

# Overview and Scrutiny Committee

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Tuesday, 10th January,  
2017

## MINUTES

### Present:

Councillor Jane Potter (Chair), Councillor Gay Hopkins (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Tom Baker-Price, Matthew Dormer, Andrew Fry, Paul Swansborough, Jennifer Wheeler and Nina Wood-Ford

### Officers:

Rebecca Dunne, Sue Hanley, Sam Morgan, Deb Poole and Liz Tompkin

### Democratic Services Officers:

J Bayley and A Scarce

#### 54. APOLOGIES AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Joe Baker.

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

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

#### 56. MINUTES

##### RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting held on 6th December 2016 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

#### 57. COUNCIL PLAN (INCLUDING LEISURE INTERVENTION WORK) - PRE-SCRUTINY

Officers gave a presentation which highlighted the salient points within the Council Plan. This included:

- The development of the Council Plan including using Member insight and customer demand data.
- Directors take forward development of their strategic purposes.

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Chair

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- Workshops and discussions with Portfolio Holders and key officers to draft actions.
- Officers had facilitated critical review of the draft actions before presentation at a Portfolio Holders' Briefing.
- The structure of the Plan; including the Council's recent achievements, finance section and strategic purposes and a section on how the authority works.
- Details of the next steps including presentation to the Executive Committee and Council, formal launch of the Plan with staff and the public.
- Work with Directors, Heads of Service and key officers to develop an implementation plan for the actions arising from it.
- Producing summaries for the public and internal use, including a timeline for the annual review process.

Following the presentation Members raised a number of issues and discussed in detail how the Plan would be implemented and the actions and funding would be monitored to enable them to be carried out. In particular questions were raised in respect of funding from partners, particularly Worcestershire County Council, and whether discussions had been held with partners about the council's preferred strategic aims prior to completing the plan. Furthermore Members questioned whether some of the content was purely aspirational and would need further work to ensure it was implemented.

Officers explained that the Council Plan was taking a strategic view and the next piece of work, which concentrated on implementation of the actions within the Plan, would need to be carried out quickly to ensure this happened. Members were reminded that it was a four year plan and therefore it would take time to deliver the actions. Questions were raised about how the monitoring would be organised, with reference being made to arrangements at Worcestershire County Council which provided information about how the authority was judged on its plans. The Committee was advised that the actions aligned to the plan would be monitored annually by the Senior Management and Corporate Management Teams.

It was also commented that there was little information for residents in respect of finances and that it would be helpful to include costs and funds which needed to be raised to give an understanding of how the Council delivered its services. Officers advised that whilst there was a section within the Plan in respect of finances resource implications against each specific project would be included in the Action Plan. It was acknowledged that this would highlight particular areas which the Council subsidised.

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Members were unanimous in the decision that it would be useful for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to receive biannual update reports on the progress of implementation of actions and negotiations with partners, to ensure that the Council Plan was achievable whilst still being able to produce a balanced budget.

Officers provided an update in respect of the Leisure Intervention work which had been carried out, which linked in to the Council Plan and the Council's strategic purpose; provide good things for me to do, see and visit. Officers had identified how the facilities could best meet the needs of the customer, which had included the extension of the dance studio to ensure current users were retained and to build on the membership base, an additional spin studio had been created to meet customer need and current fitness trends. The team had also worked in partnership with schools and other stakeholders to provide sports development activities to improve the health and wellbeing of residents and purchased additional fitness equipment to ensure a quality provision was available to its members.

Members were informed that there had also been an increased focus on cost recovery to ensure that any areas within the Leisure Service that were subsidised by the Council were reviewed with the aim of reducing the level of funding required whilst protecting those members of the community who were more vulnerable. Officers had analysed every activity to calculate the percentage of costs that were recovered and the recent fees and charges proposals aimed to reduce the gap between the cost of the service and the income it generated.

Officers had proposed further interventions be undertaken over the next 12 months to ensure that the services provided were as efficient as possible. It was also proposed that during this time a report be developed for Members to consider, detailing the available options in relation to an alternative model of delivery, which would include the service being delivered within a trust arrangement. Officers highlighted that this could be framed in a number of different ways, dependent upon requirements and level of savings. Information in respect of anticipated savings would be included within the Medium Term Financial Plan, together with costs for support in delivering such a business case. It was anticipated that a report would be presented to the Executive Committee and Council by August 2017.

