

additional papers 1

# Executive Committee

Tue 22nd Sept  
2009  
7.00 pm

Committee Room 3  
Town Hall  
Redditch



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Ivor Westmore  
Committee Support Services**

**Town Hall, Walter Stranz Square, Redditch, B98 8AH  
Tel: 01527 64252 (Extn. 3269) Fax: (01527) 65216  
e.mail: [committee@redditchbc.gov.uk](mailto:committee@redditchbc.gov.uk) Minicom: 595528**

# Welcome to today's meeting.

## Guidance for the Public

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### **Agenda Papers**

The **Agenda List** at the front of the Agenda summarises the issues to be discussed and is followed by the Officers' full supporting **Reports**.

### **Chair**

The Chair is responsible for the proper conduct of the meeting. Generally to one side of the Chair is the Committee Support Officer who gives advice on the proper conduct of the meeting and ensures that the debate and the decisions are properly recorded. On the Chair's other side are the relevant Council Officers. The Councillors ("Members") of the Committee occupy the remaining seats around the table.

### **Running Order**

Items will normally be taken in the order printed but, in particular circumstances, the Chair may agree to vary the order.

**Refreshments** : tea, coffee and water are normally available at meetings - please serve yourself.

### **Decisions**

Decisions at the meeting will be taken by the **Councillors** who are the democratically elected representatives. They are advised by **Officers** who are paid professionals and do not have a vote.

### **Members of the Public**

Members of the public may, by prior arrangement, speak at meetings of the Council or its Committees. Specific procedures exist for Appeals Hearings or for meetings involving Licence or Planning Applications. For further information on this point, please speak to the Committee Support Officer.

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**Do Not stop to collect personal belongings.**

**Do Not use lifts.**

**Do Not re-enter the building until told to do so.**

**The emergency Assembly Area is on Walter Stranz Square.**

# Declaration of Interests: Guidance for Councillors

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DO I HAVE A "PERSONAL INTEREST" ?

- Where the item relates or is likely to affect your **registered interests** (what you have declared on the formal Register of Interests)

**OR**

- Where a decision in relation to the item might reasonably be regarded as affecting **your own** well-being or financial position, or that of your **family**, or your **close associates** more than most other people affected by the issue,

you have a personal interest.

WHAT MUST I DO? **Declare the existence, and nature, of your interest and stay**

- The declaration must relate to specific business being decided - a general scattergun approach is not needed
- **Exception** - where interest arises only because of your membership of another **public body**, there is no need to declare unless you **speak** on the matter.
- You **can vote** on the matter.

IS IT A "PREJUDICIAL INTEREST" ?

In general only if:-

- It is a personal interest **and**
- The item affects your **financial position** (or conveys other benefits), or the position of your **family, close associates** or bodies through which you have a **registered interest** (or relates to the exercise of **regulatory functions** in relation to these groups)

**and**

- A member of public, with knowledge of the relevant facts, would reasonably believe the interest was likely to **prejudice** your judgement of the public interest.

WHAT MUST I DO? **Declare and Withdraw**

BUT you may make representations to the meeting before withdrawing, **if** the public have similar rights (such as the right to speak at Planning Committee).



# Executive

## Committee

22nd September 2009

7.00 pm

Committee Room 3 Town Hall

### Agenda

#### Membership:

Cllrs: C Gandy (Chair) W Hartnett  
M Braley (Vice- N Hicks  
Chair) C MacMillan  
P Anderson M Shurmer  
J Brunner  
B Clayton

<p><b>4. Benefits Service Improvement Plan - Quarterly Monitoring Report</b></p> <p>(Pages 55 - 64)</p> <p>Head of Financial Revenues and Benefit Services</p>	<p>To advise Members of actual performance during the first quarter on the Improvement Plan.</p> <p>(Report attached)</p> <p><b>(No Specific Ward Relevance)</b></p>
<p><b>9. Overview and Scrutiny Committee</b></p> <p>(Pages 65 - 72)</p> <p>Chief Executive</p>	<p>To receive the minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on the 2<sup>nd</sup> September 2009.</p> <p>(Minutes attached)</p>



## Executive Committee

No Specific Ward Relevance

22nd September 2009

### BENEFITS IMPROVEMENT PLAN – QUARTERLY MONITORING APRIL – JUNE 2009

(Report of the Head of Financial, Revenues and Benefits Services )

#### 1. Summary of Proposals

To advise members on progress during the first quarter against the Benefits Service Improvement Plan and to identify any further action required to enable the successful delivery of the Plan.

