

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Tuesday, 8th November, 2011

MINUTES

Present:

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

Also Present:

Councillors Brandon Clayton, Roger Hill and Robin King
M Collins (Independent Vice Chair, Standards Committee)

Officers:

H Broughton, K Dicks, C Felton, S Horrobin, D Kesterton and L Tompkin

Overview and Scrutiny Support Officers:

J Bayley and M Craggs

109. APOLOGIES AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Simon Chalk.

110. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND OF PARTY WHIP

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

111. MINUTES

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on Tuesday 18th October 2011 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

112. ACTIONS LIST

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

.....
Chair

As requested at the previous meeting of the Committee Officers had obtained further information about a proposal for joint scrutiny training to take place in Worcestershire. The training would consist of an introduction to scrutiny and would be provided in June 2012 at Worcester County Hall. New Members in particular would be encouraged to participate in the training. Further information about the course facilitator, dates and the financial costs involved remained to be confirmed.

RESOLVED that

the Committee's Actions List be noted.

113. SCRUTINY OF THE FORWARD PLAN

The Committee reviewed the contents of the Forward Plan but did not identify any items as suitable for pre-scrutiny.

114. TASK & FINISH REVIEWS - DRAFT SCOPING DOCUMENTS

There were no draft scoping documents for consideration.

115. 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

Councillor Mason informed Members that the group had concluded that the original terms of reference for the review had been too broad. Consequently, the group had reviewed their terms of reference and had agreed to focus on how people with disabilities accessed the town.

The group were proposing to complete their review by 17th April 2012. In order to achieve this target date individual members of the group had been allocated responsibility for addressing particular objectives detailed in the group's terms of reference.

b) Improving Recycling – Chair, Councillor Gay Hopkins

Members were advised that the group had convened their first meeting the previous week. During this meeting information about existing recycling rates and practices had been presented for Members' consideration.

There were numerous areas that could be investigated as part of the review. In particular, recycling rates at blocks of flats, recycling arrangements at local supermarkets and the potential use of incentives to encourage an increase in recycling had been identified by the group.

The Committee was advised that at the following meeting of the group Members would visit the Envirosort plant in Norton, Worcestershire.

c) Promoting Sporting Participation – Chair, Councillor Luke Stephens

Members were advised that unfortunately there had been no further meetings of the group since the previous update to the Committee. However, an interview was due to take place with relevant Officers to discuss the participation of people with disabilities in sporting activities provided by Redditch Borough Council.

d) Youth Services Provision – Chair, Councillor Simon Chalk

Members were advised that the group had recently interviewed relevant Officers to obtain further information about Redditch Student Council. The group had organised a number of further interviews with relevant Officers to discuss the provision of leisure services to young people and approaches that could be taken to promote youth activities more effectively. The group was also intending to review the county cabinet's decision about provision of positive activities for young people in December.

RESOLVED that

- 1) **the terms of reference for the review of disabilities be altered to focus on access to the town as requested by the group;**
- 2) **the title of the review be altered to Access for Disabled People Task Group; and**
- 3) **the update reports be noted.**

116. HEALTH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Councillor Quinney was formally requested to present a petition that had been received from pupils at Arrow Vale High School about Time 4 You sexual health services for the consideration of the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Members were advised that the following meeting of the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee was due to take place on Wednesday 9th November.

RESOLVED that

Councillor Quinney present the petition from pupils at Arrow Vale High School on the subject of Time 4 You sexual health services for the consideration of the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

117. CRIME AND DISORDER SCRUTINY PANEL - CHAIR'S UPDATE

The Chair of the Redditch Crime and Disorder Scrutiny Panel, Councillor Bill Hartnett, delivered a presentation on the subject of the most recent meeting of the Panel that took place on Wednesday 26th October 2011.

Members were advised that during the meeting a presentation had been delivered on the subject of the performance management framework that had been adopted by Redditch Community Safety Partnership in 2011. This report confirmed that crime rates for most categories of crime were falling in Redditch and the town was a safe place in which to live. The panel had been impressed by the positive work of the partnership and would be issuing a press release to promote this work to the public.

The panel had been advised during the presentation that levels of racially aggravated offences and harassment offences had increased when compared to the same period the previous year. The new mosque in Redditch had been vandalised during this period. However, it was difficult to confirm whether this had occurred as a result of a racially aggravated offence or due to the fact that until the building works were completed the mosque was a vacant property which was more likely to be targeted by vandals.

The panel had expressed concerns, however, about the proposed introduction of a joint North Worcestershire Community Safety Partnership, which would replace the separate partnerships that currently operated in Bromsgrove, Redditch and Wyre Forest districts. In particular, Members were concerned that a joint partnership would not be able to address the particular needs and priorities of Redditch residents to the same extent as the Redditch Community Safety Partnership.

