

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Tuesday, 16th August, 2011

MINUTES

Present:

Councillor Phil Mould (Chair), Councillor Mark Shurmer (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Peter Anderson, Andrew Brazier, Andrew Fry, Bill Hartnett, Gay Hopkins and Alan Mason.

Also Present:

Mrs T Buckley and Mr R Colebrook (Co-opted representatives from UNISON).

Officers:

H Arnold, H Bennett, J Bough and E Cartwright

Committee Services Officer:

J Bayley and M Craggs

56. APOLOGIES AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors Simon Chalk and Luke Stephens.

57. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND OF PARTY WHIP

There were no declarations of interest nor of any party whip.

58. MINUTES

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 26th July 2011 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

59. ACTIONS LIST

The Committee considered the latest version of the Committee's Actions List.

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Chair

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Members noted that as requested further information about Operations Magenta and Wizard had been received since the previous meeting of the Committee. However, whilst information had been due to be received by the 12th August, regarding the financial position of Pitcheroak Golf Course, Members noted that they had not yet received any information.

RESOLVED that

the Committee's Action List be noted.

60. EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MINUTES AND SCRUTINY OF THE FORWARD PLAN

No items were identified from the Executive Committee's minutes from 2nd August as suitable for further scrutiny and no items were selected from the Forward Plan as suitable for pre-scrutiny.

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee meeting on 2nd August 2011 be noted.

61. TASK & FINISH REVIEWS - DRAFT SCOPING DOCUMENTS

There were no draft scoping documents.

62. TASK AND FINISH GROUPS - PROGRESS REPORTS

The Committee received the following reports in relation to current reviews.

a) Facilities for Disabled People – Chair, Councillor Alan Mason

Members were advised that the final membership of the group had not yet been confirmed. However, the Chair had already undertaken some independent research, which had included identifying examples of similar reviews that had been completed by other local authorities. The research findings would be shared with the rest of the group following the launch of the review.

b) Promoting Sporting Participation – Chair, Councillor Luke Stephens

Members were advised that the group had interviewed representatives of the Council's newly established Sports Development Team regarding sporting participation and sports

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development. At the following meeting of the group Members were scheduled to interview representatives of North East Worcestershire (NEW) College.

c) Youth Services Provision – Chair, Councillor Simon Chalk

The Committee was informed that the Group had held two meetings since the launch of the review. The first meeting had been attended by a local student who had accompanied one of the members to the review and had provided a youth perspective on the subject. The group had arranged to interview County Councillor Jane Potter and relevant Officers from Worcestershire County Council at their following meeting and had identified a number of additional expert witnesses who could be interviewed during the review.

RESOLVED that

the update reports be noted.

63. HEALTH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

RESOLVED that

the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee update report be deferred until the following meeting of the Committee.

64. COUNCIL FLAT COMMUNAL CLEANING - MONITORING REPORT STAGE TWO

Members received a monitoring report outlining the action that had been taken by officers in response to the recommendations made by the Council Flat Communal Cleaning Task and Finish Group in 2009.

The Council's cleaning contract had been renegotiated in April 2011. A new contractor, Maid Marions, had been awarded the contract and management of the contract had been assumed by the Council's Housing Services team. The charge for the cleaning services had remained relatively stable, having increased in line with inflation. The Council was in the process of producing information leaflets which would advise residents about the cleaning arrangements in the communal areas for the foreseeable future.

A resident in a block of flats located in Lingen Close had requested that the cleaning contract be extended to encompass communal areas in the property. Consequently residents had been consulted over the proposal, though enthusiasm for the service had been low.

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Further consultation was due to take place in Winyates district centre as part of the ongoing enhancements work in the area. As part of this process residents would be asked about their support for the introduction of the service.

The Committee noted that in previous years the Council's contractors had experienced difficulties when attempting to access a number of properties. This had created obstacles when attempting to deliver the cleaning service. The Council was aware of these concerns and had attempted to address problems wherever possible. In particular, the service had been removed from certain blocks of flats in Woodrow South where this problem had occurred following consultation with residents.