#### 2. Recommendations

The Committee is asked to RESOLVE that

1) subject to any comments, the report be noted, and

To RECOMMEND that

2) £15,000 is allocated from General Fund balances in 2009/10 to provide additional resources within the Benefits Service, as recommended by the Performance Development Team (PDT), to improve the recovery of overallowed Housing Benefit, and

3) the cost of an additional post for this purpose be included in the base budget from 1 April 2010.

#### 3. Financial, Legal, Policy, Risk and Sustainability Implications

##### Financial

3.1 Any monies collected in respect of over allowed Housing Benefit are retained by the Council. Therefore the additional investment in the service to improve the collection of over allowed Housing Benefit will potentially be offset by improved collection rates.

##### Legal

3.2 There are no specific legal implications.

##### Policy

3.3 There are no specific policy implications

## Risk

- 3.4 Without adequate performance monitoring arrangements there is a risk that the planned/required improvements in the Benefits Service will not be achieved. In addition without an effective recovery procedures for overallowed Housing Benefit the Council will forego the ability to pursue debt recovery procedures with a consequential loss of income to the Council.

## Sustainability / Environmental

There are no specific sustainability / environmental / climate change implications.

## 3.5 Report

## 4. Background

- 4.1 The Benefits Service Improvement Plan was developed in response to the Audit Commission Inspection in 2008/09.
- 4.2. Work is progressing towards the aims of the improvement plan. The Performance Development Team (PDT) from the Department for Work and Pensions has been working with the Benefits Service to help implement the recommendations from the Audit Commission inspection. In particular they are looking at helping us improve overpayment recovery, devising a Take Up Strategy, improving access to the service and performance management. Three additional Benefits Officers have been recruited and training is ongoing.

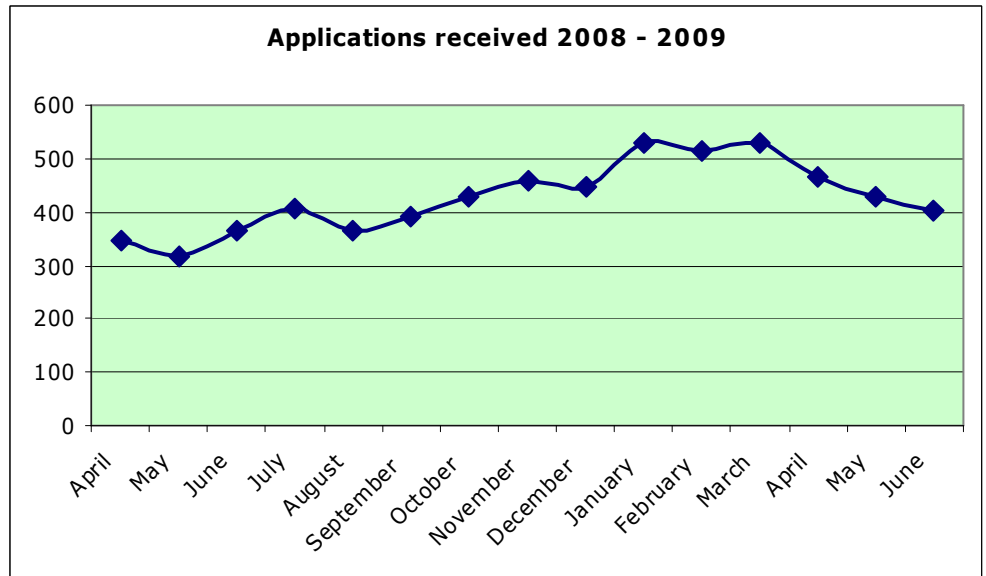
## 5. Key Issues

### Claims Performance

- 5.1. The number of claims received during the first quarter reduced from the previous periods but remained high. It has also been noted that many of the claims were from people who had not claimed before or were from the more complex claim types such as the self-employed and people with more than one home.