Members also expressed concerns about the implications of a joint partnership for crime and disorder scrutiny. During a recent meeting of the Worcestershire Joint Chairs and Vice Chairs

Scrutiny Network representatives present at the meeting had advised that Members in the south of the county had struggled to scrutinise the performance of the joint South Worcestershire Community Safety Partnership effectively. Members concurred that there was a risk that similar problems could occur in the north of the county if the community safety partnerships in north Worcestershire were merged.

RECOMMENDED that

Redditch Borough Council does not approve the merger of Redditch Community Safety Partnership (RCSP) with Bromsgrove Community Safety Partnership (BCSP) and Wyre Forest Community safety Partnership (WFCSP) resulting in the creation of a North Worcestershire Community Safety Partnership (NWCSP).

118. PETITION APPEAL - SAVE BROCKHILL GREEN BELT

Members were advised that the item had been withdrawn at the request of the lead petitioners. The petition appeal was therefore not considered during the meeting.

119. PORTFOLIO HOLDER ANNUAL REPORT - HOUSING, LOCAL ENVIRONMENT AND HEALTH

Further to consideration of the Portfolio Holder for Housing, Local Environment and Health's written report at the previous meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, on 18th October 2011, and Members' agreed questions to be put to the Portfolio Holder, Councillor Brandon Clayton, in respect of his Annual Report to the Committee, the following responses were provided:

1) What action has been taken to provide more social housing in Redditch?

Members were advised that Redditch Borough Council was actively investigating opportunities to provide affordable housing options throughout the Borough. In 2010/11 the Council had developed 100 new affordable homes, which comprised a mixture of social rented homes, intermediate rented homes and shared equity homes. The Council was aiming to provide approximately 200 further affordable homes in 2011/12.

The Council had worked with the Homes and Community Agency's (HCA's) four year funding programme, which enabled the Council to access government funds in order to subsidise affordable housing. As part of this process funding

had been secured for affordable housing at Marfield Farm, Church Hill, and for Dorothy Terry House.

2) What are the current trends in relation to:

a) homelessness enquiries to Redditch Borough Council?

Members were advised that the total number of homelessness enquiries between April 2010 and April 2011 was 302. The Council had helped 218 of the people who made these initial enquiries to avoid becoming homeless.

b) the number of statutorily homeless people being housed by Redditch Borough Council?

The Committee was informed that between April 2010 and April 2011 20 people classified as statutorily homeless were housed by either Redditch Borough Council or relevant local partner organisations.

The Council was keen to ensure that vulnerable people were housed in temporary accommodation whilst waiting to secure a permanent residence. At any one time 14 dispersal units were maintained by the Council to accommodate individuals in this position. The properties used as dispersal units varied over time to ensure that appropriate use was made of the Council's housing stock.

The Council did not accommodate people in hostels within the Borough and only occasionally utilised bed and breakfast accommodation in emergency situations. However, some individuals who required specialist treatment for substance abuse were provided with accommodation in hostels outside the Borough where appropriate services could be accessed.

3) What affect on the capital programme will the purchase of the housing stock have?

The Committee was advised that it was difficult to answer the question at this stage. Officers were scheduled to present a report on the capital programme the following month and it was anticipated that further clarification would then be made available.

- 4) What action is Redditch Borough Council taking to reduce the number of empty properties within the town to as close to 0 as possible? What obstacles, if any, are there in relation to reducing the number of empty properties?

Members were advised that at any one time there could be numerous empty properties located within the Borough. These properties were classified as short-term empty properties if they were empty for less than six months and as long-term empty properties if they were vacant for more than six months. The Council was keen to minimise the number of long-term vacant properties. There were many reasons why a property might become empty for lengthy periods of time, including the hospitalisation of the owners or ongoing probate arrangements. In each case appropriate action needed to be taken.

In Redditch 265 properties had been empty for more than six months by the date of the meeting. This compared favourably to the same time in 2008 when there had been an estimated 386 long-term empty properties. The long-term empty properties within the Borough were all privately owned. The Council had limited powers in relation to privately owned properties, though could intervene in certain circumstances such as for environmental health reasons.

The introduction of the New Homes Bonus (NHB) would encourage local authorities to invest in work to reduce the number of empty homes. Local authorities would be rewarded in the same way for returning an empty home to use as they were already rewarded for developing new homes. This reward consisted of the equivalent of Council tax income to the local authority for the six financial years after the property had been returned for use.

- 5) What initiatives are you considering to increase the rates of recycling in Redditch?

