

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Tuesday, 14th February, 2017

MINUTES

Present:

Councillor Jane Potter (Chair), and Councillors Joe Baker, Tom Baker-Price, Andrew Fry, Paul Swansborough, David Thain (substituting for Councillor Gay Hopkins), Jennifer Wheeler and Nina Wood-Ford

Officers:

D Allen, M Bough, S Hanley and J Pickering

Democratic Services Officers:

J Bayley and A Scarce

67. APOLOGIES AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Gay Hopkins with Councillor David Thain attending as her substitute.

68. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND OF PARTY WHIP

Councillor Jane Potter declared an other disclosable interest in respect of the areas with in the Medium Term Finance Plan which referred to the surrender of the Council's interest in the Kingsley Sports Centre site, Minute No. 71. She left the room and took no part in the discussions in respect of this element of the item.

69. MINUTES

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting held on 10th January 2017 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

70. COUNCIL HOUSING GROWTH PROGRAMME REPORT

Officers presented the Council Housing Growth Programme Report which set out the available options for growth, taking into account requirements for expenditure of the Housing Revenue Account (HRA). Those options were in addition to the Council's Mortgage Rescue and Buy Back schemes. The aim of these options was to

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Chair

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mitigate against the impact of the changes to the HRA and meet the affordable housing need in the Borough. This included a number of elements:

- purchasing stock from the open market, whilst ensuring that this did not impact on the housing market;
- construction of new stock with a developer;
- purchasing units on Section 106 sites, which was often done for housing associations;
- purchasing properties 'off plan' on developments,
- regenerating existing stock; and
- purchasing stock from other registered providers.

Officers were recommending that all options should be undertaken to increase the HRA stock to ensure proposed numbers were achieved. Officers confirmed that it was anticipated that 109 properties would be required by the end of 2018/19 and then a programme of 13 units per year from 2019/20.

Following presentation of the report Members discussed a number of areas in more detail:

- Concerns as to whether the Council would be able to meet the timescale in order for the Council not to have to return any of the funds. Officers confirmed that they were on track for this financial year.
- The impact on the housing market and the potential for property prices to increase due to the Council's interest in purchasing a particular type of property. Officers confirmed that this was being regularly monitored and the properties would be valued in accordance with standard procedures to ensure that an appropriate price was paid.
- Members were supportive of the building of properties to increase the Council's housing stock.
- The type of property that was most needed and the estimated value of such properties.
- Concerns around the buy back scheme taking houses off the market and thereby restricting those available for first time buyers.

RESOLVED that

the Council Housing Growth Programme be noted.

71. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN

Officers presented the Medium Term Financial Plan 2017/18 – 2020/21 and in so doing highlighted the following:

- Updated information which had been provided in the additional papers pack, following revisions made by the Executive Committee.
- The inclusion of a fourth year in the plan – this had not been included within the Efficiency Plan.
- Quarterly updates would be provided in order to monitor the areas which had been included within the Efficiency Plan.
- A significant reduction in the Revenue Support Grant and how this would be addressed.
- The report contained information about how the Council would maintain funding in order to meet its strategic purposes and ensure residents received quality services that met their needs.
- The provision settlement and a number of issues which were included within the information received; projections on Council Tax income; additional flexibility on Social Care, a new approach to the New Homes Bonus Scheme and the ability to increase Council Tax by two per cent or £5.
- The Capital Programme had been extended to four years and Heads of Services needed to be reminded that this should be accurately recorded for future years.
- The key themes identified in the Efficiency Plan needed to be mapped out, also over a four year period, to ensure that savings were achieved.
- More detailed reports would need to be prepared over the following years and these would be brought before both the Overview and Scrutiny function and the Executive Committee at regular intervals. The first of these was expected in June.

Officers provided Members with detailed information showing the projected shortfall should no further savings be made, which included unavoidable pressures and capital bids. Additional savings had been identified and these were also included within the report, together with the staff suggestions which were designed to secure either savings or additional income. Particular reference was made to unavoidable pressures, including the Microsoft License Cost increase, and it was confirmed that these could not be shared across Redditch and Bromsgrove Councils.

The proposals for savings put forward from the Administration were considered in detail, in particularly those in respect of Leisure

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Services and the surrendering of interest in sites at Kingsley Sports Centre and Arrow Vale Sports Centre.

At this stage of the meeting, in the absence of the Chair of the Committee, as detailed in Minute No. 68, Councillor Tom Baker-Price chaired the meeting whilst the Committee considered the surrender of interest in the Kingsley Sports Centre Site.

