

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Tuesday, 6th October, 2015

MINUTES

Present:

Councillor Jane Potter (Chair), Councillor Gay Hopkins (Vice-Chair) and Councillors David Bush, Andrew Fry, Gareth Prosser, Paul Swansborough and Jennifer Wheeler

Officers:

D Allen, J Bough, M Bough, S Hanley, B Holden, J Pickering, L Tompkin and J Willis

Democratic Services Officers:

J Bayley and A Scarce

37. APOLOGIES AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Joe Baker and Nina Wood-Ford.

38. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND OF PARTY WHIP

Councillor Andy Fry declared an other disclosable interest in the Voluntary Sector Grants Programme, briefing paper due to his personal family connection to the Head of Community Services.

39. MINUTES

Councillor Gareth Prosser requested that it be noted at minute No 35, Joint Worcestershire Increasing Physical Activity Task Group, that the group's final report would be considered by Worcestershire Council's Cabinet at its January 2016 meeting and not December 2015 as previously stated.

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting held on 1st September 2015 be confirmed as a correct record, subject to the amendment detailed above, and signed by the Chair.

.....
Chair

40. HOUSING PROVISION

The Chair reminded Members that an overview of both private sector housing provision and Council housing provision in the Borough had been requested during the scrutiny training session held in June 2015.

Officers provided Members with a briefing in respect of the key data sets currently available on the housing market in Redditch together with details of the private rented market in Redditch, the prevalence of benefit payments and rent shortfalls and the demand that loss of private rented accommodation generated for the Council's homelessness service as a whole.

Members were also updated on the housing register, allocations system and policy. This included information on the work of the housing advice assessment of housing need, the work of the Locality teams within the allocations process in order to understand people's needs and the current review of the allocations policy and the transformation work which was being carried out.

During consideration of this item Officers responded to the following points which were raised by Members:

- It was noted the data was produced in 2012 and the point was raised as to whether this would be updated. Officers confirmed that this data was produced with the support of Worcestershire County Council and as its approach had changed to that of a commissioning authority in many cases, the districts were in discussion as to how best to produce similar data in the future.
- The number of houses built in the Borough in the period covered by the report.
- Any information in respect of the number of developments where planning permission had been granted but the properties had not as yet been built and the effect this could potentially have on the availability of affordable housing.
- The percentage of Council tenancies and registered providers.
- Whether all those on the waiting list were Redditch residents. It was confirmed that approximately five per cent were from outside of the Borough.
- The Council's holistic approach to housing allocation and matching people with what they wanted.
- The effect of the spare room subsidy and the support that had been given to those who were required to move or wished to downsize their property.
- The turnaround of the void properties. This was approximately four to six weeks as the Council was carrying out more of the capital work using its own workforce, which was part of the wider

transformation work. It was anticipated that this turnaround time would reduce significantly as the new way of working became embedded.

- Managing the expectations of those on the non-priority waiting list – Officers dealt with this in a variety of ways, including producing data and examples of someone in a similar position and the time it had taken for others to move up the list or be allocated a property. The list was reviewed annually and those on it would be contacted to see whether their circumstances had changed or whether they still needed to be included.
- Whether the Council took account of parents who had joint custody of children and made allowance for a spare room. Officers confirmed that usually the property would be allocated to the parent who had financial responsibility for the child in terms of receiving any benefit support.
- The new regulations which had come into force during the week in respect of carbon monoxide and smoke detectors being installed in rented properties. Officers confirmed that any requirements would be met by the Council as a priority and Officers would ensure that any necessary work would be carried out in order for the Council to meet its statutory and moral responsibilities.

41. VOLUNTARY SECTOR GRANTS PROGRAMME - BRIEFING PAPER

Officers noted that at the previous meeting they had been invited to provide an update in respect of the lack of progress in recruiting an apprentice to support the Council's grants programme. Members were advised that the council would not recruit to this apprentice post until it could be ensured that the post holder could be supported by the Grants Co-ordinator.