As requested by Members the lighting arrangements in the three storey flats located in Stretton House, Batchley, had been reviewed. A lighting upgrade had subsequently occurred and light sensors had been installed to prevent the stairwells from being turned on unnecessarily during daylight hours.

During the course of the review Members had observed evidence of fly tipping and concerns had been expressed about the potential risks to tenants of this behaviour. Following completion of the review there had been an upgrade of the fire equipment in many of the properties which helped to reduce the risks involved. Furthermore, the Council's tenancy team was more frequently in contact with residents, as a result of altered working practices and the introduction of tenancy walkabouts. As a consequence Officers were able to observe and resolve problems with fly tipping more quickly than in previous years.

RESOLVED that

the update report be noted.

65. PRIVATE SECTOR HOME SUPPORT SERVICE - POST-SCRUTINY

The Committee considered an update on the delivery of the Home Support Service into the private sector for those eligible for Supporting People funding.

Contracts had been awarded to different organisations across Worcestershire to deliver the Home Support Service, which was designed to enable people to live independent lives rather than to provide a care package. Redditch Borough Council had been awarded a contract to deliver the support service in Redditch.

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The introduction of the service had been approved by the Executive Committee in February 2011. 37 hours per week of supporting people funding had been set aside for residents who were not Council tenants but who were eligible for the Home Support Service and supporting people funding. Council tenants were eligible for supporting people funding if they had a need for the service and were in receipt of housing benefit. Residents from the private sector were eligible for supporting people funding if they had a need for the service and were in receipt of guaranteed pension credit.

The hourly cost involved in delivering the service had been calculated as £14.16. However, demand for the Home Support Service amongst customers varied over time. Individual assessments were made and support plans created for each customer to ensure that the support s/he received suited his or her needs.

Following the introduction of the service in Redditch questions had been raised about the eligibility criteria for receiving the service. In particular, the organisations which delivered the Home Support Service in other parts of the county did not restrict access for vulnerable private residents who were not in receipt of guaranteed pension credit. Instead, these residents could pay a fee to receive the service. There was some concern that the more restrictive eligibility criteria in Redditch might have a negative impact on the potential for the Council to retain the Redditch Home Support Service contract in the long-term.

The Committee welcomed the report and the principles behind Officers aims for the future development of the service. Members commented that it was important to ensure that the eligibility criteria did not discriminate against residents living in the private sector. Officers were also urged to ensure that, if eligibility to receive the service was extended, the service was promoted effectively to local residents.

However, concerns were expressed about the need for further clarification regarding the financial implications of delivering the service and the level of staff input into the process. Members were advised that the scheme was financed utilising supporting people funding and that no funds were derived from the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) to pay for the service. It was agreed that this needed to be more explicitly stated within a wider business case for the process to enable the Executive Committee to make an informed decision about future arrangements for the service.

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RECOMMENDED that

- 1) the Home Support Service be extended to all eligible residents of the Borough regardless of tenure;
- 2) the Council enable this service to be available to those who are not eligible for supporting people funding; and
- 3) arrangements mirror other housing associations and extend the supporting people eligibility to those on Council tax benefit; and

RESOLVED that

- 1) Officers produce a business case for the proposals detailed in the recommendations above incorporating further information about the financial implications of extending the service and the potential impact on staff resources;
- 2) the Executive Committee be asked to postpone consideration of the recommendations detailed above until the Committee receives this business case later in the year; and
- 3) the report be noted.

66. STAFF VOLUNTEERING POLICY

The Committee received the draft staff volunteering policy for pre-scrutiny. The Committee's co-opted representatives from UNISON attended the meeting to speak on this item.

Members were advised that the staff volunteering policy would provide officers with an opportunity to undertake 16 hours of volunteering every year during working hours. Officers would be matched to placements and permission would need to be obtained from the employee's manager. The opportunity to participate in voluntary placements would not replace existing opportunities for staff to act in roles such as a school governor's post.

