

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Wed 9 Apr
2008
7.00 pm

Committee Room Two
Town Hall
Redditch



www.redditchbc.gov.uk

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- Access to a list specifying those powers which the Council has delegated to its Officers indicating also the titles of the Officers concerned.
- Access to a summary of the rights of the public to attend meetings of the Council and its Committees etc. and to inspect and copy documents.
- In addition, the public now has a right to be present when the Council determines “Key Decisions” unless the business would disclose confidential or “exempt” information.
- Unless otherwise stated, all items of business before the Executive Committee are Key Decisions.
- (Copies of Agenda Lists are published in advance of the meetings on the Council’s Website:
www.redditchbc.gov.uk

If you have any queries on this Agenda or any of the decisions taken or wish to exercise any of the above rights of access to information, please contact

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آپ انگریزی میں مدد چاہتے ہیں— نسلیاتی رسائی [Ethnic Access] سے رابطہ کریں ٹیلیفون: 01905 25121

ইংরেজি ভাষার বিষয়ে সাহায্য চান – এথনিক অ্যাকসেস [Ethnic Access] এর সঙ্গে যোগাযোগ করুন,
টেলিফোন: 01905 25121

‘Potrzebujesz pomocy z Angielskim – skontaktuj się z Ethnic Access Tel: 01905 25121’

Welcome to today's meeting.

Guidance for the Public

Agenda Papers

The **Agenda List** at the front of the Agenda summarises the issues to be discussed and is followed by the Officers' full supporting **Reports**.

Chair

The Chair is responsible for the proper conduct of the meeting. Generally to one side of the Chair is the Committee Support Officer who gives advice on the proper conduct of the meeting and ensures that the debate and the decisions are properly recorded. On the Chair's other side are the relevant Council Officers. The Councillors ("Members") of the Committee occupy the remaining seats around the table.

Running Order

Items will normally be taken in the order printed but, in particular circumstances, the Chair may agree to vary the order.

Refreshments : tea, coffee and water are normally available at meetings - please serve yourself.

Decisions

Decisions at the meeting will be taken by the **Councillors** who are the democratically elected representatives. They are advised by **Officers** who are paid professionals and do not have a vote.

Members of the Public

Members of the public may, by prior arrangement, speak at meetings of the Council or its Committees. Specific procedures exist for Appeals Hearings or for meetings involving Licence or Planning Applications. For further information on this point, please speak to the Committee Support Officer.

Special Arrangements

If you have any particular needs, please contact the Committee Support Officer.

Infra-red devices for the hearing impaired are available on request at the meeting. Other facilities may require prior arrangement.

Further Information

If you require any further information, please contact the Committee Support Officer (see foot of page opposite).

Fire/ Emergency instructions

If the alarm is sounded, please leave the building by the nearest available exit – these are clearly indicated within all the Committee Rooms.

If you discover a fire, inform a member of staff or operate the nearest alarm call point (wall mounted red rectangular box). In the event of the fire alarm sounding, leave the building immediately following the fire exit signs. Officers have been appointed with responsibility to ensure that all visitors are escorted from the building.

Do Not stop to collect personal belongings.

Do Not use lifts.

Do Not re-enter the building until told to do so.

The emergency Assembly Area is on the Ringway Car Park.

Declaration of Interests: Guidance for Councillors

DO I HAVE A "PERSONAL INTEREST" ?

- Where the item relates or is likely to affect your **registered interests** (what you have declared on the formal Register of Interests)

OR

- Where a decision in relation to the item might reasonably be regarded as affecting **your own** well-being or financial position, or that of your **family**, or your **close associates** more than most other people affected by the issue,

you have a personal interest.

WHAT MUST I DO? **Declare the existence, and nature, of your interest and stay**

- The declaration must relate to specific business being decided - a general scattergun approach is not needed
- **Exception** - where interest arises only because of your membership of another **public body**, there is no need to declare unless you **speak** on the matter.
- You **can vote** on the matter.

IS IT A "PREJUDICIAL INTEREST" ?

In general only if:-

- It is a personal interest **and**
 - The item affects your **financial position** (or conveys other benefits), or the position of your **family, close associates** or bodies through which you have a **registered interest** (or relates to the exercise of **regulatory functions** in relation to these groups)
- and**
- A member of public, with knowledge of the relevant facts, would reasonably believe the interest was likely to **prejudice** your judgement of the public interest.

WHAT MUST I DO? **Declare and Withdraw**

BUT you may make representations to the meeting before withdrawing, **if** the public have similar rights (such as the right to speak at Planning Committee).



OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 9th April, 2008

7.00 pm

Committee Room 2 Town Hall

Agenda

Membership:

Cllrs:	K Banks	C MacMillan (Chair)
	J Brunner	B Passingham
	J Cookson	D Taylor
	A Fry (Vice-Chair)	D Thomas

1. Apologies and named substitutes	To receive apologies for absence and details of any Councillor (or co-optee substitute) nominated to attend this meeting in place of a member of this Committee.
2. Declarations of interest and of Party Whip	To invite Councillors to declare any interest they may have in items on the Agenda and any Party Whip. (No Specific Ward Relevance)
3. Minutes (Pages 1 - 6)	To confirm the minutes of the most recent meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee as a correct record. (Minutes attached) (No Specific Ward Relevance)
4. Actions List (Pages 7 - 12)	To note the contents of the Overview and Scrutiny Actions List. (Report attached) (No Specific Ward Relevance)
5. Call-in	To consider whether any Key Decisions of the Executive Committee's most recent meeting(s) should be subject to call-in. (No separate report). (No Specific Ward Relevance)

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

Committee

Wednesday, 9th April, 2008

<p>6. Task & Finish Reviews - Draft Scoping Documents</p>	<p>To consider any scoping documents provided for possible Overview and Scrutiny review.</p> <p>(No reports attached)</p> <p>No direct ward relevance</p> <p>(No Specific Ward Relevance)</p>
<p>7. Joint Scrutiny Exercise on Flooding (Pages 13 - 18)</p>	<p>To consider further developments in the joint scrutiny exercise on flooding.</p> <p>(Report attached)</p> <p>(No Specific Ward Relevance)</p>
<p>8. Communications Task and Finish Group Draft Final Report (Pages 19 - 54)</p>	<p>To consider the draft final report and recommendations of Stage Two of the Communications Task and Finish Group.</p> <p>(Report to follow)</p> <p>(No Specific Ward Relevance)</p>
<p>9. District Centres Task and Finish Group Draft Final Report (Pages 55 - 94)</p>	<p>To consider the draft final report and recommendations of the District Centres Task and Finish Group.</p> <p>(Report to follow)</p> <p>Various Wards</p>
<p>10. Fees and Charges Task and Finish Group: Draft Charging Policy (Pages 95 - 106)</p>	<p>To consider the draft charging policy produced by the Fees and Charges Task and Finish Group.</p> <p>(Report attached)</p> <p>(No Specific Ward Relevance)</p>

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

Committee

Wednesday, 9th April, 2008

<p>11. Draft Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report (Pages 107 - 136)</p>	<p>To consider the draft Overview and Scrutiny Committee's Annual Report for the year 2007/08.</p> <p>(Report to follow)</p> <p>(No Specific Ward Relevance)</p>
<p>12. Referrals</p>	<p>To consider any referrals to the Overview & Scrutiny Committee direct, or arising from:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Executive Committee or full Council• Other sources. <p>(No separate report).</p> <p>(No Direct Ward relevance)</p> <p>(No Specific Ward Relevance)</p>
<p>13. Work Programme</p>	<p>To consider the Committee's current Work Programme, and potential items for addition to the list arising from:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Forward Plan / Committee agendas• External publications• Other sources. <p>(Report attached)</p> <p>(No Specific Ward Relevance)</p>

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

Committee

Wednesday, 9th April, 2008

14. Exclusion of the Press and Public

Should it be necessary, in the opinion of the Borough Director, during the course of the meeting to consider excluding the public from the meeting on the grounds that exempt information is likely to be divulged, it may be necessary to move the following resolution:

“That, under S.100 (A) (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting for the following matter(s) on the grounds that it/they involve(s) the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in the relevant paragraphs (to be specified) of Part 1 of Schedule 12 (A) of the said Act”.



Overview & Scrutiny Committee

27th March 2008

Minutes

Present:

Councillor C. MacMillan (Chair) and Councillors Banks, Cookson, Fry and Thomas.

Officers:

S Shammon and J Staniland.

Overview and Scrutiny Support Officers:

J Bayley and H Saunders.

151. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors Brunner and Taylor.

152. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND OF PARTY WHIP

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

153. MINUTES

The Chair reported that, with his agreement, the minutes from the previous meeting, held on Wednesday the 19th March 2008, would be presented to the following meeting of the Committee on Wednesday the 9th April 2008.

154. ACTIONS LIST

Officers reported that a completion date had been provided for the first action detailed on the Action List, requested at a meeting of the Committee on the 7th November 2007. Officers estimated that the information would be made available for Members' consideration by Tuesday the 15th April 2008.

Officers further reported that information about the extended recycling services and cemeteries, as requested at previous meetings, had been provided for the consideration of Members.