Members discussed the cost of the services provided at Kingsley Sports Centre and it was confirmed that discussions would be held with the school in respect of the withdrawal of those funds and the savings which could be made.

Further clarification was requested in respect of the costs for both Kingsley and Arrow Vale Sports Centres, in particular the cost of credit card payments and why these costs were not being passed on to the customer. Officers confirmed that this had been a decision made by Members, but was something which had been highlighted in the staff suggestions and would be investigated further in the future. Charging for cash payments was something which would not be considered, although it was noted that a number of other authorities did not accept cash.

Consideration was given to how the sites could be made more efficient rather than surrendering the Council's interest and concerns were raised about the potential level of interest from other parties in running them. It was confirmed that once the Council had withdrawn its funding it would be the responsibility of the schools, as the owners of the properties, and the Council would have no further interest. Members discussed how the Council needed to ensure it had a balanced budget with minimal disruption to services.

Officers went on to explain a number of other savings which had been put forward by the Administration including sourcing external funding for the Christmas Light Display and charging for the Shopmobility service. In this respect a survey of users had been carried out and from the results there was general consensus that customers would be happy to be charged. Charging for pre application services with developers and a review of the pre 9.30 am concessionary bus travel would also contribute significant savings.

A number of other savings and income streams were highlighted including the reduced cost of landscaping on the highways, the introduction of a Garden Waste Service, a review of charging for pest control, review of fleet costings and revenue opportunities including car parking. Savings still needed to be made in respect of

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the management structure, which had been included within the Efficiency Plan.

Following presentation of the report Members discussed a number of areas in more detail:

- Members thanked officers for the hard work which had been needed in order to achieve a balance budget and for the clear and comprehensive report.
- The areas to be included within the Leisure Services model and the options available. Some Members expressed concerns about the amount of savings proposed and how these would be achieved.
- A formal business case to be brought forward with the options available for Leisure Services. It was confirmed that Members would receive a report updating the information received by the Committee in 2015. The next stage would be a more detailed high level report providing the options available and how the savings would be achieved.
- The cost of the work by the consultants in respect of Leisure and Cultural Services with questions being raised about the potential for officers to carry out that work.
- What services would be included within the business case for Leisure and Cultural Services.
- The option for the National Trust to be invited to manage the Bordsley Abbey site.
- The cost of Microsoft Licenses and the procurement process in order to achieve best value for the Council.
- Savings and the benefits and pitfalls of the introduction of a four year election system as opposed to the current elections by thirds system and whether this provided the Council with stability.
- Members were impressed with the variety of staff suggestions put forward.

RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

72. CRIME AND DISORDER SCRUTINY - JOINT SCRUTINY PROPOSAL

Officers presented a proposal which had been put forward by Bromsgrove District Council in respect of the potential joint scrutiny of the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership. Members were reminded that originally there were three separate partnerships in the north of the county which more recently had been combined into

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one partnership for North Worcestershire. This was similar to South Worcestershire and it was confirmed that joint scrutiny arrangements had been successfully established there.

There was a legal requirement for the Council to allocate the scrutiny of the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership to a specific committee and to hold at least one meeting each year covering this role. Redditch had chosen to set up the Crime and Disorder Scrutiny Panel to carry out this work. Officers highlighted that the Panel was only able to scrutinise the work of the Partnership as a whole and not individual partners. This had proved to be challenging and had led to only a minimal number of recommendations being made in the last six years.

Officers confirmed that Bromsgrove District Council had also written to the Chairman of Wyre Forest District Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee and she would be attending the Bromsgrove Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting due to be held on 27th March, when this would be discussed further.

Following presentation of the report Members discussed a number of areas in more detail:

- The differing needs of each Council and whether these would be addressed with the introduction of joint scrutiny.
- The benefits of joint scrutiny.
- The previous work of the Panel and the outcomes of that work.
- How officers envisaged the joint scrutiny panel working.

RESOLVED that

no further action be taken and that the Council continues with the current arrangements for scrutinising the local Community Safety Partnership, subject to two meetings a year of the Crime and Disorder Panel being held in the coming year.

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

Officers highlighted to Members that during the Executive Committee meeting held on 17th January 2012 the Budget Scrutiny Working Group's recommendation in respect of the recharge process had been approved. The Executive Committee had also endorsed the proposals from the Committee in relation to the HRA.

