



OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

9th April 2008

Committee

MINUTES

Present:

Councillor Colin MacMillan (Chair), Councillor Andrew Fry (Vice-Chair) and Councillors K Banks, J Brunner, J Cookson, B Passingham, D Taylor and D Thomas

Officers:

E Storer, J Smith, S Hanley and T Kristunas.

Overview and Scrutiny Support Officers:

H Saunders and J Bayley

162. APOLOGIES AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Mike Chawner (Borough Tenants' Panel representative).

163. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND OF PARTY WHIP

There were no declarations of interest or of any party whip.

164. MINUTES

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meetings of the Committee held on the 19th of March and the 27th of March be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

165. ACTIONS LIST

The Committee considered a list of agreed actions.

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Chair

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The Chair explained that an exercise, due to take place during the Work Programme Planning Day on the 23rd of May, would deal with the third point listed on the Actions List. This point, which had been raised at a meeting of the Committee on the 7th of February 2008, noted that Members had agreed to consult within their parties to identify potential items for scrutiny.

RESOLVED that

subject to the update recorded in the preamble above, the Actions List be noted.

166. CALL-IN

Members received the Decision Notice from the meeting of the Executive Committee held on Wednesday, the 2nd of April 2008.

Officers referred to Decision 234, which related to the introduction of additional fees and charges for existing Planning Services functions. This had been recommended by the Fees and Charges Task and Finish Group, via the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Officers explained that the recommended additional fees had been approved, subject to receipt of legal advice. Members were informed that the Head of Legal, Democratic and Property Services (HLDP) had investigated this issue and had identified that it would be legally permissible to introduce these fees. The Head of Legal, Democratic and Property Services was due to report back on the subject at the Council meeting on the 21st April.

No call ins were required.

167. TASK & FINISH REVIEWS - DRAFT SCOPING DOCUMENTS

Members were reminded that they were due to consider the Reporting Council Priorities Draft Scoping Report.

RESOLVED that

consideration of the Reporting Council Priorities Draft Scoping Report be postponed until the Work Programme Planning Day, due to be held on Friday, the 23rd of May.

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168. JOINT SCRUTINY EXERCISE ON FLOODING

Members noted the contents of the reports attached to the agenda.

Members asked Officers, on behalf of the Committee, to thank Councillor Chalk for his work on the Joint Scrutiny Exercise.

Officers explained that the Operations Manager had also been attending County Officer-level meetings on flooding and that he too had been commended for his work.

Members raised concerns about the blocked condition of Batchley Brook, the ditches in the woods behind Poplar Road, and the river at the bend in Abbeydale, close to the allotments.

The Chair suggested that, owing to Member interest, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee should review the issue of ditches, and the resources required to maintain or clean them, following completion of the Joint Scrutiny Exercise into Flooding. This review could take the form of either a short, sharp parent Committee debate or a Task and Finish review.

RESOLVED that

- 1) Officers pass on the Committee's thanks to Councillor Chalk for his work on the Joint Scrutiny Exercise;**
- 2) Officers provide further information about work being done to address the condition of the Batchley ditches;**
- 3) Officers add the review of ditches to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme; and**
- 4) the report be noted and the proposed action detailed in the preamble above agreed.**

169. COMMUNICATIONS TASK AND FINISH GROUP DRAFT FINAL REPORT

The Committee received the draft final report of the Communications Task and Finish Group.

The Chair explained that, if accepted by the Committee, the Task and Finish Group's reports would be forwarded to the Executive Committee meeting of Wednesday, the 23rd of April. The Chair

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clarified that the O&S Committee was to decide on a course of action when considering each report. If only minor changes were required, such as changes to grammar or phrasing, then these could be accepted by the Chair of the Group. However, if the Committee proposed major alterations or further work, then the Task and Finish Group in question would need to reconvene to undertake the necessary work and report back to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at a later date.

The Chair of the Communications Task and Finish Group presented the recommendations of the Group to the Committee. The Chair began by thanking the members of the Group and Officers that had participated in the exercise. The Chair of the Group commented that one potential recommendation of the Group was that the Communications Team should be reviewed. However, whilst undertaking the exercise, Officers had informed the Group that they were in the process of conducting a separate service review of the Communications Team. Officers informed the Committee that there would be some changes to the staffing structure of the Communications Team which would result in additional resources being directed to the Team.

The Chair of the Group explained that the recommendations were grouped under seven key themes. Under the theme of "Prioritising Communications", Members agreed that the wording of recommendation 1a) should be changed to read "the Council adopt communications as an underpinning principle of the key priorities of the Council". Members also agreed that reference to the "five" key messages should be omitted and only referred to as "key messages".

