

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Tuesday, 11th September, 2012

MINUTES

Present:

Councillor Juliet Brunner (Chair), Councillor Simon Chalk (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Andrew Brazier, David Bush, John Fisher, Andrew Fry, Pattie Hill, Pat Witherspoon and Roger Hill

Also Present:

Councillor Phil Mould

Officers:

M Craggs, R Bamford, C Felton, S Jones, J Pickering, D Poole, A Scarce and A de Warr

Committee Services Officer:

M Craggs and A Scarce

61. APOLOGIES AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES

An apology for absence was received on behalf of Councillor Gay Hopkins. Councillor Roger Hill was confirmed as her substitute.

62. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND OF PARTY WHIP

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

63. MINUTES

Members requested clarification in respect of Minute No. 50 and in particular Blue Badges being displayed in Dial a Ride buses. Officers clarified the position and confirmed that this was not a recommendation of the Access for Disabled People Task Group, but an action which would be taken forward for further consideration by Officers.

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Chair

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RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 14th August be approved as a true and correct record of the meeting and signed by the Chair.

64. PORTFOLIO HOLDER ANNUAL REPORT - PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR CORPORATE MANAGEMENT, COUNCILLOR PHIL MOULD

Further to consideration of the Portfolio Holder for Corporate Management's written report at the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 14th August 2012 and Members' agreed questions that were based on the report, Portfolio Holder Councillor Phil Mould provided the following responses as part of his annual report.

1) Please could you outline what you consider to be:

a) The successes within the remit of your Portfolio

Councillor Mould advised Members that as he had only been in post for a relatively short period it was difficult to highlight any particular successes. However, he praised the Executive Director for Finance and Resources and her team for the prompt and professional way in which they responded to the changes to the Budget.

b) Areas of concern within the remit of your Portfolio

Councillor Mould was concerned with likely further reductions to the Council's budget in the coming years together with the impact that the changes to the welfare system would have on the Council. It was anticipated that this would be particularly difficult for housing benefit claimants who were not used to having full control of their own finances. Concern was raised that the Council's own finances could potentially be affected by this.

It was commented, however, that providing claimants with the opportunity to take responsibility for their own finances could empower them. Members also discussed ways in which the Council could provide support by raising awareness of the changes as soon as possible.

2) What are your long-term plants for:

a) The REDI Centre

Councillor Mould informed Members that it was imperative for new occupants to be found for the building to help make it a sustainable asset. The Centre had remained empty since December 2010. Members were informed that potential tenants had been identified and had been made aware of its available.

Reference was made to the Localism Act, with Members being made aware that while no formal legislation had yet been enacted, if an approach was made from the voluntary sector to purchase an asset maintained by the Council then they would be given a six month window to raise capital and bid for the property.

It was confirmed that through the agreement with Property Services at Worcestershire County Council (WCC), regular security checks on both the exterior and interior of the building were made.

Members also discussed the future plans for Threadneedle House and the remedial work which needed to be completed. Officers agreed to provide Members with a briefing paper on the currently position with this building.

b) The Anchorage

It was confirmed that the Anchorage was in a similar position as the REDI Centre, although the position was slightly more complicated due to its position within the grounds of the Sandycroft Centre and the involvement of a third party. It was hoped that the issues which had arisen from this would be resolved shortly.

3) How will the implementation of new ICT systems at the Council impact on the services delivered to customers?

Councillor Mould informed Members that Bromsgrove District Council's (BDC) and Redditch Borough Council's IT systems were not fully compatible. BDC had more recently invested in its system and the Council now needed to bring its system up to a similar level.

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Members were provided with further details of the work that was being carried out and confirmed that currently there was the skill base and budget within the team to cover this work. The Committee were informed that many of the problems which Members had recently experienced were due largely to this work, however the problems were expected to reduce as the work progressed. It was anticipated that this would be completed within the next 12 months.

The benefits of a joint system would mean staff could work more efficiently and easily across both councils, together with enabling the sharing of data and cost savings, all of which were an important step towards the successful implementation of shared services.

4) Following transformation of the services within your remit:

a) How will the Council deliver solutions for customers?

