

# Overview and Scrutiny Committee

27th September 2011

## MINUTES

### Present:

Councillor Phil Mould (Chair), Councillor Mark Shurmer (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Peter Anderson, Andrew Brazier, Bill Hartnett, Gay Hopkins, Brenda Quinney, Alan Mason and Luke Stephens

### Also Present:

Councillor Michael Braley

### Officers:

T Kristunas, D Poole, J Staniland, L Tompkin and A de Warr

### Committee Services Officer:

M Craggs and I Westmore

### 81. APOLOGIES AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillor Andy Fry.

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

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

### 83. MINUTES

#### RESOLVED that

**the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 6th September 2011 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.**

### 84. ACTIONS LIST

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

Members were informed that, in respect of Actions 1 and 2, the next meeting of the Worcestershire Scrutiny Chairs and Vice Chairs had

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Chair

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been arranged for Monday, 3rd October. With regard to Action 3, Officers highlighted the report later on the agenda under which this matter would be addressed. Officers also noted that the additional information concerning fly-tipping had been circulated to members of the Committee following the last meeting as requested.

**RESOLVED that**

**the Committee's Actions List be noted.**

**85. EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MINUTES AND SCRUTINY OF THE FORWARD PLAN**

No items were identified from the Executive Committee's minutes of 13th September as requiring further scrutiny. However, the Committee did note that an item in respect of the Review of the Housing Revenue Account was due to be considered by the Executive Committee on 15th November and requested that it be pre-scrutinised at the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 8th November. Officers cautioned that timely preparation of this item was dependent on external factors and the Committee consequently agreed that consideration of the matter would take place one week prior to its submission to the Executive Committee, irrespective of the date.

**RESOLVED that**

**the minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee held on 13th September 2011 be noted.**

**86. TASK & FINISH REVIEWS - DRAFT SCOPING DOCUMENTS**

There were no draft scoping documents.

**87. 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 Group was awaiting the submission of additional information regarding disabled facilities for consideration at the meeting to be held on 6th October.

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b) Promoting Sporting Participation – Chair, Councillor Luke Stephens

The Committee was advised that the Group had now met on four occasions. Whereas the original intention was that an interim report would be prepared focussing on events planned to coincide with the 2012 Olympics, it was now planned to prepare a single report for early in 2012 given the extent of Olympic-related activities that had come to light as a result of the Group's discussions with officers and other public bodies.

c) Youth Service Provision – Chair, Councillor Simon Chalk

In the absence of Councillor Chalk, other Members of the Group provided an update on its activities. Considerable useful feedback had been received from young people, including the Redditch Student Council, and a number of key themes were starting to emerge, as were certain cross-overs with the work of the Promoting Sporting Participation Group. These key themes included the location of events aimed at young people, transport difficulties for this group and support for grass-roots participation by young people. Based on the evidence Members had gathered the group had also submitted a response to Worcestershire County Council's consultation on the subject of positive activities for young people.

**88. PORTFOLIO HOLDER ANNUAL REPORT - CORPORATE MANAGEMENT - COUNCILLOR MICHAEL BRALEY**

Further to consideration of the Portfolio Holder for Corporate Management's written report at the previous meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 6th September 2011, and Members' agreed themed questions to be put to the Portfolio Holder, Councillor Michael Braley, in respect of his Annual Report to the Committee, the following responses were provided:

**1. The Worcestershire HUB was the subject of a recent scrutiny review. Has the HUB service subsequently improved? If so, to what extent?**

The Committee was informed that statistics demonstrated that the performance of the Council's Customer Service Centre was indeed improving, although it was noted that such statistical information was to be gathered differently in the future with the focus being placed on problem resolution rather than basic response times. It was noted that the overwhelming majority of the interaction with the

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Council was still face to face or over the telephone and reductions in the time that both groups were having to wait was very significant.