A similar policy had been introduced in recent years at Bromsgrove District Council. The impact of the policy had not yet been monitored, though it was understood that the number of officers who had utilised the opportunity to volunteer had been relatively low, ensuring that requests to volunteer had not undermined service

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delivery. However, feedback received from members of staff who had participated in voluntary placements had been largely positive.

Concerns were expressed about the potential benefits of staff participating in voluntary placements rather than attending work. Council staff were considered to be a valuable resource and therefore any placements needed to represent value for money for both the Council and local residents. However, it was noted that through volunteering an officer could make a valuable contribution to local voluntary and community sector organisations and the local economy whilst the officer could develop transferable skills that might be utilised to deliver services more effectively at the Council. Furthermore, the exigencies of the service would be prioritised.

Placements would not automatically be approved. The needs of the service area in which the officer worked would be prioritised by managers when considering applications to volunteer. Managers would also have the authority to reject proposed placements which were not considered likely to add value.

Members noted that the policy would need to be promoted effectively to ensure that officers were aware of the opportunity to participate in volunteering activities. As part of this process information about the policy could be provided during staff briefings and in the Council's online staff magazine. It was also suggested that members of staff from Bromsgrove who had participated in the scheme could be invited to brief Redditch based staff about the process.

The Committee's co-opted representatives commented that the unions would be largely supportive of the introduction of this policy. The appropriate timing for the introduction of the policy would need to be considered carefully, as many Council staff would be involved in the Council's transformation programme and would potentially be affected by the introduction of shared services. In this context many staff might welcome the opportunity to participate in volunteering activities which could help them to develop their skills and thereby improve their future career prospects.

RECOMMENDED that

subject to noting Members' comments as detailed in the preamble above, the Staff Volunteering Policy be approved.

67. PETITIONS - MONITORING REPORT

The Committee was advised that the Petitions Monitoring Report had been introduced in 2011/12. The report provided Members

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with an opportunity to monitor the implementation of actions that had been recommended in response to petitions considered by the Committee in 2010/11 and to date in 2011/12.

In 2010/11 the Committee had received four petitions. Members had concluded that no further action was required in relation to two of these petitions because the Council did not have the power to secure any alternative outcomes in relation to the subject of the petition. The Committee had agreed, however, that action was required in relation to two further petitions.

The first of these petitions had been received by the Committee in August 2010 and related to reports of anti-social behaviour in Lowlands Lane Park, Winyates. A Partners and Communities Together (PACT) meeting had subsequently taken place in Winyates where the subject had been considered in detail. No further reports had been received of anti-social behaviour from residents and support remained for the continuing use of the park. However, it had been agreed that work could be undertaken to redecorate the skate ramps located within the park.

The second petition had been presented by local residents who expressed concerns that the removal of barriers from Yardley Close had resulted in an increase in anti-social behaviour. Officers had met local residents to discuss the issue and had identified three core actions that could be taken to improve the situation: a gap in the hedge bordering the close could be filled, members of the public could be discouraged from using the close to reach other parts of the Borough; and gates could be installed in place of the barriers.

One petition had been received in 2011/12 by the committee, regarding the location of the taxi rank on Unicorn Hill. As requested, this petition had been referred to the Licensing Committee which had considered the item at a meeting on 14th July 2011. Evidence had been gathered from a variety of expert bodies. Based on this evidence the Licensing Committee had concluded that no further action could be taken.

RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

68. REFERRALS

There were no referrals.

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69. WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee was advised that as requested at the previous meeting Councillor Hopkins had met with relevant Council Officers to discuss the appropriate timing for the Improving Recycling Rates Task Group review. It had been agreed that the review would launch in November 2011 and Members would aim to complete the exercise in March 2012.

RESOLVED that

the Committee's Work Programme be noted.

The Meeting commenced at 7.00 pm
and closed at 8.35 pm