

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

6th March 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, Brenda Quinney and Luke Stephens

Also Present:

Councillor Jinny Pearce, Portfolio Holder – Planning, Regeneration, Economic Development & Transport
M Collins, Vice-Chair, Standards Committee
A Scarce, Committee Services, Bromsgrove District Council - Observer

Officers:

R Bamford, H Broughton, R Dunne, D Hancox, S Horrobin, G Revans and J Staniland

Committee Services Officer:

M Craggs and D Sunman

181. APOLOGIES AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES

An apology for absence was received on behalf of Councillor Mason.

182. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND OF PARTY WHIP

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

183. MINUTES

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 14th February 2012 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

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Chair

184. PORTFOLIO HOLDER ANNUAL REPORT - PORTFOLIO FOR PLANNING, REGENERATION, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND TRANSPORT - COUNCILLOR JINNY PEARCE

Further to consideration of the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Regeneration, Economic Development and Public Transport written report at the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 14th February 2012 and Members' agreed questions to be put to the Portfolio Holder, Councillor Jinny Pearce, provided the following responses as part of her annual report.

- 1) What is elected Members' involvement in the governance arrangements of the North Worcestershire Economic Development Unit?

The North Worcestershire Client Management Group (CMG) whose membership includes a Cabinet Member / Portfolio Holder (or substitute) from each of the three North Worcestershire districts together with Chief Executives and Directors, is responsible for the oversight of the work of the North Worcestershire Economic Development and Regeneration Team. The Head of Economic Development and Regeneration makes quarterly reports to this group and also attends Economic Advisory Panel meetings. She also advised that regular status meetings had been arranged for her with the Head of Economic Development and Regeneration. A number of meetings had been facilitated by the team between the Leader of the Council and businesses in the area.

Members were informed that they could contact North Worcestershire Economic Development and Regeneration Team at their key office base in Redditch Town Hall.

- 2) What actions have been taken and what plans are in place to grown the night-time economy in Redditch?

The Committee was informed that the work being carried out by the Town Centre Partnership, including administering the Evening Economy Grant, would improve the town centre generally and help the night-time economy to expand.

Members suggested the types of businesses, particularly restaurants, which they would like to encourage to locate in the town centre.

Overview and Scrutiny

Committee

6th March 2012

- 3) How successful has the North Worcestershire Economic Development Unit been in creating new jobs in Redditch? What arrangements are in place of measure its effectiveness?

The Committee was informed that it was difficult to measure the correlation between the team's activities and job creation as other factors, such as the current economic climate, had to be taken into consideration. However, a monitoring sheet had been included in the Redditch Economic Development Strategy to assist in measuring this activity.

The team had been working with the NEW College and local schools to identify the skills required by local businesses and to encourage more people in Redditch to engage in higher education.

- 4) The written report for your portfolio, which was considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 14th February, stated that "Worcestershire County Council (WCC) funding cuts to bus services managed well and impact minimised in Redditch."

- a) In this context what is your view of the recent removal of the 57 and 58 bus services to the Alexandra Hospital?

The service 57 and 58 extension of the route to the Alexandra Hospital was not considered to be commercially viable by the two bus operators and the decision to stop the service was made on this basis. Officers have approached WCC to establish whether the route could be subsidised but, in the current financial climate, this has not been possible.

- b) What is being done to alleviate inconvenience to local residents?

The Committee was informed that following the recent withdrawal of the 68 bus route, the Council's Dial a Ride service had worked in partnership with WCC to pilot a new bus route, utilising a Section 22 permit under the Transport Act, to provide services to the new Abbey Stadium. The service would be reviewed after six month's operation and, if successful, an option to provide a similar Section 22 bus route to the Alexandra Hospital would be explored.

Overview and Scrutiny

Committee

6th March 2012

- 5) To what extent is the Portfolio Holder involved in assessing new commercial planning applications that could help create new jobs in Redditch?

Councillor Pearce said that she attended many pre-application discussions and reminded members that any Member who had undertaken planning training was welcome to attend pre-application discussions. Recently the Leader of the Council had attended a pre-application discussion with a local business representative.

- 6) What plans are in place to continue and develop the Organised Work Experience Awards programme in Redditch?

Members were informed that as long as schools continued to send students on work experience placements the Awards scheme would continue. However, there were no plans to develop the scheme and, in accordance with the recommendations of the Wolf Report, schools would no longer have to send students at Key Stage 4 out on work experience placements.

- 7) What is being done to fill empty retail units and office spaces in the Borough?

New promotional literature had been produced and an advertising campaign carried out during the summer and autumn of 2011. The advertising campaign had included adverts being placed in the Birmingham Post, the Birmingham & Solihull Chamber Magazine and The Insider (a regional business magazine). Commercial property searches are carried out, on request, to match people looking for properties to vacant units.

The Town Centre Partnership continues to work with the Kingfisher Shopping Centre because if the centre is busy it follows that the rest of the town benefits.

The Chair thanked Councillor Pearce for her Annual Report.

185. COMMUNICATIONS TASK AND FINISH GROUP - MONITORING UPDATE REPORT

The Committee received a monitoring update report on the implementation of recommendations proposed by the Communications Task and Finish Group in 2008.

Officers outlined changes in the Communications Team since publication of the Task and Finish Group final report and the changing emphasis on how the media require news to be sent to them. Members received updates on the seven subject themes of the final report.