RESOLVED that

the Actions List be noted.

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CHAIR

Overview & Scrutiny

Committee

27th March 2008

155. **GYPSIES AND TRAVELLERS – JOINT POLICY ON UNAUTHORISED ENCAMPMENTS**

Officers explained that a discussion of the Worcestershire Joint Policy on unauthorised Gypsy and Traveller encampments had been proposed at a previous meeting to provide Members of the Committee with an opportunity to discuss the subject of a proposed scrutiny exercise.

Officers explained that the joint policy had been adopted by the Worcestershire District Councils, the County Council and West Mercia Police in 1995. Members were informed that the policy document had subsequently been amended in 2000 and 2006 and that any of the partners could propose further changes to the policy.

Officers explained that the Policy outlined the roles of the Council, the County Council, West Mercia Police and other partner organisations in response to unauthorised encampments. Members noted that Redditch Borough Council was responsible for the use of Council owned land and property. Officers reported that the Borough Council was not responsible for unauthorised sites on private land, though the Council would approach private landlords to ensure that they were aware of their responsibilities, particularly when there were Environmental Health concerns. Officers explained that Worcestershire County Council was responsible for the provision of authorised traveller sites and for monitoring the movements of gypsies and travellers in the County.

Members were informed that the Council was required to abide by the policy, which incorporated the principles set out by the Human Rights Act and Race Relations (Amendment) Act, when investigating unauthorised encampments. Government-issued guidance “Managing Unauthorised Camping – A Good Practice Guide” and subsequent circulars encouraged Councils to be tolerant of gypsies and travellers, and required that they must ascertain whether there were any welfare concerns that justified the encampment. Officers explained that if there was no discernable reason to justify an unauthorised encampment the Council could take legal proceedings to enforce their removal. Officers reported that in the past there had been a large number of incursions every year within Redditch but that this had reduced to two or three unauthorised encampments every year. Redditch was therefore regarded at County level as an active authority at responding to the issue.

Members were informed that the Police had powers to evict gypsies and travellers in cases where five or more caravans had been parked; when a landlord requested that the travellers be removed; and in cases where it could be proved that they had committed a criminal offence. Officers explained that the Police had two additional policies which affected their responses to unauthorised encampments.

Overview & Scrutiny Committee

27th March 2008

Officers further reported that there was some concern that the Police were not fulfilling their role as set out in the joint policy.

Members agreed that their main concern was to ensure that all partners consistently complied with the terms of the joint policy when responding to unauthorised gypsy and traveller encampments. Members further agreed that a Task and Finish review might not be the most appropriate measure to address this issue. Instead, Members approved three courses of action which, in descending order, could be undertaken to address the issue:

- a) The Chair would address a letter to the Gypsy and Traveller Liaison Officer at Worcestershire County Council, on behalf of the Committee, requesting that a meeting of the partners take place to discuss the joint policy: whether the terms of the policy remained appropriate; and the roles and responsibilities of each partner organisation. Members agreed that this letter would request that an elected Member from the Borough Council should be invited to attend the meeting.
- b) Members agreed that, if no action was taken in response to this letter, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee would invite representatives of the partner organisations to attend a meeting of the Committee to discuss the joint policy and the roles of each partner organisation.
- c) Finally, Members agreed that, if neither of these courses of action resolved the issue to Members' satisfaction, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee would invite the relevant Police representative and the County Council Gypsy Liaison Officer to attend a meeting of the Redditch Forum to answer questions about the policy.

RESOLVED that

the Committee note the reports and agree the action, as detailed, and in the order proposed, in items a) to d) above.

156. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Officers provided Members with an overview of the Economic Development agenda at both the regional and local level. Members were informed that the West Midlands Regional Economic Strategy (RES) provided leadership and a strategic vision for economic development in the region. Officers explained that the Executive Committee had endorsed an Officer response to the West Midlands Economic Strategy Delivery Framework which would facilitate delivery of the West Midlands Economic Strategy.

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27th March 2008

The framework set out priority actions, based on the themes of Business, Place and People, around which the Council would be required to undertake action.

Members were informed that Redditch was not considered to have high unemployment and was not classified as an economically deprived area. However, there was a need to diversify the local economy outside of the manufacturing industry and to identify ways to encourage highly skilled young people to take up employment in the Borough. Furthermore, there were problems of low educational attainment which needed to be addressed, including through the development of links between schools and local businesses.

Members discussed educational attainment levels in Redditch and noted that Members and Officers from Worcestershire County Council had recently attended a meeting to discuss this issue with Redditch Councillors. Members agreed that they would appreciate further information from Worcestershire County Council on the subject of educational attainment in the Borough and asked Officers to invite representatives from the County Council to attend a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to discuss the subject further.