Following this update, Members discussed a number of areas in more detail, including:

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- An expectation that the Committee would receive a written report in respect of the transformational work which had been carried out.
- It was highlighted that the Committee had delayed consideration of its Leisure Services report in anticipation of receiving that transformation report.
- Timescales and implication of following the leisure trust route.

## **RESOLVED that**

- 1) the Overview and Scrutiny Committee receive twice yearly updates in respect of the Council Plan;**
- 2) the Overview and Scrutiny Board receive a written report in respect of the transformational and intervention work carried out within Leisure and Cultural Services.**
- 3) the draft Council Plan be noted.**

## **58. LGB&T TASK GROUP - UPDATE REPORT**

Officers presented a briefing paper which detailed the actions that had been taken in respect of the recommendations from the LGBT Task Group which fell to the Policy Team to deliver.

LGBT History Month 2016 has been a positive event which was held at the Palace Theatre, which culminated in a performance from the Rainbow Voices Choir. It was explained that Officers had co-ordinated much of the event and would be working with the Palace Theatre again for this year's event, which was due to be held in February.

Officers explained that although the recommendation in respect of the Stonewall Index had not been completed, this was currently being worked towards. The reasons for this not being completed were explained together with details of the work which would be carried out in order to submit an application this year. The work involved in the application was considerably more than anticipated, however to date the team had gone through the most recent submission document and rated what it had already achieved before the deadline of September 2017 and which actions were not currently possible. Several meetings had been held with Human Resources (HR) to ensure that the requirements were met from an HR perspective, as a number of policies were due to be reviewed in 2017. Contact had been made with a number of outside agencies for support and it was interesting to note when the West Midlands

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Local Authority Equalities Network officers were informed they had revealed that none of the other authorities in the West Midlands were planning on submitting an application.

Details were provided of the next steps which needed to be taken in order to proceed with the submission and it was confirmed that a plan would be produced which would highlight the elements which needed further work, together with implementation timescales. Members questioned why other authorities had not considered signing up to it and officers confirmed that it was a lot more work than they had anticipated and perhaps this was off putting for some authorities. Whilst it was a lot of work the Council had made a commitment to sign up and therefore officers were using it as a positive piece of work and an opportunity to review a number of its policies.

**RESOLVED that**

**the LGBT Task Group update be noted.**

## **59. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT 2017/18 - PRE-SCRUTINY**

Officers presented the Housing Revenue Account Budget 2017/18 to 2019/20 report and in so doing highlighted the following:-

- This was an annual report considered by the Executive Committee and full Council. The report only considered those items included in the Housing Revenue Account (HRA).
- The three year budget projections included the 1% rent reduction.
- Over a 30 year period the loss of rental income was estimated at £120.873m.
- The 1% increase gave an average rent on a 52 week basis of £78.63 or £85.18 on a 48 week basis.
- During 2014/15 41 council houses were sold under the right to buy scheme. For the period 1st April 2015 to 1st December 2016 53 houses had been sold.
- The budget and four year forecast assumed 70 right to buys per annum which equated to a rent loss of £0.315m per annum. In total this represented nearly £1.260m rent loss over the four year period.

During consideration of the report Members raised a number of points to which Officers responded. These included:

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- The significant decrease in the net cost of services. Officers provided a detailed explanation as to the methodology behind this.
- The provision for bad debts and what actions were taken to reduce or recover these. Officers confirmed that this was reviewed annually and discussed in detail with the Auditors. Bad debts had decreased significantly in recent years.
- The criteria which was used by the Council when purchasing a house on the open market. Officers explained that unless a house was being sourced for a particular family the average purchasing price considered was £130-140,000. Dependent on the property's condition the Council would not wish to spend more than £15,000 in order to bring a house up to the standards required for a local authority property.