Members were advised that, since the HUB Scrutiny report, changes had been made to the way the Council handled enquiries. One significant change had been around the layout and operation of the main reception desk at the Town Hall. The configuration of the reception area did not, at present, lend itself to a satisfactory queuing system. Officers had experimented with the use of temporary barriers but generally found that self-regulating queues were the most successful means of managing customers. Customer privacy had not generated as many issues as might have been expected and the process of transferring customers to less public locations when appropriate was managed by Customer Services staff using their expertise and discretion. Staffing levels were also being managed on a more rational basis and in accordance with demonstrable need.

The Committee was surprised at the lack of use of email as a means of doing business with the Council. Officers conceded that online business had not increased to the extent that had been expected, as it seemed there was some customer resistance to this method of interaction. Members also discussed the options around access to the Council's services over the telephone and whether there was any intention of introducing autodialing or an automated description of a customer's place in a telephone queue.

The Portfolio Holder provided a brief update on the Worcestershire HUB. It was reported that the service had demonstrated a significant improvement during the last year with customer waiting times decreasing both over the telephone and face to face. A closure report on the scrutiny of the HUB was anticipated by the end of the calendar year.

## 2.

- (a) **What is the current position of the shared Property Services and what, if any, improvements have been made to address earlier concerns?**
  
- (b) **Would you consider it appropriate to follow Bromsgrove District Council in taking this service back in-house?**

The Portfolio Holder explained that all partners were content with the shared service in respect of the valuation function being provided, with a greater pool of knowledge and expertise providing improved resilience.

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The facilities management aspect of the service had initially been a cause for some concern but had improved following discussions involving all partners. Once again, improved resilience had been provided by a greater pool of staff, and Officers were now becoming clearer about their roles for the County and District Councils.

In response to the suggestion that Redditch should consider Bromsgrove's example and take the service back in-house, it was noted that the two authorities were in quite different situations in that Redditch had a much wider property portfolio. It was made clear that the Portfolio Holder was minded to follow the course of action that he felt that was most appropriate for Redditch rather than being implacably tied to one model or another.

### **3. Do you feel that maintenance of the Council's website is adequately prioritised? If not, how should this be addressed?**

It was acknowledged that the Council's website had been inadequate in the past but that the site had been substantially improved in recent years. However, the process of updating the site and ensuring that it was customer-focussed continued, with improved search facilities being incorporated, the numbers of pages being reduced and a two-click service made available in many areas. It was highlighted that the individual services had responsibility for maintaining their areas of the site and that the quality of information on the site was regularly monitored.

Members were pleased to see that improvements to the site were continuing as the increasing importance of websites as a key determinant in how those outside the Council regarded the authority was appreciated. Given the growth in social media it was stressed that the Council would increasingly need to look to such means of communication. Officers were able to confirm that the Council used both Facebook and Twitter and provided newsfeeds.

It was identified that there were potential training needs for some Members in the use of the internet and social media. The Portfolio Holder pointed to recent Members' training sessions on such areas and suggested that further opportunities might be available through Learndirect.

On behalf of the Committee, the Chair thanked Councillor Braley for his annual report and it was

**RESOLVED that**

**the report be noted.**

**89. EXTERNAL REFURBISHMENT OF HOUSING STOCK SHORT, SHARP REVIEW - UPDATE REPORT**

Members considered an update report on actions arising from the recommendations of the External Refurbishment of Housing Stock Short, Sharp Review Group which reported in December 2010 (Appendix 1).

As an initial point of clarification, Officers noted that Councillor Phil Mould had attended the site visit to properties in Woodrow contrary to the statement in Paragraph 3.10 of the report.

The Committee was informed that, as a result of Officers successfully negotiating costs downwards with their suppliers, the repairs and repainting work to garage lintels and doors at Ombersley Close, Rushock Close and Longdon Close had been carried out using existing painting budgets. On this basis Members were requested to consider whether any further action was required in respect of this recommendation.

Consultation with Council tenants and owner occupiers of those occupying pebble dashed properties had been proposed in order to establish the levels of support for the repainting of these properties using lighter colours. This consultation had been added to the Housing Services consultation planner but Members' attention was drawn to the limited ability for Housing Services to carry out consultation activities in the near future. The total cost of the repainting would be significant and Officers were currently looking into the possibility of accessing further Community Energy Savings Programme (CESP) funding for properties of the Wimpey no-fines method of construction. CESP funding had recently been obtained for insulation of such properties in Winyates and the properties in Rushock Close and Ombersley Close were also of this method of construction.