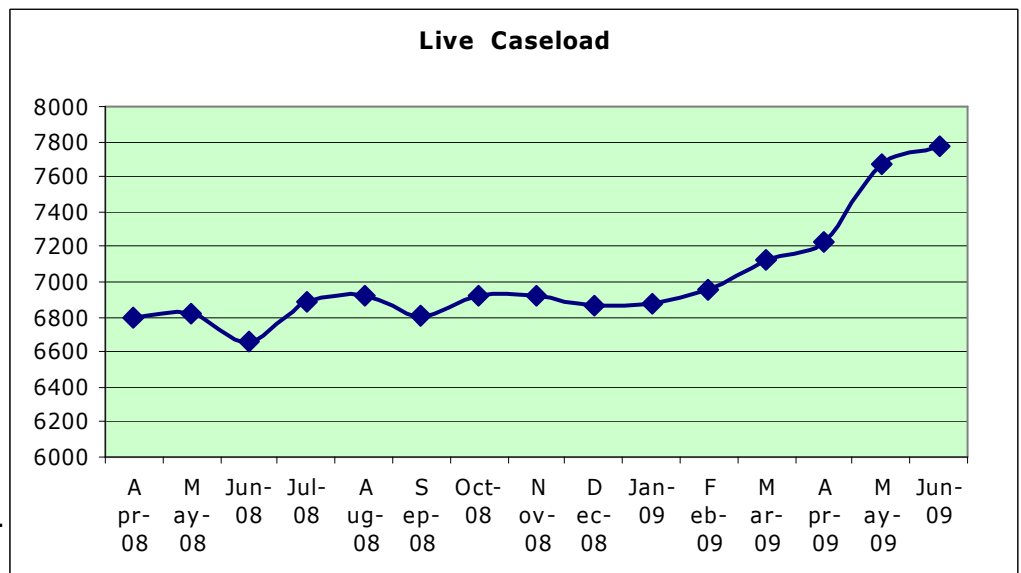
The graph below shows the pattern of applications for Housing Benefits received during between April 2008 and June 2009.





5.2. The Service went live with new In and Out of Work service from Department of Work and Pensions in June 2009 – this process sees the local Jobcentre gathering information in support of HB/CTB claim and passing it on to Benefits Service. Additionally when someone finds work an electronic form is received through a secure e-mail system to advise of the new circumstances. For this process to work a series of software security protocols had to be confirmed and a connection to the Governments secure network installed – this will enable secure exchange of sensitive data.

5.3. Despite the falling number of claims being made the actual number of claims in payment went up during this quarter as the peak of claims received in the first three months of the year were finally cleared, finishing at 7771 claims compared to 6664 in June 2008. An increase of 16.6%, see graph below.



5.4.

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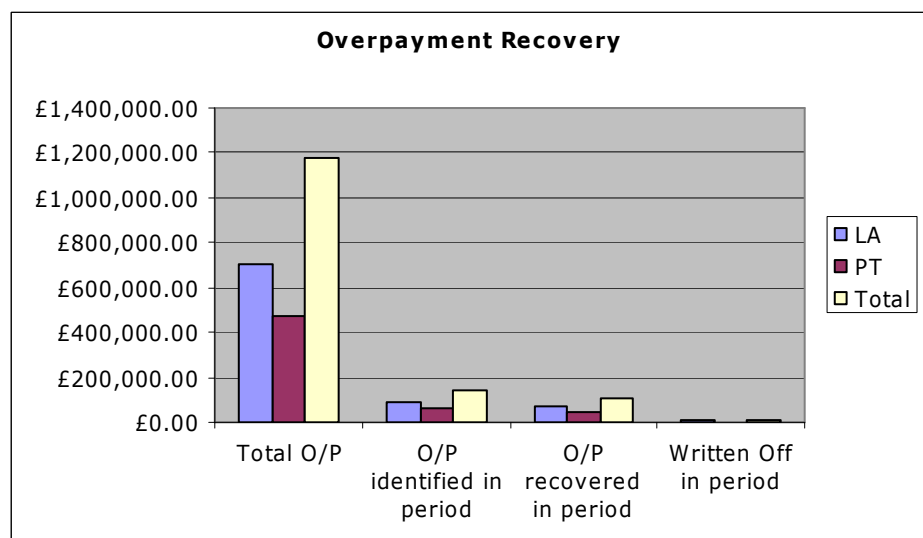
22nd September 2009

quarter of 2008/09 was 21 days. With the additional funds made available temporary workers were drafted in to help cover the telephones and to process claims. With this additional help the average time to process claims had reduced to 16 days for the first quarter in 2009/10. Three additional Benefit Officers also started in May and have received legislative training and are currently undergoing system training.