Members discussed a number of options in respect of replenishing the Council's house stock and whether consideration had been given to the Council building its own houses as opposed to linking into housing schemes via developers. Officers explained that a number of options would be considered in the future, however the Council was in the process of purchasing nine houses on the open market to ensure the right to buy receipts were allocated in the appropriate timescales. In 2015/16 five properties had been purchased, by the end of 2016/17 it was expected that the Council would have purchased fifteen properties and in 2017/18 Officers were anticipating that the Council would purchase 47 properties. The Housing, Strategic Housing and Planning teams were in discussions to ensure that all options were considered. This included the development of a number of pieces of land which were owned by the local authority and working with a housing association or the Council developing its own properties.

## **RECOMMENDED that**

- 1) the draft 2017/18 Budget for the Housing Revenue Account attached to the report at Appendix A, be approved;**
- 2) the three year budget projections 2017/18 to 2019/20, incorporating the 1% rent reduction be approved;**
- 3) the actual average recent decrease for 2017/18 be 1%; and**
- 4) that £780,614 be transferred to the capital reserve in 2017/18 to fund the future Capital Programme and / or repay borrowing.**

## 60. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN UPDATE REPORT - PRE-SCRUTINY

Prior to the presentation from the Officers Members discussed the number of reports for pre-decision scrutiny and the quantity of information which had been received within their additional papers pack. The Committee was unanimous in its view that receiving such information at a late stage was not conducive to constructive scrutiny. Officers advised that within the Council's Constitution it was clearly stated that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee was not entitled to any document that was in draft form. Thus, the Committee were not automatically able to see such documents until they had been published as part of the Executive Committee's agenda; which usually occurred the day before the Overview and Scrutiny Committee met. A number of options were considered by the Committee in this respect including an amendment to the Constitution and changing the dates of future meetings on a temporary basis until the matter could be considered by the Constitution Review Working Party.

Officers then proceeded to deliver an update on the Budget. During the presentation the following areas were covered:

- The impact of the settlement and areas where clarification was still awaited, this included Localisation of Business Rates and New Homes Bonus.
- The option to increase Council Tax by up to 2% or £5 (Band D equivalent).
- New Homes Bonus – the outcomes of the initial consultation and the expected final proposal and the impact on the Council. There was an expectation that the scheme would reduce from 6 years to 4 which would have a financial impact.
- The Efficiency Plan – a report was being developed which would be presented to the February Executive and Overview and Scrutiny Committee meetings and to Council on 20<sup>th</sup> February.
- Details of the shortfall that needed to be addressed in order for the Council to have a balanced budget.

Following the presentation Officers responded to questions from Members, with particular focus being given to whether the Council was able to have a balanced budget for 2017/18. Officers confirmed that a number of options were being considered in order to achieve this and a report would be brought before Members in February with full details. A workshop was being held for all fourth tier Managers which would concentrate on commercialisation and to discuss potential income streams and additional savings which

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needed to be made. There was also the option of using balances should Members wish to go down this route.

Members went on to discuss a number of options for raising additional funds, in particular strategic housing and options in respect of funds available through the New Homes Bonus scheme. It was confirmed that a report in respect of this would be considered at the Executive Committee meeting due to be held on 17<sup>th</sup> January 2017.

After further discussion it was

**RECOMMENDED to the Constitutional Review Working Party that**

**the Constitutional Review Working Party give consideration to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee being permitted access to reports for the Executive Committee at an earlier stage than currently takes place; and**

**RESOLVED that**

**in the short term Officers investigate the potential to move meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to the Thursday for 2017/18.**

## **61. EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MINUTES AND SCRUTINY OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE'S WORK PROGRAMME**

Officers highlighted Minute No.s 53 and 54 and confirmed that the recommendations put forward by the Budget Scrutiny and Performance Scrutiny Working Groups had been accepted by the Executive Committee. A recommendation from the Performance Scrutiny Working Group in respect of Member training would be considered by the Member Support Steering Group at its meeting due to be held on 23rd January 2017. However, Councillor Potter confirmed that the Committee's recommendation in respect of bulky waste had not been accepted.

Councillor Baker-Price requested sight of the Housing Strategy Report. Officers confirmed that this would be considered at the meeting of the Executive Committee due to be held on 17th January and therefore the Overview and Scrutiny Committee were not in a position to carry out pre-scrutiny of this document. However the topic could still be considered for noting after 17th January.