The Committee heard that each area was different and therefore had its own individual problems. However, an example was provided of how the transformation process had improved the way in which benefits payment process had been streamlined and simplified for both staff and applicants.

b) Where will the funding for these solutions be obtained from?

Members were informed that savings were made through cutting out waste and the savings that were made funded the changes in processes.

c) Will any cuts have to be made?

It was difficult to provide a response to this question as each service was different. Some services were particularly labour intensive and every effort was made to redeploy staff where possible.

The Committee heard that embarking on shared services with BDC was crucial to preserving services and to making necessary financial savings. In respect of Transformation, the outcomes for the areas which had gone through the process so far have been positive with improved and more efficient services being provided.

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- 5) How is the Council mitigating the risks involved in reducing the budget available for maintenance of Council properties?

This was being achieved through prioritisation which only involved undertaking maintenance that was absolutely necessary.

- a) What are the current methods used for assessing these risks?

Health and safety issues were dealt with initially followed by the traditional system of identifying high, medium and low priorities. Members discussed the reduction in the budget for maintenance and whether this was sufficient for the work that would need to be carried out in the forthcoming year.

- 6) Does the Council undertake an annual inventory of telephone, ICT systems and PAT testing?

The Committee heard that the phones, which are part of a recent new system, were all acquired through IT in order to be compatible with other Council IT equipment.

- a) If so how does this work?

All the equipment is logged on an inventory through the IT system. This inventory also included licenses for software. Property services have a register of equipment with detailing the regularity of PAT testing needed, i.e. annually, quarterly.

The Committee discussed how each individual item was recorded for PAT testing purposes and in particular the equipment that was allocated to Councillors, as it was apparent that this equipment had not been PAT tested. Officers confirmed the Council had a robust service level agreement with WCC and agreed to provide Members with a briefing paper to clarify this issue.

- b) What are the current figures for use of Redditch Borough Council telephone and ICT equipment?

Current usage figures were not known and would be very difficult to monitor, particularly as the systems were now used across both BDC and RBC.

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Councillor Mould thanked the Head of Business Transformation for her support in preparing the responses for the meeting and for the continued work carried out in respect of the transformation process.

On behalf of the Committee, the Chair thanked the Portfolio Holder for his report.

RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

65. SICKNESS POLICY PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY AND SHORT, SHARP REVIEW

The Chair thanked Councillors Fisher and Witherspoon for the comprehensive report they had prepared within such a short timescale.

The Committee was informed that the Executive Committee had postponed consideration of the Officers' report on the Sickness Policy and it was therefore suggested that the Committee should postpone consideration of the scrutiny report on this subject in order to ensure that the two items were considered in tandem.

RESOLVED that

consideration of the Sickness Policy Pre-decision Scrutiny Short, Sharp Review be postponed until the Committee meeting to be held on 9th October 2012.

66. CONCESSIONARY RENTS - PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY

The Chair thanked Councillor Brazier for the work that had been carried out in completing the pre-decision scrutiny report.

The Committee was informed that the Executive Committee had postponed consideration of the Officers' report on Concessionary Rents and it was therefore suggested that the Committee should postpone consideration of the scrutiny report on this subject in order to ensure that the two items were considered in tandem.

RESOLVED that

consideration of the Concessionary Rents Pre-decision Scrutiny and Short, Sharp Review be postponed until the Committee meeting to be held on 9th October 2012.

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67. PORTFOLIO HOLDER ANNUAL REPORT - WRITTEN REPORT - PLANNING, REGENERATION, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND TRANSPORT PORTFOLIO

The Committee proposed the following list of questions for the consideration of the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Regeneration, Economic Development and Local Transport, Councillor Greg Chance, ahead of his appearance before the Committee on 9th October 2012.