- 5.5. Between April 2009 and the end of June 2009 1916 claims were processed, of these 1160 were processed within 14 days and only 64 claims took longer than 50 days to process. The day count starts when the claim is requested or the change reported so for some of the days reported we are waiting for information to come back from the claimant.

### Overpayment Recovery

- 5.6. Overpayment recovery remained disappointing with an overall increase in the debt outstanding and below target recovery rates. Work undertaken by the PDT during this quarter concluded that the processes in place to recovery over allowed benefit are satisfactory but that additional resources are required if the rate of recovery is to improve. The current resource within the Income Team is equivalent to 0.4 of a full-time employee. Officers have reviewed the work of the PDT and concluded that best way forward is to provide a dedicated resource within the Benefits Service. The Income Team will retain responsibility for the caseload transferred to IBS system in 2006. The other cases and any new overpayments will become the responsibility of a dedicated resource within the Benefits Service. This proposal will be subject to member approval of an additional resource within the Benefits Service.



Key – LA = Local Authority PT = Private Tenant O/P = Overpayment

- 5.7. Local Authority Error overpayments continue to remain below the financial threshold and remain on target to receive 100% subsidy

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again. Only £14,778 has been treated as Local Authority error in the three months from April out of expenditure of £11,604,834, see table below. Local Authorities receive a grant to cover all overpayments attributed to Local Authority delay or error as long as the total does not exceed 0.48% of qualifying expenditure (qualifying expenditure in this case being expenditure which qualifies for 100% subsidy).

	<b>EXPENDITURE £</b>	<b>100% Subsidy £</b>	<b>LA ERROR £</b>	<b>LA Error %</b>
<b>HRA</b>	3,009,573	2,953,817	7,127	0.24%
<b>NON- HRA</b>	22,193	21,376	0	0.00%
<b>PT</b>	1,997,309	1,939,867	4,360	0.22%
<b>CTB</b>	6,575,759	6,050,216	3,291	0.05%
<b>Totals</b>	<b>£11,604,834</b>	<b>£10,965,276</b>	<b>£14,778</b>	<b>0.13%</b>

## Benefits investigations

- 5.8 In this first quarter 297 cases where fraud was suspected were referred to the Investigations team, 13 Cautions and 1 Administration penalty were issued. 1 case was successfully prosecuted and a further 3 cases were identified as being suitable for prosecution. Additionally the Investigations Team identified overpaid Benefit as detailed in the table below.

### **Overpayments from Investigations 01/04/09 - 30/06/09**

Housing Benefit Total Overpayments identified	£26,440.36
Council Tax Benefit Overpayments identified	£11,001.44
DWP Benefits overpayments identified by RBC	£3,045.02
Total Housing Benefit Saved per week	£1,352.78
Total Council Tax Benefit Saved per week	£386.01

## Appeals

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- 5.9. There has been an increase in the number of appeals received. In order to improve the turnaround time for Appeals and to cope with the increased volume an additional officer has been undertaking appeals work. This has allowed new appeals to be looked at earlier and enabled the Appeals Officer to concentrate on submissions to the tribunal. The One Stop Shop have also been given additional guidance on the process to help to correctly identify formal appeals rather than including all requests that we look again at claim decisions as appeals – this has helped reduce the number of appeals.

### Take-Up Strategy

- 5.10 Work has started on creating a comprehensive Take-Up strategy to help local people maximise their income. Local partners such as Job Centre Plus, Age Concern and Citizens Advice Bureau are working with the Benefits Service on this strategy as are the DWP Performance Development Team.

### Improvement Plan

- 5.11. The position on the Benefits Improvement Plan has been included at Appendix 1.

## 6. Other Implications

Asset Management	-	None
Community Safety	-	None
Human Resources	-	None
Social Exclusion	-	None

## 7. Lessons Learnt

- 7.1 The Performance Development Team are as useful source of learning for the Benefits Service.

## 8. Background Papers

Audit Commission inspection report.  
Reports of work undertaken by the PDT.  
Performance statistics maintained by the Income Team and the Benefits Service.