The Council was co-ordinating a three month campaign to increase awareness amongst residents about waste and recycling services. Adverts had been displayed on the Council's refuse vehicles as well as in local print media. The Council had also produced banners for the campaign which would be displayed in the Kingfisher Shopping Centre and other public spaces over the festive period. This process formed part of a wider campaign that had been launched by the Council's Environmental Services and would be taking place in stages.

Unfortunately, Members were advised that despite an increase in the number of items that residents could recycle using the Council's recycling service there had been a decrease in the rate of recycling in the Borough. The reasons for this decline were difficult to confirm, though there were various factors which could impact on recycling rates, which included the provision of independent recycling facilities at local supermarkets. The Council was anticipating the Increasing Recycling Task and finish Group would help to identify suitable actions that could be taken to improve recycling rates within the Borough.

RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

120. TASK AND FINISH GROUP MONITORING REPORT - LOCAL STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP (LSP)

The Committee received a monitoring report which detailed the actions that had been taken to implement the fifteen recommendations proposed by the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) Task and Finish Group.

Members were advised that the majority of the group's recommendations had been implemented since the conclusion of the review in August 2010. However, no action had been taken in response to recommendation two, concerning the requirement for the Redditch Partnership to convene an annual "We Are Redditch" event. The intention of this event would have been to inform the public about the work of the partnership and to consult over local priorities.

The partnership had finalised the Redditch Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS), which detailed core priorities and action plans for the Borough, in 2011. The content of this strategy had partly been based on information provided by residents who had been consulted during events in the Kingfisher Shopping Centre in January 2010 and at the Morton Stanley Festival in August 2010. The partnership had therefore concluded that no further consultation was required in 2011. However, an event had been held in June to which all partners had been invited. This had provided an opportunity for partner organisations to review the SCS and the actions that had been taken to address the partnership's priorities. It was anticipated that further consultation with the public would follow in 2012.

Members welcomed the action that had been taken in response to the majority of the group's recommendations. However, concerns

were expressed about the fact that no public consultation had been undertaken in 2011 by the partnership. Public consultation was considered to be important to ensure that the partnership remained aware of changing needs and priorities within the local community. The partnership was therefore urged to hold a further public consultation event as soon as possible.

The frequency with which copies of the minutes from meetings of the LSP board were made available for Members' consideration, as proposed in recommendation 5, was also discussed. Members were advised that the minutes were circulated by email to all Members, though could also be accessed on the Council's website. The following meeting of the LSP board was due to take place on 19th December 2011 at Redditch Football Club and it was anticipated that the minutes would be available in the new year.

RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

121. SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY STRATEGY - MONITORING UPDATE REPORT

The Committee received and considered a monitoring update report on the subject of the Redditch Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS).

Education attainment levels and raising the aspirations of young people was one of the key priorities of the Redditch Partnership. An action plan, detailing specific actions to address this priority, had been developed by the partnership. In addition, the Redditch Local Children's Partnership had been established as a sub-group to co-ordinate action for children and young people.

Worcestershire County Council had responsibility for education and positive activities for young people and a number of representatives from the county council were appointed to the partnership's board and relevant theme groups. The partnership helped to hold Worcestershire County Council to account for actions that the local authority was taking to improve education attainment levels in Redditch. Progress was being made and the partnership's board had recently been advised that G.C.S.E results for grades A* - C in Redditch had increased by nine per cent when compared to the previous year.

The LSP's primary role was to help raise aspirations for young people outside the school environment. As part of this process the LSP had organised a careers fair which had taken place in summer 2011. Young people attending the fair had had an opportunity to

learn about the different types of careers that they could pursue as well as about local employers. A further careers fair had been organised to take place in June 2012 and it was anticipated that the fair would become an annual event.

Members welcomed the provision of a careers fair in Redditch. However, it was suggested that improvements could be made to future careers fairs. In particular, Members suggested that there was a need to reduce the number of employment agencies represented at the careers fairs. Instead, it was suggested that more companies should be encouraged to attend to promote the different industries in which offered employment in Redditch as well as to advertise job and apprenticeship opportunities.

RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

122. GRITTING AND SNOW CLEARANCE - REDDITCH BOROUGH COUNCIL APPROACH - PRE-SCRUTINY

The Committee received the *Gritting and Snow Clearance – Redditch Borough Council's Approach* report for pre-scrutiny.

Members were advised that the report outlined existing practices at Redditch Borough Council which were implemented during periods of inclement weather. The report had been produced to provide the Council with an opportunity to formalise this approach. As part of this process the Council would continue to concentrate on providing snow clearance and gritting services at Council venues, such as the crematorium and cemeteries.

Worcestershire County Council, rather than Redditch Borough Council, had responsibility for gritting and snow clearance on the town's highways and for installing and replenishing grit bins situated on adopted highways. The two local authorities in recent years had started to work closely together during periods of inclement weather to ensure that effective use was made of available resources and particularly problematic areas could be prioritised.