Members were given a full account of the current service provided by the Communications Team. In particular, this included: the production of three copies of Redditch Matters a year; the production of five press releases each week; daily updating of the Council website; the production of a monthly communications plan; the production of a daily e-update for staff and a monthly newspapers; and working with the Leader and senior Members, including Portfolio Holders, to ensure the Council's corporate messages are promoted.

Officers were also pleased to report that the local BBC radio station had commended the team as the best Council media team in Worcestershire (May 2011).

Officers reported future work would include the production of: a joint media protocol; a joint brand and style guidelines; and of a joint communications strategy;

Members discussed the efficacy and cost effectiveness of the various methods of communication used by the Council when engaging with residents of Redditch, which included Redditch Website, Redditch Matters, Facebook and Twitter.

RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

186. GRITTING SHORT, SHARP REVIEW - MONITORING UPDATE REPORT

The Committee received a report which provided further information on the recommendations made in the final report of the Gritting, Short, Sharp Review (May 2011) and on progress that had been made by Officers working with colleagues from Worcestershire County Council (WCC) to improve gritting and snow clearance service in the Borough.

Members welcomed the positive response from WCC including their financial contribution to the provision of additional snow clearing equipment.

RESOLVED that

Overview and Scrutiny

Committee

6th March 2012

- 1) **Members note the content of the report and the partnership work with Worcestershire County Council to improve gritting and snow clearing services in the Borough; and**
- 2) **Members also note the feedback, attached at Appendix 1 of the report, to the recommendations made in the Gritting Short, Sharp Review that Overview and Scrutiny completed in 2011.**

187. PERFORMANCE REPORT FOR SERVICES WITHIN THE REMIT OF THE PORTFOLIO FOR COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP AND PARTNERSHIP

The Committee received a written report which detailed the performance of services within the remit of the Portfolio Holder for Leisure Community Leadership and Partnership, Councillor Carole Gandy.

On the basis of the information contained within the report Members requested that the following questions be addressed by the Portfolio Holder in her Annual Report to the Committee, which has been scheduled to be delivered on 27th March 2012:

- 1) As Portfolio Holder, what are you planning to do to help ensure that the Redditch Partnership remains adequately funded in future?
- 2) Are there any plans to widen the successful use of focus group exercises, such as the Budget Jury, to provide direct public feedback to other areas of Council policy?
- 3) Is there any flexibility for increasing the maximum size of a voluntary sector grant if, in particular instances, this increase could likely benefit a significant number of people?
- 4) Are there any plans to re-introduce the register of activities document which informs residents of what local community activities and events are to be held and whom they can contact to obtain more information?

RESOLVED that

the content of the written performance report be noted.

188. CENTRE FOR PUBLIC SCRUTINY (CFPS) PARLIAMENTARY SEMINAR SERIES TRAINING - FEEDBACK REPORT

Councillor Stephens gave an oral report on the Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS) Parliamentary Seminar Training session that he had attended on 14th February 2012. Whilst he did not return any specific implications for scrutiny in Redditch, he found the event to be extremely useful, especially the opportunity to witness a Select Committee session in action.

RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

189. ACTIONS LIST

The Chair reported that he had received a response to Item 5 on the Action List on the effect of a 5% rather than a 7% increase in actual rent in 2012/13. He had been advised that this would have reduced the funds for the Housing Revenue Account by £450,000.

RESOLVED that

subject to the amendments detailed in the preamble above, the actions list be noted.

190. EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MINUTES AND SCRUTINY OF THE FORWARD PLAN

The Committee received the minutes of the Executive Committee meetings that took place on 20th and 21st February 2012. The Chair reminded members that these minutes had been approved at the full Council meeting held on 5th March 2012.

Members considered the latest edition of the Forward Plan and were advised that Item 17 (Roxboro House – Disposal Options) had been removed because the Executive Committee at their meeting on 23rd August 2012 had declared the site surplus and had agreed the method of disposal.

RESOLVED that

- 1) the minutes of the Executive Committee meetings held on 20th and 21st February be noted; and**
- 2) subject to the amendments detailed in the preamble above, the Forward Plan be noted.**

Overview and Scrutiny

Committee

6th March 2012

191. TASK & FINISH REVIEWS - DRAFT SCOPING DOCUMENTS

There were no draft scoping documents for consideration.

192. TASK AND FINISH GROUPS - PROGRESS REPORTS

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

a) Access for Disabled People – Chair, Councillor A Mason

The Committee was informed that the draft final report had been circulated to relevant officers for comment. The final version would be considered at the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to be held on 17th April 2012.

b) Improving Recycling – Chair, Councillor Gay Hopkins

Councillor Hopkins reported that two more meetings had taken place and, in addition, the group had carried out a site visit to look at the process for 'Grey Bin' collections. Officers are consulting the Communications Team on ways to work with the press to further promote the importance of recycling. The final report would be considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 27th March 2012.

c) Promoting Sporting Participation – Chair, Councillor Luke Stephens

Councillor Stephens reported that a meeting had been held immediately preceding the Committee meeting to further develop the Group's ideas for final recommendations. These recommendations were expected to be drafted at the Group's next meeting on 14th March 2012.

d) Youth Service Provision

Councillor Simon Chalk reported that draft final report had been circulated to relevant officers for comment. The final version would be considered at the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to be held on 17th April 2012.

193. HEALTH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Councillor Quinney advised that she had nothing to report.

194. REFERRALS

There were no referrals.

Overview and Scrutiny

Committee

6th March 2012

195. WORK PROGRAMME

There were no changes to the Work Programme.

The Meeting commenced at 7.00 pm
and closed at 8.55 pm

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Chair