## 9. Consultation

# Executive

## Committee

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This report has been prepared in consultation with relevant Borough Council Officers

**10. Author of Report**

The author of this report is Teresa Kristunas (Head of Financial, Revenues and Benefits Services), who can be contacted on extension 3295 (e-mail: [teresa.kristunas@redditchbc.gov.uk](mailto:teresa.kristunas@redditchbc.gov.uk)) for more information.

**11. Appendices**

Appendix 1 – Position Statement – Benefits Service Improvement Plan April – June 2009



Ref	Action Area	Who	When	Position statement
<a href="#">R1</a>	<b>Improve the management and collection of all Housing Benefit overpayments.</b>		<b>31/01/2010</b>	
R1a	Reviewing the roles and responsibilities for recovery.	D Taylor J Bough PDT	19/05/2009	Initial discussions and fact finding review carried out. PDT agree that processes are satisfactory. Decision required as to future location of debt recovery side – remain with Income Recovery Team, move to Benefits or move somewhere else.
R1b	Ensure that the resources needed are made available.	D Taylor J Bough	19/06/2009	PDT have recommended that additional resource made available to deliver improvement. The equivalent of 40% of a post currently works on the recovery of overpaid HB.
<a href="#">R2</a>	<b>Increase income levels of the poorest parts of the community by adopting a Take-Up Strategy.</b>		<b>30/09/2009</b>	
R2a	Compile a description of roles and responsibilities to introduce Take-Up Strategy.	D Taylor PDT	19/05/2009	Work ongoing with Performance Development Team – stakeholders and potential take-up activities identified. Link to Income Maximisation group.
R2d	Clear measures of effectiveness.	D Taylor	30/06/2009	Identified benchmarking and customer surveys and LAA targets.
<a href="#">R3</a>	<b>Improve the accessibility of the Service.</b>		<b>31/10/2010</b>	
R3c	Develop relationship with Registered Social Landlords (RSL's)	D Taylor	30/06/2009	Meeting planned for 24 <sup>th</sup> September 2009 – quarterly meetings to follow.
<a href="#">R4</a>	<b>Ensure challenging service standards and performance targets are in place, that are relevant to customers needs.</b>		<b>Interim 30/09/2009 Full 30/09/2010</b>	
R4c	Ensure that the Service has robust plans to deliver the standards and targets.	D Taylor K Herbert S Maddox S Knight	19/06/2009	Some challenging targets set regarding average processing times – further work being undertaken with PDT to set a broader range of performance targets. Improvement plan agreed by Council.
R4d	Ensure that the Service has the capacity to deliver them.		30/06/2009	Temporary workers as short term measure and 3 additional Benefits Officers (1 temporary) appointed as longer term measure. Additional resources to help speed up Appeal response times and to deal with increased volume.
R4e	Greater clarity for both internal and external customers as to what the Service is aiming to achieve.	T Kristunas D Taylor	30/06/2009	New Service plan identifies aims plus includes service standards – still need to include these on website – Income Maximisation group to consider the standards.

<b>R5</b>	<b>Performance Improvement</b>		<b>31/10/2010</b>	
R5a	Improve claim processing performance.	K Herbert	30/06/2009	Average processing times improved – 16 days for first quarter compared to 21 days last quarter. Further work required to achieve target of 13 days. The appointment of 3 additional officers will assist.
<b>R6</b>	<b>Service Planning</b>		<b>31/12/2009</b>	
R6b	Service Plan to be supported by a detailed action plan that identifies key activities, responsibilities and measures of success that can be recognised by customers. These should address problem areas and have specific and measurable targets, linked to staff objectives.	D Taylor K Herbert S Maddox S Knight	19/06/2009	Partly done through improvement plan. Action plans in support of individual parts of plan still need to be prepared. Chance to link them to individuals as part of the new appraisal process.
<b>R7</b>	<b>Performance Management</b>		<b>31/03/2010</b>	
R7b	Improve Performance management arrangements at service level. Introduce staff performance appraisals and individual or team targets for processing staff. Measure productivity systematically. Embed new performance management.	D Taylor K Herbert S Maddox S Knight	31/05/2009	Ongoing work with PDT to develop individual and team performance targets. Staff attended new Performance Management training. Regular update of Benefits performance provided to Senior Managers and Members.
R7f	There are not yet robust, formally adopted SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, resourced and time-based) plans in place to give clear structure to the delivery of improvement.	T Kristunas D Taylor	30/06/2009	Improvement Plan.
R11c	Compare costs to other services, calculate unit costs and seek to evaluate cost effectiveness.	D Taylor	30/06/2009	Some base work done with Herefordshire Council. It has been agreed that data will be shared between Revenues and Benefits Managers across the County. No data received to date.
<b>R13</b>	<b>System and System Reports</b>		<b>30/06/2010</b>	
R13b	Improve HB/CTB Subsidy Claim processes. Introduce testing of software releases and regular testing of claim accuracy during the year to ensure that subsidy calculation is accurate.	D Taylor I Spratt	06/05/2009	Some extra work done but difficult to resource – IBS reconciliation spreadsheet completed for 2008/09 claim. Subsidy claim run monthly. LA error and expenditure looked at. Work needs to be extended to other areas.