Redditch Borough Council was in the process of procuring specialist equipment to assist with snow clearance and gritting in the town. This would include purchasing snow blades which could be fitted to existing vehicles used by the Council to assist with snow clearance. The Council was anticipating that the equipment could be purchased at a cost of approximately £20,500.

Members praised the work of relevant Redditch Borough Council Officers during the inclement weather in the winter 2010/11. This

positive assessment of the work of Borough Officers had been endorsed by the Gritting Short, Sharp Review Group. However, Members expressed disappointment with the gritting and snow clearance services that had been provided by Worcestershire County Council. Members expressed concern that similar issues, that had been identified by the Gritting review group, did not appear to have been addressed in either the report or in a separate written submission to the Committee and it was questioned whether the problems that had been identified by the group would be acknowledged and addressed by Worcestershire County Council in future periods of inclement weather.

Officers explained that Worcestershire County Council and Redditch Borough Council both acknowledged that mistakes had been made the previous year and lessons had been learned. As part of this process modifications had been made to Worcestershire County Council's website to ensure that maps locating grit bins and demonstrating primary and secondary gritting routes could easily be accessed by the public. Furthermore, the two Councils had determined that whilst Redditch Borough Council could only maintain a stock of 90 tonnes of salt, additional salt stocks could be obtained from Lydiate Ash or Alvechurch in emergency circumstances in future years.

Following consideration of the Gritting review group's final report by the Executive Committee in May 2011 the Leader of the Council and Chief Executive had met with relevant representatives of Worcestershire County Council to discuss concerns raised in the report. The need for collaborative working between the two Councils had been agreed. Furthermore, constructive actions, such as the potential for County Officers to train Redditch Borough Council staff to drive snow clearance vehicles, had been discussed. It had also been agreed that Redditch Borough Council's communications team would co-ordinate communications in Redditch during periods of inclement weather to ensure that Councillors and residents were updated on action as well as ongoing risks.

In order to address the Committee's remaining concerns it was suggested that a further meeting between relevant Officers from Redditch Borough Council and Worcestershire County Council should be organised. Members suggested that this meeting should be regarded as an urgent priority and should take place as soon as possible prior to the beginning of winter.

RECOMMENDED that

- 1) the following policy be adopted with regards to gritting and snow clearance:**

Redditch Borough Council will strive to keep the following areas clear of snow and ice and safe to use:

- a) crematorium and cemeteries to allow funerals to continue;
 - b) Redditch Borough Council staff car parks to ensure that there are suitable parking areas for Council staff who are getting into work to provide essential services;
 - c) key Council sites like the Town Hall and district centres to assist local shops and businesses and enable residents to access services;
 - d) gritting/snow clearance at other areas including Council sheltered accommodation will only be carried out subject to available resources; gritting/snow clearance at Council owned sheltered accommodation will be to allow the home Support Service Access to residents;
- 2) the Council will not provide grit bins on any highway land but may provide grit bins on its own land to enable gritting to take place – e.g. at leisure sites;
 - 3) further publicity is undertaken to ensure that residents are aware of how the Council will deal with gritting/snow clearance and what to do when bad weather affects their waste collection service;
 - 4) Officers purchase appropriate snow clearance and gritting equipment from within existing budgets; and
 - 5) relevant Officers from Redditch Borough Council arrange a meeting with relevant Officers from Worcestershire County Council in advance of winter 2011/12 to discuss additional issues raised in the Gritting Short, Sharp Review Group's final report and arrangements for gritting and snow clearance in Redditch for the winter.

123. REFERRALS

There were no referrals.

124. WORK PROGRAMME

Members were advised that the Committee was due to receive two petitions for consideration during the meeting of the Committee on 29th November 2011. These would consist of a petition on the subject of car parking in Redditch town centre and a petition from Arrow Vale High School concerning the provision of Time 4 You sexual health services to young people. The Committee would also be receiving a proposal to launch a review of Redditch market at this meeting.

Officers advised that two reports were scheduled for the Committee's consideration as part of the budget setting process. The first of these reports, detailing proposed budget bids and savings, would be considered during the meeting of the Committee on 29th November. The second report was due to be considered at a meeting of the Committee on 14th February 2012 and would entail a more detailed report on the proposed budget for 2012/13.

Due to the significant size of the agenda on 29th November the chair had proposed that a report on the subject of Youth Employment at Redditch Borough Council should be considered later in the year. However, concerns remained that the meeting could be relatively lengthy. Consequently, Members agreed to start the following meeting at 6.00 p.m.

RESOLVED that

the Committee's Work Programme be noted.

The Meeting commenced at 7.00 pm
and closed at 9.30 pm