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**RESOLVED that**

**the Executive Committee Minutes of 13th December 2016, together with the various updates provided and the latest edition of the Executive Committee's Work Programme, be noted.**

## **62. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME**

There were no updates to the Work Programme from Officers. However, Members requested that the Protecting Redditch's Heritage Assets Short Sharp Review item, scheduled to be launched in April, be removed from the Work Programme.

**RESOLVED that**

**subject to the pre-amble above, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's Work Programme be noted.**

## **63. WORKING GROUPS - UPDATE REPORTS**

Budget Scrutiny Working Group – Chair, Councillor Jane Potter

Councillor Potter confirmed that there had been no meeting of the Group since the last update provided to the Committee. However a meeting was scheduled for 17th January 2017.

Performance Scrutiny Working Group – Chair, Councillor Tom Baker-Price

Councillor Baker-Price reported that at its last meeting the group had met with the Chief Executive and discussed corporate performance and target setting in some detail. The group had also looked at communications and marketing and at its forthcoming meeting on 13th January would interview Officers about room bookings at the Council and staff performance.

## **64. TASK GROUPS - PROGRESS REPORTS**

Mental Health Services for Young People Task Group – Chair, Councillor Nina Wood-Ford

Councillor Wood-Ford informed Members that since the last update, the group had been advised about a suicide prevention strategy which was in the early stages of development. A number of written responses to questions from witnesses who were unable to attend scheduled meetings were expected and Members of the group

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hoped to attend a Wellbeing Event at the Town Hall later in the month.

## Staff Survey Joint Scrutiny Task Group – Vice Chair, Councillor Jane Potter

Councillor Potter advised Members that at the latest meeting of the group Members had discussed with Officers the questionnaire and response rate and how the questions themselves had been formulated. These had been the same as those of the survey issued in 2013 to allow for comparable data to be produced. The group had also discussed the Cultural Referendum which had been issued to staff on 15th December 2016. The referendum had contained two open questions which staff were invited to give their views on. It was hoped that the group would be able to consider the results of this referendum at a future meeting. Officers confirmed that the data had not yet been released, but would be available for consideration in due course. The group had also been provided with background information in respect of Shared Services, which had helped to clarify the number of staff at each location.

The next meeting of the Group was to be held on 18th January when Members would interview the Chief Executive as lead officer of the Programme Board which had been set up in response to the staff survey as well as supporting officers who were taking a lead on specific areas. The group had also asked to see the Action Plan which the Board had produced.

## **65. HEALTH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

Councillor Wood-Ford, the Council's representative on the Worcestershire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC), had been unable to attend the Committee's most recent meeting. The minutes for the meeting had not yet been published but, Councillor Wood-Ford provided a brief overview of the areas which had been included within the agenda for the meeting. These included:

- Dentistry in Worcestershire
- Pharmacy Services in Worcestershire
- Fast food outlets and health
- Stroke Services

It was understood that the dentistry item had been brought up following issues in Worcester and the Pharmacy Services item was around encouraging people to visit Pharmacies rather than GPs in

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the first instance. Members discussed the potential for Pharmacists to issue prescription drugs to further release the pressure on GPs.

## 66. WEST MIDLANDS COMBINED AUTHORITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Officers explained that unfortunately neither Councillor Wheeler, the Council's representative on the West Midlands Combined Authority Overview and Scrutiny Committee, nor the substitute, Councillor Nina Wood-Ford, were able to attend the meeting held on 16<sup>th</sup> December. However, Officers had attended to observe and provided the following update:

- An operational structure had been proposed with the Committee acting as a Management Committee over a number of subsidiary select committees.
- The Mental Health Commission, Land Commission and the Productivity and Skills Commission had been selected as topics for the select committees to review.
- Councillor Wheeler had shown an interest in taking part in the Mental Health Commission following her work on the Mental Health Services for Young People Task Group.
- The Committee might make recommendations which would require work from authorities' Overview and Scrutiny Committees.
- The next meeting was likely to take place on 27th January 2017.

The Meeting commenced at 7.00 pm  
and closed at 8.53 pm