# Overview and Scrutiny Committee

2nd September 2009

## MINUTES

### Present:

Councillor Phil Mould (Chair), and Councillors K Banks, G Chance, W Norton, J Pearce, D Taylor and D Thomas

### Also Present:

Councillor C MacMillan

### Officers:

J Staniland and L Hadley

### Committee Services Officer:

J Bayley and H Saunders

### 1. APOLOGIES AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES

Apologies were received on behalf of Councillors R King and Smith.

### 2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND OF PARTY WHIP

There were no declarations of interest or of any party whip.

### 3. MINUTES

#### RESOLVED that

**the minutes of the meeting held on 29th July 2009 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.**

### 4. ACTIONS LIST

There were no updates on actions contained within the Action List.

### 5. CALL-IN AND PRE-SCRUTINY

The Committee considered the Decision Notice of the Executive Committee meeting held on Wednesday 26th August. Officers informed the Committee that both the procedures for the Councillor

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Chair

# Overview and Scrutiny Committee

2nd September 2009

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Call for Action (CCfA) and the recommended model for crime and disorder scrutiny had been approved by the Executive Committee.

There were no call-ins or suggestions for pre-scrutiny.

## 6. TASK & FINISH REVIEWS - DRAFT SCOPING DOCUMENTS

There were no draft scoping documents to consider.

The Chair reminded Members that there were only two Task and Finish Groups currently running which were due to reach completion in the late autumn. The Chair encouraged Members to think of suitable subjects that could be proposed for a scrutiny review.

## 7. TASK AND FINISH GROUPS - PROGRESS REPORTS

The Committee received reports in relation to current reviews.

### a) Dial-A-Ride - Chair, Councillor King

In the absence of the Chair, Councillor Chance informed the Committee that the Group had not met for a long period of time as they were waiting for a large amount of information to be provided by Officers in order to complete the next stage of the review. The Chair of the Committee urged that this information be provided by Officers as soon as possible. Officers confirmed that the next meeting of the Group was scheduled for Wednesday 9 September where it was anticipated that the majority of the information requested by the Group would be presented.

### b) Neighbourhood Groups – Chair, Councillor Banks

Councillor Banks informed the Committee that the Group had been examining the value and benefits of the Neighbourhood Groups in their current format. She explained that the Group had examined a diverse number of options that could be utilised by the Council to communicate with a larger number of residents.

She explained that completed questionnaires were still being submitted by Officers and Members and these had been analysed. The Group had interviewed several stakeholders involved in the Neighbourhood Groups process including: the leaders of the three political groups represented on the Council; the acting Deputy Chief Executive; representatives from the Police; and Officers from the Council's IT, Communications and Economic Development teams. The Group had examined the potential for using new technology,

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such as Twitter, for community engagement and had also considered government guidance on these issues.

Members of the Group were due to attend the October round of Neighbourhood Group meetings to consult and inform residents about the review.

## **RESOLVED that**

- 1) **Officers be urged to provide the information required by the Dial-A-Ride Task and Finish Group as soon as possible; and**
- 2) **the Task and Finish update reports be noted.**

## **8. FEES AND CHARGES TASK AND FINISH GROUP – UPDATE**

The Committee considered the response provided by Officers regarding the implementation of the recommendation by the Fees and Charges Task and Finish Group that the Council introduce additional fees and charges to cover the cost of planning services. Officers informed the Committee that fees had been introduced for: planning enquiries; pre-application discussions; and post-decision amendments. Officers advised Members that owing to the current economic climate the number of applications had decreased, however, it was expected that these would increase as the market picked up. With regards to post-decision amendments, Officers reported that the Government was due to introduce new legislation which would require all local authorities to levy a fee for this service.

