

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Tuesday, 14th February, 2012

MINUTES

Present:

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

Also present:

A Scarce

Officers:

S Hanley, T Kristunas, S Morgan and S Skinner.

Overview and Scrutiny Support Officers:

J Bayley and M Craggs

164. APOLOGIES AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors Mason and Stephens.

165. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND OF PARTY WHIP

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

166. MINUTES

The Committee was advised that a number of minor textual amendments needed to be made which did not otherwise affect the record of the meeting. These amendments would be made to the final version of the minutes.

RESOLVED that

subject to making a number of minor amendments the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on Tuesday, 24th January 2012 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

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Chair

167. FEES AND CHARGES 2012/13

The Committee considered the proposed fees and charges for 2012/13 for the Council's chargeable services. Reference was also made to the minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee held on Tuesday 31st January 2012 which detailed the Committee's decisions regarding fees and charges.

Officers had increased many of the fees and charges by 2.5 per cent, though there had been some variances. In particular, a number of fees were set at a statutory level. Attempts had been made, where possible, to round up the fees charged for particular services, though this had not always been considered appropriate.

There were a number of licensing fees which had not been increased when compared to the previous year. A decision had been made to retain the same fees to ensure that, as legally required, the Council did not generate a profit from these charges.

The Committee suggested that clarification should be provided with regards to the timeframes for charging new fees for the Council's allotments. Residents would be interested to learn that these fees were set a year in advance as it would help allotment holders to calculate the charges they would need to pay.

RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

168. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT 2012/13

The Committee received the Housing Revenue Account Initial Estimates for 2012/13. Reference was also made to the minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee held on 31st January 2012, which detailed the Committee's recommendations on the subject.

The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Initial Estimates were designed to set the budget for the HRA for the following year. In previous years the Council had paid £6.8 million to the government due to the local authority being in a negative subsidy position. This housing subsidy process would cease in March 2012 and the Council would no longer need to make these payments.

The process for rent setting had also been reviewed in the report. Local authorities were increasingly being urged to secure rent

convergence with the social housing sector by 2015/16. As part of this process similar rents would be charged for similar properties. The rents charged by the Council were due to increase by seven per cent in line with government guidelines and the average rent would be increasing from £72.82 to £79.90 on a 48 week basis.

There were concerns amongst Members that some tenants would struggle to pay these increased rents. However, Officers advised that significant adjustments would need to be made to the figures if the rents were to be increased at a lower rate.

An assumption had been made that there would be a limited increase in the number of residents who would request to purchase their Council house under the Right to Buy scheme. In recent years the number of properties sold to tenants under Right to Buy had stabilised at an average of five properties per annum. In the current economic environment many tenants were struggling to obtain mortgages and it was anticipated that this would continue to be a problem for the foreseeable future.

RECOMMENDED that

- 1) the draft 2012/13 Estimates for the Housing Revenue Account, attached to the report at Appendix 1, be approved;**
- 2) the actual average rent increase for 2012/13 be 7 %;**
- 3) £2 million be transferred to a reserve as a Revenue Contribution to Capital to fund the future Capital Programme; and**

RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

169. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT REPORT - UPDATE ON FUTURE ARRANGEMENTS

Members received a report on the Housing Revenue Account review for pre-scrutiny.

Officers advised that the previous Housing Revenue Account subsidy system was due to be replaced with a new Council housing finance process, called self-financing. As part of this process a valuation had been made of each local authority's Council housing stock and assumptions had been made by the government

regarding each Council's income through rents and maintenance expenditure over the next 30 years.

The Council would need to pay the government £98.929 million for the local authority's housing stock by 28th March 2012, though money could be borrowed to cover these costs from the Public Works Loans Board. The local authority would be required to pay back the amount that had been borrowed over the next 30 years. Members agreed that Officers' proposal to pay back the amount that had been borrowed every five years after year 15 of the process would help to minimise the risks of this borrowing to the Council.

A draft Capital Programme for the following 30 years had also been provided for Members' consideration. Funds had been transferred from the current Major Repairs Reserve (MRR) to this Capital Programme. Members were advised that until year 11 surplus funds would not be available from the Capital Programme to repay the borrowing. However, in subsequent years significant funding would be available from the programme to contribute to repayments.