During consideration of the latest edition of the Executive Committee's Work Programme Members discussed a number of

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items including the Housing Business Case. Members identified the Engagement Strategy, scheduled for a decision in April 2017, as a suitable item for further scrutiny.

RESOLVED that

- 1) the Engagement Strategy be added to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's Work Programme for pre-scrutiny at the 28th March meeting of the Committee; and**
- 2) the Executive Committee Minutes of 17th January and 7th February 2017, together with the Executive Committee's Work Programme, be noted.**

74. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

Officers highlighted that there were a number of items which needed to be allocated to future meetings of the Committee and confirmed that an update on the Sustainability and Transformation Plan would be received from the Worcestershire Health Care Trust and Worcestershire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust at the July meeting.

The Chair requested for a future meeting a presentation on Economic Development within the Borough to ensure that appropriate action was being taken.

Officers also highlighted that there had been an error in the date of the next meeting of the Committee circulated in the calendar sheets for Members' consideration. It was confirmed that this meeting would take place on the 28th March 2017.

75. WORKING GROUPS - UPDATE REPORTS

Budget Scrutiny Working Group – Chair, Councillor Jane Potter

Councillor Potter confirmed that at the latest meeting of the Working Group Members had concentrated on the Medium Term Financial Plan and had asked for further information in respect of the Council's contracts in order to gain a better understanding of the process.

Performance Scrutiny Working Group – Chair, Councillor Tom Baker-Price

Councillor Baker-Price explained that the Working Group had looked at usage of the Civic Suite and were pleased to see that the

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staff had a level of discretion over negotiating charges and that block bookings were being made more regularly.

The group had also met with the Head of Business Transformation and Organisational Development who had provided information in respect of staff appraisals. A new process was being rolled out and this would be monitored by Human Resources. At the Group's next meeting Members would be reviewing the gas safety inspection process.

76. TASK GROUPS - PROGRESS REPORTS

Mental Health Services for Young People Task Group – Chair, Councillor Nina Wood-Ford

Councillor Wood-Ford confirmed that the Group was coming to the end of its investigations and had that morning, held a lengthy meeting when draft recommendations had been formulated. She had also recently attended an initial meeting to discuss the development of a Suicide Prevention Plan for Redditch which had proved most interesting.

Staff Survey Joint Scrutiny Task Group – Vice Chair, Councillor Jane Potter

Councillor Potter advised that at the previous week's meeting the Group had interviewed the Chief Executive as Chairman of the Performance Board and the lead officers for the three main work streams, which covered Organisational Culture, People Management and Meeting Customers' Needs. The introduction of an appraisal scheme and regular one-to-one meetings and team meetings should be in place within 12 months.

The group had a meeting planned for 22nd February when they would review the work carried out to date and decide on the next stage of the investigation.

77. HEALTH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Councillor Nina Wood-Ford, the Council's representative on the Worcestershire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC), advised that she had attended two meetings of the Committee since her last update.

At the first meeting, the main topic was a presentation from the West Midlands Ambulance Service. Members had been advised that this was the only ambulance service to achieve each of the

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national emergency access targets for 2015/16 and remained the top performing service in the country. Information had also been provided within the presentation in respect of the waiting time at A&E departments, with Worcester Royal Hospital being the poorest performer. The Ambulance Service had placed members of staff within the A&E Department in order to try and reduce the waiting times.

The agenda for the second meeting, which had taken place on 7th February, had concentrated on the response which had been received from the Care Quality Commission (CQC) in respect of Worcestershire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust. This included details of both the announced and unannounced visits which had been made and the areas of improvement which needed to be completed by the end of March 2017, in order for the Section 29A notice to be lifted.

Following Councillor Wood-Ford's update, Members discussed the role of HOSC and the lack of task and finish work carried out as part of the health scrutiny process.

78. WEST MIDLANDS COMBINED AUTHORITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Councillor Jenny Wheeler, the Council's representative on the West Midlands Combine Authority Overview and Scrutiny Committee, confirmed that she had attended the most recent meeting of the Committee. Members had discussed the draft order for how Overview and Scrutiny was going to work following the election of a Mayor for the combined authority area and the Committee's work programme.

Three select committees had been set up and Councillor Wheeler had been appointed as Vice Chair of the Mental Health Select Committee due to her experience working on the Mental Health Services for Young People Task Group. The meeting had been held in the morning and during the afternoon a training event had been held which covered a number of financial areas including audit and risk.