- 1) Please could you outline what you consider to be:
 - a) The successes within the remit of your Portfolio?
 - b) Areas of concern within the remit of your portfolio?
- 2) Regarding economic development and regeneration in Redditch:
 - a) What are you plans to encourage new business start-ups in the town?
 - b) To what extent does Redditch have a cross-section of housing types to accommodate both employees and employers?
 - c) Within the emerging local plan, what is being done to encourage local developers to build?
 - d) Is the focus of the 'Eastern Gateway' strategic employment site being placed on generating new employment or housing development?
- 3) What are your plans for the regeneration of:
 - a) Town centre
 - b) Train station and its local environment
- 4) What plans do you have to engage local people, especially elderly residents and young people, on their aspirations for the town?
- 5) What are you doing to ensure that the proposer submitted for traffic surveys are based on current and not historic data and will cover all the roads that are likely to be affected by development?
- 6) Regarding European Regional Development Funding (ERDF):
 - a) How much funding is expected to be received in Redditch?
 - b) How will the funding received used to support young people setting up new businesses? Is there any provision in the ERDF to support this?

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- 7) Regarding *Choose How You Move 2*:
- a) How do you define 'sustainable transport' as part of this?
 - b) How will residents, businesses and visitors be encouraged to use sustainable modes of transport?
 - c) What are you expecting to achieve from this project?
- 8) What is being done to address any skills shortages issues being experienced by local businesses?

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 his annual report to the Committee on Tuesday 9th October 2012; and**
- 2) **the report be noted.**

68. ACTIONS LIST

Members' attention was drawn to a tabled paper which provided an update in respect of the recommendations made in relation to the War Memorial petition which was originally considered by the Committee at its meeting on 8th October 2011. It was explained that work was scheduled to be undertaken to resolve the two outstanding actions that were remaining ahead of Armistice Day. This concerned the installation of planters around the Memorial to deter anti-social behaviour, and the development of an education campaign in the local press to raise greater awareness about the purpose of the Memorial.

RESOLVED that

the Committee's Actions List be noted.

69. EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MINUTES AND SCRUTINY OF THE FORWARD PLAN

The Committee received the minutes of the Executive Committee meeting held on Tuesday 21st August 2012 and considered the latest edition of the Forward Plan.

Councillor Fry confirmed that the Access for Disabled People Task Group Report had been well received by the Executive Committee,

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although concerns had been raised in respect of the change of use of the covered market area and it was acknowledged that further work needed to be done in respect of any changes. Any work which encouraged improved access for disabled people into the town centre was seen as a positive development.

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee held on 21st August 2012 and the Forward Plan be noted.

70. TASK & FINISH REVIEWS - DRAFT SCOPING DOCUMENTS

There were no draft scoping documents.

71. TASK AND FINISH GROUPS - PROGRESS REPORTS

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

a) Arts and Culture Centre – Chair, Councillor Gay Hopkins

Members were informed that the first meeting of the Task and Finish Group had been arranged for Thursday 20th September 2012.

b) Redditch Market – Chair, Councillor Andrew Brazier

Councillor Brazier explained that a meeting had been held with representatives from North Worcestershire Economic Development and Regeneration to discuss its objectives for the market and what was currently being done on an operational level.

The Group recently visited Nuneaton Market to learn how a previously struggling market had reversed its fortunes. This had led to further information being requested. The next meeting of the group was planned to take place on Monday 24th September 2012.

RESOLVED that

the update reports be noted.

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72. HEALTH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Councillor Witherspoon confirmed that she would be attending the next meeting of the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC) which was due to take place on 12th September 2012. Members were informed that the agenda had contained an update report on the Joint Service Review, however this has now been removed in light of an announcement which she understood was due to be made on 14th September 2012. It was understood that this would include details of the final three or four options which would form the final part of the consultation process which was due to commence in October 2012. Councillor Witherspoon had been asked to arrange a meeting of the Older People's Forum as part of the consultation process.

RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

73. REFERRALS

There were no referrals.

74. WORK PROGRAMME

It was confirmed that Councillor Pattie Hill was hoping to attend the next meeting of the West Midlands Regional Scrutiny Network on 20th September 2012 and she agreed to provide Members with an update at the October meeting of the Committee if this was possible. Members were provided with future dates for the network meetings and asked to contact Officers if they were interested in attending.

Members were reminded of the Scrutiny training event which would take place on 25th September 2012 at 6.30pm.

RESOLVED that

the Committee's Work Programme be noted.

The Meeting commenced at 6.30 pm
and closed at 7.55 pm