Further information was also provided in respect of the other outstanding recommendations from the Voluntary and Community Sector Task Group.

- Recommendation 6a – It was anticipated that immediately the service was fully staffed this recommendation would be addressed.
- Recommendation 7a – The staff volunteering policy was in the process of being refreshed and would be relaunched at the end of October 2015 as part of the Five Ways of Well Being event that was due to be held.
- Recommendation 8 – Staff volunteering would continue to be promoted and celebrated in publications such as the Oracle (staff) newsletter and as part of the internal communications campaign. Officers also advised Members that there would be a

workshop for volunteering on 13th October as part of the Five Ways of Well Being event, which staff would be encouraged to attend.

- Recommendation 10 – A Voluntary Sector event would be held when the team was fully staffed with the possibility of this being linked to National Volunteering Week.

Members commented that they felt reassured to see that the long term issues were being resolved and that members of the voluntary and community sector still had the opportunity to get support when applying for grant funding. Thanks were given to Officers for maintaining the service during a difficult time.

RESOLVED that

- 1) Recommendations 7 and 8 proposed by the voluntary and Community Sector Task Group be removed from the Recommendation tracker; and**
- 2) the contents of the briefing paper be noted.**

42. GAS SAFETY TESTING - UPDATE REPORT

Following a request at the previous meeting of the Committee, Officers provided Members with an update in respect of the Gas Safety Testing which covered the following:

- Regular updates had been provided to all Members detailing the number of overdue inspections, including a Ward breakdown. As of 30th September 2015 40 remained overdue.
- The Council referred itself to the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) verbally with a follow up in writing. HCA were considering the matter to ascertain whether it represented a breach of consumer standards.
- The matter was also referred to the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) following the issue of a press release and HSE were undertaking an enquiry into the Council's system of carrying out annual gas inspections, including the accumulation of a backlog.
- The HSE would seek to recover their costs for the work undertaken by them, if the Council was found to be in contravention of health and safety law.
- An interim Internal Audit report had been completed and provided, in confidence to the HCA and HSE.

Officers assured Members that since the last report the issue had been dealt with as a priority with additional and dedicated resources being deployed, regular contact with the gas contractor and support from other teams. The Corporate Management Team (CMT) had

also been provided with regular progress reports. There had already been a comprehensive review of the gas testing schedule/process and all relevant documentation, which had led to a number of measures already being put in place to ensure that this did not happen again.

The Committee was advised that a final report would be made available for Members' consideration once it had been produced. However, at this stage only an interim report had been drafted. The legal team had been consulted and it had been agreed that as the report was both confidential and in an interim form, and as there was further work to be undertaken, Members would not, at this stage, be able to see the report.

Following consideration of the report Members, whilst pleased to see that such swift action had been taken to rectify the matter, expressed disappointment that they were unable to have sight of the interim Internal Audit Report, as it was felt this document would provide vital information to enable them to ascertain how this situation had occurred and make a constructive response. It was highlighted that Members had previously been informed that they could, in theory, be legally responsible for what had happened. Whilst the Committee noted the reasons for not being provided with access to the report, it was suggested that a copy of the document should be made available for the consideration of all Members. Members therefore reiterated their request to have access to the interim internal audit report.

Members also discussed the availability of historic data in order to understand how long the delays had been going on, as this would provide useful background to the report, though it was suggested that such information was likely to form part of the overall report. The Committee was further reminded that some backlog data had already been provided for each ward.

RESOLVED that

the Gas Safety Testing update be noted.

43. OVERVIEW OF THE BUDGET - REPORT

Officers provided Members with background information to this report, explaining that the process had been revised following concerns which had been raised during the budget scrutiny exercise undertaken for 2015/16. The format of the report brought before Members was that which had been agreed at the previous meeting and provided an opportunity to consider any particular areas to be scrutinised in more detail at future meetings.