RECOMMENDED that

subject to the Council's approval of the budgetary implications,

- 1) the 5 year Housing Capital Programme, as set out at Appendix 1 to the report, be approved;**
- 2) the Director of Finance and Corporate Resources be authorised to acquire debt from the Public Works Loans Board up to the amount of the actual Debt Cap in line with the profile set out at Appendix 4 to the report;**
- 3) subject to Members' comments, the viability of the 30 year business case for the Housing Revenue Account, and the projected availability of resources within the Business Plan to undertake projects such as regeneration be noted;**
- 4) Officers be authorised to incur expenditure as detailed in Appendix 1 to the report, up to the limit approved by the Council and for the purposes detailed in the report;**
- 5) the Council approve the financial / budgetary implications, as detailed in the report; and**

RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

170. STREET NAMING AND NUMBERING POLICY - PRE-SCRUTINY

As requested the Committee received a report on the Street Naming and Numbering Policy for pre-scrutiny.

Members were advised that the revised Street Naming and Numbering Policy contained many of the points that had been detailed in the previous version of the policy. However, additional information had been added to the policy including information about the legislative framework and standards for road signage.

The Council was committed in the policy to prioritising any suggestions from Feckenham Parish Council for the parish as long as the proposals met the approved naming criteria. In cases where the Parish Council's suggestions did not correspond with this naming criteria authority to make a decision on the proposals would be delegated to the Director of Planning, Regeneration, Housing and Regulatory Services in conjunction with the Head of Business Transformation. This would require a further addition to the Scheme of Delegation to Officers.

Local Councillors would continue to be consulted with regards to the selection of street names for streets within their wards. These names could be selected from the Candidate List for Street Names provided in the policy, though consideration would also be given to additional names proposed by Members when appropriate.

Members suggested that the artist Norman Neasom should be added to the list of well-known local "characters" detailed in the Candidate List for Street Names. Officers were also asked to review a number of signs located in the Borough where spelling mistakes and incorrect ward references had been identified by Members.

RECOMMENDED that

- 1) the revised policy on Street Naming and Numbering, as attached to the report at Appendix 1 and 2, be approved and adopted;**

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- 2) authority be delegated to the Head of Business Transformation to carry out all functions relating to the addressing process, as now detailed in the revised Policy;
- 3) the Scheme of Delegation to Officers be updated accordingly; and

RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

171. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN 2012/13 - 2014/15

Members received the Medium Terms Financial Plan 2012/13 – 2014/15 for comment. Reference was also made to the minutes of the Executive Committee meeting held on Tuesday 31st January 2012, when a decision had been made on this subject.

The Committee was advised that a number of assumptions had been made in the report. This included the assumption that approximately £600,000 worth of savings would be made by the Council through transformation and the shared services programme and that fees and charges would be increased by an average of 2.5 per cent. Assumptions had also had to be made with regards to the level of government grant that would be allocated to the Council.

A number of revenue and capital bids, as detailed in the report, had been approved by the Executive Committee on 31st January 2012. Two further revenue bids had been approved as high priorities during the meeting. This included the proposal from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for the revenue bid for an Energy Advisor, jointly employed by Redditch Borough Council and Bromsgrove District Council, to be supported as a high priority.

RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

172. PERFORMANCE REPORT FOR SERVICES WITHIN THE REMIT OF THE PORTFOLIO FOR PLANNING, REGENERATION, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND PUBLIC TRANSPORT

The Committee proposed the following list of questions for the consideration of the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Regeneration, Economic Development and Local Transport:

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- 1) What is elected Members' involvement in the governance arrangements of the North Worcestershire Economic Development Unit?
- 2) What actions have been taken and what plans are in place to grow the night-time economy in Redditch?
- 3) How successful has the North Worcestershire Economic Development Unit been in creating new jobs in Redditch? What arrangements are in place to measure its effectiveness?
- 4) The written report for your portfolio, which was considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 14th February, stated that "Worcestershire County Council funding cuts to bus services managed well and impact minimised in Redditch" (p2)
 - a) In this context what is your view of the recent removal of the 57 and 58 bus services to the Alexandra Hospital?
 - b) What is being done to alleviate inconvenience to local residents?
- 5) To what extent is the Portfolio Holder involved in assessing new commercial planning applications that could help create new jobs in Redditch?
- 6) What plans are in place to continue and develop the *Organised Work Experience Awards* programme in Redditch?
- 7) What is being done to fill empty retail units and office spaces in the Borough?

RESOLVED that

- 1) **the questions detailed in the preamble above be addressed by the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Regeneration, Economic Development and Local Transport during her annual report to the Committee on Tuesday 6th March 2012; and**
- 2) **the report be noted.**

173. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY RECOMMENDATION TRACKER - MID-YEAR REPORT 2011/12

The Committee received the first Overview and Scrutiny recommendation monitoring report for 2011/12. The report detailed the recommendations that had been made by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee from 24th May 2011 – 1st January 2012 and outlined the response that had been received from the Executive Committee as well as actions that had been taken to date to implement the approved recommendations.