The Chair suggested that recommendation 1c) relating to the Council website should be clarified to include reference to a specific timeframe for the Council website to be updated. Members agreed this suggestion. Members also agreed that recommendation 1d) relating to the review of progress of recommendations should be removed. Members suggested stating, in the body of the report, that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee would review the recommendations of the review in twelve months.

Members suggested that an additional recommendation should be made under the theme of "corporate branding". Members felt that an additional recommendation proposing the introduction of staff briefings on the Council's corporate brand and how employees convey this when dealing with customers should be made. It was

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agreed that this recommendation should acknowledge the Council's existing customer contact standards.

Under the theme of "media relations", Members felt that recommendation 7c) regarding comments on press releases should be rephrased to refer to obtaining comments from the relevant "spokesperson".

RESOLVED that

- 1) the wording of recommendation 1a be changed to read "the Council adopt communications as an underpinning principle of the key priorities of the Council";**
- 2) recommendation 1c) relating to the updating of the Council website be clarified to include a timescale within which the Council website should be updated;**
- 3) recommendation 1d) regarding the review of recommendations made by the Task and Finish Group in twelve months be removed;**
- 4) a recommendation be added under the theme of "corporate branding" recommending the introduction of staff briefings on the Council's corporate brand and how staff convey this when dealing with customers;**
- 5) recommendation 7c) relating to spokesperson comments on press releases be rephrased to refer to obtaining comments from the relevant "spokesperson"; and a sentence be added to explain that, where comments are requested from Portfolio Holders they should have 24 hours to provide a response; and**
- 6) the Executive Committee be asked to consider the recommendations of the Communications Task and Finish Group, as amended by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and as detailed in the resolutions above.**

170. DISTRICT CENTRES TASK AND FINISH GROUP DRAFT FINAL REPORT

The Chair of the District Centres Task and Finish Group introduced

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his Group's draft final report and began by thanking the Members and Officers that had worked on the exercise.

The Chair of the Group explained each recommendation in turn. Members agreed that the first recommendation needed to be clarified by stating that Officers should carry out further work to develop the Improvement Fund.

Members discussed the fourth recommendation regarding the installation of an Automatic Teller Machine (ATM) outside or inside the Costcutter supermarket in Woodrow.

Officers informed Members that an ATM machine had been installed inside the supermarket; however, it was a machine that charged for dispensing money. Members were keen to pursue this recommendation and requested that Officers alter the recommendation to request that a free ATM be installed outside the Costcutter supermarket.

Members discussed the fifth recommendation regarding the Council's use of the Probation Service to provide extra resources to undertake work at the District Centres. Officers clarified that the Probation Service would only be able to undertake work not already part of the work schedules of the Council. Therefore, Officers suggested rephrasing the recommendation to read "where there is scope, the Council work with the Probation Service to deliver specific enhancement works in Matchborough, Woodrow and Winyates District Centres".

Members discussed recommendation 7 regarding inviting the community group What's Your Point to repaint the commercial unit's shutters at the District Centres. Officers informed Members that What's Your Point charged for their services and the Group had charged the Council for painting of the mural under the underpass in the town centre. Members agreed that a rough cost for the repainting and decorating of the shutters should be inserted into the recommendation and agreed that £5,000 should be allocated for this job.

Recommendation 9, the resurfacing of the Winyates Centre, was discussed by the Committee. Officers informed Members that a £30,000 budget was already allocated to Phase Three which involved basic upgrading of the tarmac surface around the central precinct. Members decided to amend this recommendation by taking out reference to Phase Three but keeping Phase One and

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Two, acknowledging that, if supported?, these would be subject to a capital bid for 2009 / 2010.

The Chair of the Group explained that the Group had proposed 3 different forms of action in relation to recommendation 10, the possible opening of the 57 / 58 bus routes. Officers explained that the Committee was being asked to approve either one of these options or put forward two of these options as a majority and minority recommendation, in accordance with constitutional requirements. Officers reminded Members that ultimately decisions about the bus routes lay with the County Council. Some Members argued that the County would be very unlikely to change its policy regarding bus lanes in Redditch; however, some Members believed that the County should be challenged about this issue.

Members debated this issue and ultimately agreed that the 57 / 58 bus lane should be maintained as a bus only route.

Members considered recommendation 11 regarding the removal of chewing gum from the pavements in the District Centres. Officers reported a suggestion proposed by a member of the Group given after the publication of the draft report. This Member had suggested that the recommendation should stipulate that the Council not only review the costs of buying machinery for the removal of chewing gum but also the costs of hiring machinery, or contracting the service out, to ensure that the best option financially for the Council was selected. Members agreed that these options should be taken into account and that the recommendation should be reworded to reflect this.