## **RESOLVED that**

**the report be noted.**

## **9. TOWN CENTRE STRATEGY**

Officers informed the Committee that this item provided Members with an opportunity to undertake pre-scrutiny of the Town Centre Strategy before it was considered at the Executive Committee.

The Chair invited Councillor MacMillan, the relevant Portfolio Holder, to begin this item by answering the question of whether he thought the proposals were realistic, deliverable, and achievable. Councillor MacMillan informed the Committee that he believed the team of consultants commissioned to undertake this initial piece of work had highlighted all of the main issues facing the town centre and had also provided a wide range of realistic and deliverable suggestions as to how to tackle some of these problems. He

# Overview and Scrutiny Committee

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believed that if all Members agreed that developing a strategy for the town centre was a priority for the Council then it would be feasible to fund the actions proposed in the strategy. He stressed that implementation of the proposals would happen over a long period of time. It would therefore take years to fully achieve the potential of the town centre.

Councillor Thomas explained that the future development of the town centre was something that she was passionate about. However, she felt that she had heard similar proposals for the town centre many times in the past and very little had been achieved. She questioned how achievable the proposals were. One of her main concerns was that the Council might raise residents' expectations but might not in the long-term be able to deliver.

Councillor MacMillan explained that he was willing to support the proposals for the duration of his time on the Council but that more advocates were needed to champion the scheme. He suggested that Councillors should sign up to a long term plan to show their support for the proposals. Members briefly touched on the issue of leveraging in external funds to help deliver the strategy and the possibility of approaching Advantage West Midlands to help fund some of the proposals. Councillor MacMillan said that he felt that at this stage, the Council should not discount this option. He believed that if the Council could produce a sound business plan for the proposals with a clear strategic vision and key deliverables then there was a chance that Advantage West Midlands would be willing to support the strategy.

He went on to acknowledge that the Kingfisher Shopping Centre had a role to play in the rejuvenation of the town centre. He had met with representatives from Scottish Widows where the future of the town centre was discussed. Scottish Widows were keen to ensure that something was done to develop the town centre as it would help to attract retailers into the Shopping Centre. There was a pressing need for units to be let and Scottish Widows had attempted to find creative ways of attracting good quality retailers to the Centre. Members commented that they wanted to ensure that any development that did take place would benefit the entire town centre and not just the Kingfisher Centre.

Members concurred that they were passionate about the town centre and its future. It was noted that the Council could not afford not to undertake redevelopment of the town centre as so much of the economic future of the town relied heavily on the town centre being a vibrant and prosperous place. It was noted that the current provision of retail and leisure services in the town centre was not

# Overview and Scrutiny Committee

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enough to offer choice to both residents in the town and to attract visitors from outside the area.

Officers commented that in the past, proposals for the rejuvenation of the town centre had been un-co-ordinated. This time a much more strategic approach had been taken, with the production of an overall strategy for all of the key areas within the town centre. It was also important to ensure, through planning development policy that the most appropriate uses of land were provided for in the town centre.

Members particularly liked the plans for the 'gateway' area to the town, where the train and bus stations were situated. In the past, local Ward Members had experienced difficulty in getting work done on these areas. Members stressed that there were many parties that could potentially be involved in any re-development of this area and that it would be important that the Council worked in partnership to realise the proposals for this part of the town centre. It was suggested by Members that the best approach would be to carefully stage the implementation, ensuring that small scale actions with tangible outcomes were undertaken first followed by the more large scale and complex elements of the scheme in the latter stages.

Members asked Officers to clarify the current position with regards to permitting banks and building societies inside of the Kingfisher Shopping Centre. Officers confirmed that banks and building societies were permitted within the Centre; however policy did restrict successive blank frontages occupying large parts of the centre. Members commented that there was a need for smaller, independent shops to populate the Church Green area. Councillor MacMillan generally agreed with the Committee but pointed out that there was a need to encourage, in particular, a range of high quality and diverse retail uses.

Councillor MacMillan informed the Committee that the strategy was still under consultation and a further consultation event with relevant interested parties was due to take place the following week. Comments provided by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and at the stakeholder event would be reported back to the Executive Committee.