Officers advised that by 1st January 2012 the Committee had proposed 20 recommendations. A total of 16 recommendations had been approved by the Executive Committee, three recommendations remained to be considered and one recommendation had been rejected. The three recommendations that remained to be considered were due to be presented for the consideration of the Executive Committee in a report on the subject of the private sector home support service on 21st February 2012.

The Council had already taken action to implement many of the approved recommendations, as detailed in the report. Further information, with regards to gritting and snow clearance and the Redditch war memorial would also be provided for the Committee's consideration in March and April 2012.

A report, detailing responses to the Committee's recommendations between 1st January – 1st May 2012 would be received at the beginning of the following municipal year.

RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

174. ACTIONS LIST

RESOLVED that

the Committee's Actions List be noted.

175. EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MINUTES AND SCRUTINY OF THE FORWARD PLAN

The Committee received the minutes of the Executive Committee meeting that took place on 31st January 2012 for comment and considered the contents of the latest edition of the Forward Plan.

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Members noted that a report on the subject of the Housing Allocations Policy review was scheduled to be presented for the Executive Committee's consideration in due course. Due to the significance of this policy to local tenants Members agreed that the report would be suitable for detailed pre-scrutiny.

RESOLVED that

- 1) **the Housing Allocations Policy – Review be added to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's Work Programme for pre-scrutiny; and**
- 2) **the minutes of the Executive Committee meeting held on Tuesday 31st January 2012 be noted.**

176. TASK & FINISH REVIEWS - DRAFT SCOPING DOCUMENTS

There were no draft scoping documents for consideration.

177. TASK AND FINISH GROUPS - PROGRESS REPORTS

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

- a) Access for Disabled People – Chair, Councillor Alan Mason

Members were advised that the group had agreed an initial list of proposals during a meeting in January 2012. Officers had been consulted with regards to the financial and legal implications of each of the group's proposals. Based on the feedback received from Officers Members would be agreeing their final list of recommendations at the following meeting of the group.

- b) Improving Recycling – Chair, Councillor Gay Hopkins

Councillor Hopkins advised the Committee that the group was continuing to gather evidence. The majority of Members had accompanied staff undertaking green bin collections in the town. The group was considering options on how the Council could most effectively engage non-English speaking residents on recycling. These included plans for visiting local mosques to promote the value of recycling amongst the Islamic community in the Borough.

The group had discovered that the performance of the street sweeping teams in Redditch was excellent, though this

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performance was not reflected in the local authority's statistics for recycling. A letter was due to be sent to Worcestershire County Council to formally request that Redditch be prioritised for the recycling of mechanical sweeper arisings.

c) Promoting Sporting Participation – Chair, Councillor Luke Stephens

The group had convened a meeting to discuss the possibility of introducing a centralised sport website for Redditch. Relevant senior Officers representing Leisure Services and the Communications team were due to be interviewed to discuss this idea further.

d) Youth Services Provision – Chair, Councillor Simon Chalk

Councillor Chalk explained that the group had met on 26th January 2012 to agree a list of initial proposals. The Student Council, which had been consulted over these initial proposals, had been in favour of the majority of the group's suggestions. Officers had also been consulted regarding the financial and legal implications of the group's proposals. Based on the feedback received by Members the group would make a decision about their final list of recommendations.

RESOLVED that

the update reports be noted.

178. HEALTH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Councillor Quinney provided an update on the work of the Worcestershire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC) as Redditch Borough Council's representative.

Members were advised that the HOSC had recently received information about the current performance of Worcestershire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust. The trust was performing well in relation to a number of targets, including the 18 week waiting times and in relation to MRSA infection rates. Changes were also occurring including the approval of a new radiotherapy centre, the opening of a new audiology centre, the provision of extra support to patients in the early stages of pregnancy and the launch of the Drive to Free Up, which aimed to help nurses cease spending time producing unnecessary paperwork. In addition a new contract had been awarded to the Working Well Centre to provide occupational health

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support the Hereford and Worcester Fire Service over the following three years.

A number of issues continued to be monitored by the HOSC. This included the proposed changes to ambulance services in the county and the review of the appropriate location for the Stroke Unit in Worcestershire. The HOSC would also be responding to the joint services review on an ongoing basis.

RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

179. REFERRALS

There were no referrals.

180. WORK PROGRAMME

Members were advised that Councillor Luke Stephens had asked to present a report at the following meeting of the Committee detailing the outcomes of the Centre for Public Scrutiny's (CfPS) Parliamentary Seminar Series training and the implications, if any, for scrutiny in Redditch.

RESOLVED that

the Committee's Work Programme be noted.

The Meeting commenced at 7.00 pm
and closed at 8.10 pm