The Chair highlighted a number of areas where there were large variances and suggested that it would be helpful to have explanatory notes for these in order for Members to determine whether further investigation was needed. Those areas included Bereavement Services, Building Control, Community Safety, Council Tax, Business Development, Elections, HR and CMT. Members agreed that where there was a marked difference year on year it would be useful to have an explanation in order to understand the differences.

RESOLVED that

- 1) Officers to provide, via email, explanations of the areas where large variances have occurred; and**
- 2) the Budget Scrutiny 2016/17 report be noted.**

44. EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MINUTES AND SCRUTINY OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE'S WORK PROGRAMME

Officers confirmed that there were no updates in respect of Overview and Scrutiny within the Executive Committee minutes from the meeting held on 8th September 2015. A copy of the most recent Executive Work Programme had been tabled at the meeting and Members were given the opportunity to identify any subjects which they felt might be suitable for pre-scrutiny.

RESOLVED that

the Executive Committee Minutes of 8th September 2015 and the latest edition of the Executive Work Programme be noted.

45. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee was advised that there were no updates to report in respect of the Committee's Work Programme. However, it was highlighted that the agenda for the meeting on 8th December was particularly long and it would not therefore be appropriate to add any further items to that agenda.

It was confirmed that officers had been approached with a view to moving the Housing Benefits presentation to the January meeting. However, unfortunately the relevant Head of Service was unavailable. It was therefore agreed that the item would remain on the agenda for the December meeting.

RESOLVED that

the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's Work Programme be noted.

46. TASK GROUPS - PROGRESS REPORTS

Joint Worcestershire Increasing Physical Activity Task Group –
Redditch Borough Council Representative, Councillor Gareth
Prosser

Councillor Prosser confirmed that he had met with the Head of Leisure and Cultural Services to discuss the provision of activities by the Council and he had also provided information in respect of Worcestershire County Council. The next meeting of the Group was due to take place on 16th October at County Hall when representatives from Worcestershire County Cricket Club and Worcester Warriors would be interviewed. A further meeting was planned for 21st October when representatives from Worcester Ramblers and the Countryside Greenspace Manager would be interviewed.

It was anticipated that the final report would be presented to the Worcestershire County Council Overview and Scrutiny Performance Board's November 2015 meeting and, as previously noted, presented at the Cabinet's January 2016 meeting.

Leisure Services Options Short Sharp Review – Councillor Jane
Potter, Chair

Councillor Jane Potter, Chair of the group, confirmed the other Members nominated to serve on the review were Councillors Gay Hopkins, Tom Baker-Price and Paul Swansborough.

The group had held its first meeting and had agreed to send a questionnaire to other Councils to find out how they delivered their leisure services. Any responses to the questionnaire will be discussed at a future meeting. The next meeting was due to be held on 7th October when the group would consider further information about the different service delivery models that were available to the Council. Relevant Officers would be invited to attend future meetings to discuss the governance and funding implications of the different models.

RESOLVED that

the update reports be noted.

47. CRIME AND DISORDER SCRUTINY PANEL - UPDATE REPORT

Councillor Gareth Prosser, Chair of the Crime and Disorder Scrutiny Panel, confirmed that the Panel had met on 16th September 2015 for its annual meeting. During this meeting Officers had provided a comprehensive update on the work of the Partnership. Members were informed that full details and the minutes of the meeting were available to view on the Council's website.

48. HEALTH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

In the absence of Councillor Nina Wood-Ford, the Council's representative on the Worcestershire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Officers informed Members that a meeting had been held on 16th September 2015. Members agreed that the minutes of this meeting should be provided when available for information. It was further agreed that if Members wished to raise any issues arising from these minutes this could be done at the next meeting or by contacting Councillor Wood-Ford directly.

The Meeting commenced at 7.04 pm
and closed at 8.27 pm