**RESOLVED that**

**the report be noted.**

# Overview and Scrutiny Committee

2nd September 2009

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## 10. PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR PLANNING, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND TRANSPORT - ANNUAL REPORT

The Chair welcomed Councillor MacMillan, the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Economic Development and Transport to the meeting. Councillor MacMillan presented his Portfolio Holder Annual Report in accordance with the questions set by the Committee. In response to the first question which asked whether the Council as the Planning Authority should influence and encourage private developers to build new developments to certain required standards, he felt that the Council should not take any more action than it currently takes. He felt that the Council provided adequate guidance in planning documents such as the Core Strategy. Some Members of the Committee disagreed with this and felt that more should be done by the Council. In justification of his view, Councillor MacMillan argued that builders and developers understood the market they were working in and therefore knew what would sell. By being too stringent in the application of rules and regulations, the Council would run the risk of deterring companies from building in the town.

Members of the Committee pointed out that the recent housing developments built by some of the town's Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) had resulted in high quality buildings that were both spacious and incorporated environmentally friendly design features. It was questioned why many private sector developers were unwilling to also do this. Officers commented that it was interesting that there was this difference between private sector developers and RSLs. One of the reasons for this was because of the need for RSLs to comply with Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) standards.

The Committee asked Councillor MacMillan his views on how the Council should work in partnership with other agencies to combat the problem of people Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEETs). Councillor MacMillan admitted that this was a complex issue that required a long term solution. It involved the Council working in partnership with organisations such as Jobcentre Plus, Connexions and other education providers. The Council had already worked with the Prince's Trust to undertake a scheme helping to support school leavers in applying for jobs. The Council had also been working in partnership to organise a careers fair for year 8 pupils in the town and also to establish a 'young entrepreneur of the year' award.

He informed the Committee that he had met along with other Councillors with Professor Michael Clarke, a former Vice-Principal

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of Birmingham University, regarding the possibility of establishing a 'Redditch University Centre'. The idea of this initiative was that educational institutions in Redditch such as the North East Worcestershire College could provide foundation level degree courses that could enable young people in the town to readily access a University education. Councillor MacMillan felt that what was needed in the town were organisations that would be able to work with the community to initiate effective schemes like this that could help address the issue of NEETs.

The Committee discussed the performance of children at school and the merits of the two-tier versus the three-tier system in enhancing pupils' performance. It was also noted that parents played a huge role in influencing the attitude and aspirations of their children. It was suggested by the Committee that the subject of NEETs might be a suitable subject for a scrutiny exercise.

The Committee asked Councillor MacMillan his views on the future of the Business Centres. He explained that Officers in Property Services had proposed that the Business Centres be reviewed. He explained that he believed the Council needed to be clear about what it wished to use the Business Centres for. In the past, it had been envisaged that they would be used to provide office space for start-up businesses. However, it had been shown that very few new businesses had taken up units. He argued that if the Council wished to provide support for start-up businesses then it may be more effective to give the resources spent on Businesses Centres directly to start-up business in the form of grants. Furthermore, he suggested that before any review was undertaken of the Business Centres, work should be undertaken to establish the needs of new businesses and how the Council might be able to address these.

Members asked the final question regarding the progress of the Smartcard scheme and real time bus information at bus stops in Redditch. Councillor MacMillan confirmed that Worcestershire County Council had been working in partnership with Diamond Bus Company and Centro to progress this scheme. All buses in the West Midlands area would be supplied with the equipment and technology to support Smartcard ticketing. However, there had been supply issues of this equipment which had resulted in a delay in rolling out this scheme until late autumn. With regards to real time bus information, Councillor MacMillan explained that this system had been installed in Worcester bus station and at the Alexandra Hospital in Redditch. It was also being made available at the Redditch bus station and on the 57 and 58 bus route in the town.

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The Chair thanked Councillor MacMillan for attending the meeting.

**RESOLVED that**

**the report be noted.**

**11. PORTFOLIO HOLDER ANNUAL REPORT - QUESTIONS**

The arrangements for the Portfolio Holder for Housing, Local Environment and Health Portfolio Annual Report were considered by the Committee. Members agreed a number of questions for the Portfolio Holder to address during his Annual Report (Appendix A).

**12. REFERRALS**

There were no referrals.

**13. WORK PROGRAMME**

There were no updates provided on the Work Programme.

**RESOLVED that**

**the Work Programme be noted.**

The Meeting commenced at 7.00 pm  
and closed at 8.45 pm

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Chair