Members discussed the final recommendation regarding the proposal that Woodrow District Centre should be the next District Centre for redevelopment. Officers suggested that all three of the remaining District Centres needed redeveloping. Members agreed that this was the case and that the final recommendation should reflect this.

RESOLVED that

with regard to the recommendations detailed in the Task & Finish Group's report,

- 1) recommendation 1) regarding the introduction of an Improvement Fund be clarified by stating that Officers should carry out further work to develop the Improvement Fund;**

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- 2) recommendation 4) relating to the ATM at Woodrow be amended to request that a free ATM be installed outside the Costcutter supermarket;
- 3) recommendation 5) be rephrased to read “where there is scope, the Council work with the Probation Service to deliver specific enhancement works in Matchborough, Woodrow and Winyates District Centres”;
- 4) a cost of £5,000 be allocated for the repainting of the shutters and that recommendation 7) be amended in order to reflect this;
- 5) recommendation 9) that relates to the resurfacing of the Winyates Centre be amended by taking out reference to Phase Three and acknowledging that, if accepted, Phase One and Two would be subject to a capital bid for 2009 / 2010;
- 6) the 57/58 bus route be maintained as a bus only route;
- 7) the first sentence of recommendation 11) be altered to read “the Council investigate the relative costs of either contracting out or buying the machinery to remove chewing gum from the paved surfaces in the three District Centres”;
- 8) recommendation 12) be amended to reflect the need for all of the remaining District Centres to be redeveloped; and
- 9) the Executive Committee be requested to consider the recommendations of the District Centres Task and Finish Group, as amended by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and as detailed in the resolutions above.

171. FEES AND CHARGES TASK AND FINISH GROUP: DRAFT CHARGING POLICY

The Committee received the draft Charging Policy report, proposed by the Fees & Charges Task & Finish Group.

In introducing the report, the Chair explained that the Group had considered the need for the Council to develop a comprehensive charging policy. The Chair of the Group explained that the Group had examined examples of charging policies from other local

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authorities and had used these to develop a draft charging policy for the Council. The Chair explained that the policy set out key processes, reporting procedures, and key policy principles.

Members questioned paragraph 5.5 in the covering report relating to the different types of charging by the Council. Members requested that the first sentence be removed and the second sentence be qualified by using the details regarding the categorisation of services contained in paragraph 2.5a of the proposed charging policy.

Members considered the draft charging policy and requested that some minor alterations be made. Members queried paragraph 1.2a relating to the objectives the Council should be clear about in their approach to charging and asked that the wording be altered to read “which service users will be affected by charges”. Members also requested that paragraph 1.5e outlining the considerations to be addressed by the Council when setting charges, be altered to read “How much do residents, communities and businesses value the service?” A further alteration was requested by Members for the same paragraph on point 1.5c. Members asked that the paragraph be rephrased to read “should this service be subsidised?”

RESOLVED that

- 1) In respect of paragraph 5.5. of the covering report that relates to the different types of charging, the first sentence be removed and the second sentence be qualified by using the details regarding the categorisation of services contained in paragraph 2.5a of the proposed charging policy;**
- 2) the wording in paragraph 1.2a of the proposed charging policy that relates to the Councils objectives in their approach to charging be altered to read “which service users will be affected by charges”;**
- 3) the wording in paragraph 1.5e of the proposed charging policy that outlines the considerations to be addressed the Council when setting charges be altered to read “How much do residents, communities and businesses value the service?”;**
- 4) the wording in paragraph 1.5c of the proposed charging policy that outlines the considerations to be addressed when setting charges be rephrased to read “should this**

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service be subsidised?"; and

- 5) the Executive Committee be asked to consider the proposed draft charging policy of the Fees and Charges Task and Finish Group as amended by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and as detailed in the resolutions above.

172. DRAFT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT

The Committee considered a draft Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report for 2007/08. Members agreed that the report accurately reflected the work of the Committee through the year.

RESOLVED that

- 1) a press release be sent to the local media advertising the work of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in the current year;
- 2) a photograph of the Committee be taken before full Council on the 21st of April, to accompany the press release;
- 3) Full Council be asked to consider the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Annual Report; and
- 4) subject to all the above, the Committee note the report.

173. REFERRALS

There were no referrals.

174. WORK PROGRAMME

RESOLVED that

the Committee's Work Programme be noted, as amended by the earlier items on the agenda.

175. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

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The Meeting commenced at 7.05 pm
and closed at 9.30 pm