Redditch Borough Council. Improved lighting, blue badge spaces and accessibility to mobility scooters were being considered to minimise these concerns. The Board asked that a check be made to ensure that written confirmation had been received regarding the Blue Badge parking facilities.
- A Member asked about the context and breadth of the consultation process. The Assistant Director advised that whilst the Town Deal was the backdrop to the reason for the proposed library move, this consultation exercise had solely focussed on the specifics of the proposed move. It was evident that there was an overlap for some respondents who had also submitted views about other issues

connected with the Town Deal. Councillor Dormer highlighted that Redditch Borough Council had six months previously provided a newspaper to every household explaining all the details of the whole Town Deal initiative.

- A Member expressed support for the exciting plans taking shape in Redditch and the positive outcomes that would be achieved. Councillor Clayton was invited to comment. He agreed that it was an exciting development for the residents of Redditch. In terms of the proposed library location, he highlighted that it had the benefit of most of the services being available on the ground floor as well as being a more environmentally friendly building.
- Assurance was provided to the Board that the consultation exercise had been delivered in a thorough manner and had benefitted from the Teams knowledge and experience of running previous consultations. The Assistant Director acknowledged that there were always learnings to be taken forward for future consultation exercises, for example, in this instance relating to the quality of the initial plans displayed.
- In response to a question about the overall Town Deal funding, Councillor Dormer advised that if the library move did not go ahead, the £4.2m allocated to Redditch Borough Council for the Plaza initiative (as part of the Town Deal), was at risk of having to be returned to the Government, due to the timescales not allowing sufficient time for another project to be delivered, with 2026 being the date by which monies needed to be spent. It was confirmed that the grant funding for the other 2 aspects of the Town Deal was secured.
- The Board was informed that no archives had been moved to date. The Assistant Director explained that staff and volunteers were working together to assess which archives would need to move to the Hive, Worcester (due to specific storage requirements) and which would be retained locally in Redditch. It was also highlighted that a dedicated local history area had been factored in, to enable more materials to be displayed and accessible for visitors.
- A question was raised as to whether the Town Hall site was the only possible option for the library move. The Assistant Director explained that other locations for the library had been considered initially and some work completed on the comparability of sites. The Town Hall had proved to be the most viable option for the new library, and it was explained that the ability to have a lease exchange arrangement was a significant benefit of this site.

The CMR felt assured that the consultation process had been open, fair and transparent and that due regard would be given by Cabinet to all of the information obtained throughout this process, including the many detailed responses received to the survey and the views of Scrutiny.

The Chairman commented that there had been a thorough and effective scrutiny process carried out on this proposal. He thanked all those who had contributed, and in particular the Assistant Director for Communities who had responded in a full and open manner to all the questions raised.

The meeting was adjourned from 11.25 to 11.35am.

The Chairman confirmed that the comments made from OSPB and the C&C Panel would be submitted to the CMR (and Cabinet for consideration at its meeting on 20 July) and that he and the Chair of C&C Panel were planning to attend that meeting.

In response to a Member suggestion that there should be further exploration of other alternative sites in Redditch. Board Members were content that Officers had given assurance that this site was the most viable option available to ensure best value and the time limit on grant funding was also important to keep in focus.

In conclusion, therefore, the OSPB (and the Corporate and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel) have scrutinised the Proposal to Relocate Redditch Library, and from a Worcestershire County Council's perspective, found no compelling evidence that the Proposal would result in any deterioration of the library service or its quality. The Board therefore believed that the Cabinet had all the information it needed to make an informed decision.

1326 Scrutiny Chairmen (and Lead Member) Update, Work Programme and Cabinet Forward Plan

The Scrutiny Panel Chairmen/Lead Members provided an update on recent Scrutiny meetings and activities.

Adult Care and Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Cllr Shirley Webb)

The Panel was due to meet on 2 July and as part of the preparation for the discussion of Assistive Technology Panel Members had been offered the opportunity to visit to the Heart of Worcestershire College to view two flats which had been created to display the technology, which enabled people to remain living independently.

Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Cllr Steve Mackay)

The Chairman provided feedback from the Panel's recent meeting which had included updates on:

- Get Safe - the strong partnership working in place with the Police, Education, Health and Young Solutions, the learning from the tragic death of a young person in 2019 which had resulted in recommendations which were now followed by all agencies, including the audits of cases discussed at Missing Intervention or Multi Agency Child Exploitation meetings. Ten recent cases had been examined and none were found unsafe, with no remedial action required. The key message was also reinforced that MACE meetings should never take the place of child protection procedures when the threshold for statutory intervention had been met.
- Update on SEND Accelerated Progress Plan and Worcestershire Strategy for SEND - There were 4 remaining areas of weakness

identified at the November 2021 inspection. The DfE had recognised the huge amount of work that had taken place to make the required improvements, and the value of all contributors including the Parent Carer Forum and school representatives. A further update would be provided later in the year.

- Worcestershire Children First Independent Fostering Service Ofsted Inspection - The Chairman was pleased to report that following an Ofsted inspection in September 2021, when a 'requires improvement' judgement was received, a re-inspection in February 2023 had now resulted in an overall grade of 'Good'.

Corporate and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Cllr Emma Stokes)

The Chairman provided feedback from the Panel's recent meeting, highlighting that the proposal to relocate the Redditch Library had been the major focus of the meeting. An update received on Libraries Unlocked had also been considered.

Economy Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Cllr Matt Dormer)

The Chairman explained that the Panel had been due to meet at Bromsgrove District Council but this had been rearranged to a later date. The main highlight of the Panel's meeting was a Workforce Skills update and the Panel had particularly focused on ways to engage with young people.

Environment Overview and Scrutiny Meeting (Cllr Alastair Adams)

The Chairman provided feedback from the Panel's recent meeting including:

- Street Works - the Panel had requested detailed information on a number of areas relating to the co-ordination, compliance and control of Street Works activities on the highway, including road closure diversions, reinstatement defects, Section 58 restrictions – protection of resurfaced footways and carriageways, Emergency and urgent work permit applications and the Lane Rental Scheme feasibility. The Chairman commented on the huge increase in Inspection checks carried out by the Council in the last 5 years. The Panel had raised a number of queries seeking further detailed information on the street works activity.
- Section 278 Scrutiny Task Group – The Chairman advised that the report of the Task Group had been deferred by Cabinet, further information was awaited about the rescheduled date for discussion.

Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Cllr Brandon Clayton)

The Chairman provided feedback from the Committee's May and June meetings:

- At its May meeting the HOSC had discussed workforce pressures, Maternity Services and the Integrated Care System (ICS). A further update on Maternity Services had been requested for 6 months' time.
- In June, the Committee held its meeting at the Worcestershire Royal Hospital and were able to visit the new Accident and Emergency Facility due to open later in the year.
- The Chief Executive and the Chairman of the Worcestershire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust were leaving the Trust and a recruitment process was underway.
- There had been 4 changes to the District Council membership of HOSC following the recent elections, including the Vice-Chairman who had retired in May. The district council representative would be agreeing a nomination for Vice-Chairman at their meeting in September, which would then be ratified at the next full Council meeting.

Crime and Disorder (Cllr Richard Udall)

- The April crime figures showed a substantial increase in violent crime and hate crime in the West Mercia region.
- The Chairman reminded Members that the October Board meeting had been designated as the Annual Crime and Disorder meeting, with one of the areas of focus being sex workers in Worcestershire. The Chairman advised that a local newspaper had contacted him about this issue which he would discuss further with the Lead Member.

Work Programme

- A discussion of budget scrutiny for 2024/25 was scheduled for the July meeting of OSPB and the Leader, Chief Executive and Chief Finance Officer would be invited to the meeting. As discussed earlier in the year (as part of Budget Scrutiny for 2023/24) Scrutiny was keen to be involved in the budget setting process at an earlier stage in the process.
- An update on the Corporate Plan would also be requested for the July meeting.
- The annual update from the Worcestershire Local Enterprise Partnership (WLEP) was scheduled for September meeting. The Vice-Chairman would Chair this discussion as the Chairman was a member of the WLEP Board.
- It was noted that Income generation was a possible future agenda item. The Chairman of the Corporate and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel highlighted that this Panel was also looking at income generation with more of a focus on the provision of countryside sites as a wedding venue.
- Scrutiny Task Groups – members were asked to consider suggestions for possible Scrutiny Task Groups which would be discussed at the next meeting.

Cabinet Forward Plan

- Worcestershire County Museum Review of Lease – it was agreed that it would be checked whether this was an appropriate issue for Scrutiny.

- Home to School Transport Review – it was agreed that the progress of this review would be checked and discussed with the Interim Democratic Governance and Scrutiny Manager.

The meeting ended at 12.28 pm

Chairman