Members noted the applicability of many of the recommendations of the Group to other areas of the town and welcomed the actions to date.

**RECOMMENDED that**

- 1) based on the costs involved, no further action be taken regarding repainting the pebble dashed facades of properties located on Ombersley Close and Rushock Close;**

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- 2) no further consultation work be undertaken in respect of the repainting of pebble dashed facades; and

**RESOLVED that**

- 3) the report be noted.

## 90. QUARTER 1 - BUDGET MONITORING REPORT - APRIL-JUNE 2011

The Committee considered the quarterly budget monitoring report for the period April - June 2011/12. At the present time there was a projected under spend in the current financial year of approximately £170,000 for the Council's General Fund.

Members discussed the charging policy at the Council's pay and display car parks, primarily that at the rear of the Town Hall. The Portfolio Holder for Corporate Management acknowledged that the charges were relatively expensive but, given the cost involved in revising the prices on the ticket machines and signage, it was proposed that charges remain at their present level for the time being. Officers also commented that a review of the entire pay and display service was to be undertaken in the medium term.

The holding of staffing vacancies led some Members to question whether the levels of staffing in certain areas were unwarranted or whether there was undue pressure being placed on the remaining staff. Officers explained that the vacancies concerned were in planning services. In general, it was considered prudent to maintain such vacancies in the present situation, in which shared services were being introduced. The additional flexibility which these posts provided was a valuable tool for management of the process of sharing services.

The Appendix to the main report, detailing performance at Pitcheroak Golf Course, was highlighted as a subject for further debate when the Portfolio Holder for Leisure and Tourism presented their annual report to the Committee in January.

**RESOLVED that**

**the report be noted.**

## 91. QUARTER 1 PERFORMANCE MONITORING REPORT - APRIL-JUNE 2011

Members considered the Corporate Performance report for the first quarter of the 2011/12 financial year.

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It was noted that there had been no definable progress made in the uptake of Leisure activities whereas Members had been informed that this was to be one of the strengths of the new leisure and cultural management team. Officers noted that the team had only recently been put in place and it was not expected that any such improvements would be apparent in the first quarter's data.

The delivery of affordable homes was highlighted as being particularly low in the first quarter. Officers explained that such housing was achieved through social landlords securing Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) Grant Funding and through a negotiated percentage of affordable homes being provided as part of a larger private development. In respect of both streams, it was hoped that both would deliver towards the affordable housing target soon as the bidding round for HCA funding has recently concluded and a number of other developments were expected to be realised in the near future. Officers undertook to provide the Committee with details of the number of affordable homes provided at Windsor Heights following the meeting. Members were also interested to know whether they might get involved in meetings with social housing partners to discuss plans for affordable housing. Officers explained that the Housing Strategy Team already held regular meetings with these partners and proposed that discussions take place with relevant Officers and partners over the involvement or attendance of Councillors at future meetings.

Councillor Hopkins sought additional information on how staff absences had reportedly led to a reduction in the number of fly-tipping enforcement actions compared to the same period the previous year. Officers undertook to provide this information following the meeting.

Members were informed that the indicator BV 84 – total kg of waste collected - would be included in the second quarter's report for 2011/12 following their recommendation to the Executive Committee that it be retained.

## **RESOLVED that**

**the update on key performance indicators for the period ending 30th June 2011 be noted.**

### **92. REFERRALS**

There were no referrals.

### **93. WORK PROGRAMME**



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Members were advised of a number of updates to the current Work Programme. A report back on the Quarterly meeting between the Chair of the Committee and the Leader was scheduled to be submitted to the next meeting, as was an update from the Worcestershire Scrutiny Chairs and Vice Chairs Network meeting. A further inclusion to that agenda was a petition in respect of the War Memorial in the Town Centre which had recently been received by the Council.

The Meeting commenced at 7.00 pm  
and closed at 8.39 pm

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Chair