Officers reported that the Economic Development Manager post was vacant. Members were informed that a suggestion had been made that this should become a joint Redditch and Bromsgrove District Council post, though no decision had been taken in response to this suggestion. Members agreed that it would be useful to review the job specification for the Economic Development Manager post to ensure that the role required the Officer to address the three themes of Business, Place and People identified as priority areas for Redditch.

Members agreed that the subject of Economic Development had already been reviewed as part of the Jobs, Employment and Economy exercise undertaken by the former Leisure, Tourism and Economy Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Officers were therefore asked to circulate copies of the final report from this review to all members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee prior to further discussion of Economic Development.

Members agreed that further information was required detailing the responsibilities of Worcestershire County Council and regional bodies in addressing Economic Development. Furthermore, Members agreed that information about the work undertaken by Bromsgrove District Council on the Economic Development would be useful because the Council was considering a Joint Economic Development Manager post. Officers were asked to contact representatives of the relevant regional organisations, Worcestershire County Council and Bromsgrove District Council to obtain this information.

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27th March 2008

Members discussed timeframes for further discussing the subjects of Economic Development and educational attainment levels. The Chair proposed that these issues should be raised during the Scrutiny Work Programme Planning Day in May when Members would be discussing appropriate subjects for scrutiny in 2008/09. Members agreed that the Committee would determine the dates when Members would consider these topics after the Work Programme Planning Day had taken place.

RESOLVED that

1) Officers be requested to

review the job specification for the post of Economic Development Manager;

a) circulate copies of the Jobs, Employment and Economy scrutiny report among members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee;

b) invite representatives of Worcestershire County Council to attend a meeting of the Committee to discuss educational attainment levels in the Borough;

c) provide further details about the responsibilities of regional organisations and Worcestershire County Council in relation to Economic Development;

d) provide details about the work undertaken by Bromsgrove District Council in relation to Economic Development;

2) Economic Development and educational attainment levels be considered as potential items for scrutiny at the Scrutiny Work Programme Planning Day in May 2008; and

3) timescales be agreed for discussing the subjects of Economic Development and educational attainment levels following the Work Programme Planning Day

all as detailed in the preamble above.

157. TASK & FINISH REVIEWS – DRAFT SCOPING REPORTS

There were no draft scoping documents for consideration.

Overview & Scrutiny

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27th March 2008

158. TASK & FINISH GROUPS – PROGRESS REPORTS

The Chair proposed that there should be no Task and Finish Group progress reports on this occasion, because detailed information about the reviews had been provided at the previous meeting of the Committee a week earlier.

159. FLOODING - JOINT SCRUTINY EXERCISE

The Chair proposed that there should be no progress report for the Joint Scrutiny Exercise into Flooding on this occasion, because detailed information on the subject had been provided at the previous meeting of the Committee a week earlier.

160. REFERRALS

There were no referrals.

161. WORK PROGRAMME

RESOLVED that

the Committee's Work Programme be noted.

The meeting commenced at 7.00 p.m.
and closed at 8.50pm

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CHAIR

Actions requested by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Date Action Requested	Action to be Taken	Response
07/11/07	When discussing the biannual budget report Members asked for further information about the vacant posts that were referred to. Members specified that they would like information about the number of days lost, the financial savings involved and the capacity implications of these vacant posts. Members did not specify a date by which this information should be made available.	Relevant Officers have been working to produce a document containing the requested information. Reassurances have been given that this will be made available for Member consideration soon. (WILL BE DONE SOON). Head of Financial, Revenues and Benefits Services, estimated completion date Tuesday the 15th of April 2008.
19/12/07	Members discussed the proposed new form for presenting performance information to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Officers were asked to provide an explanation of the traffic light system. Members did not specify a date by which this information should be made available.	The Overview and Scrutiny Support Officers have informed the relevant Officers of this request. (WILL BE DONE). Lead Officer, Head of Strategy and Partnerships, Estimated introduction date 28th May 2008.
07/02/08	Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to consult within their political groups to identify potential items for scrutiny.	Members to act on this request and to inform the Overview and Scrutiny Support Officers when this action has been completed. (TO BE DONE).
07/02/08	The Overview and Scrutiny Support Officers to consult with other Officers within the Council to identify potential items for scrutiny.	The Overview and Scrutiny Support Officers to liaise with other Officers over this request. (TO BE DONE).
27/02/08	The Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed that the Communications Task and Finish Group could report final	The Communications Task and Finish Group is scheduled to present final recommendations on the 9th April. (WILL BE

	recommendations to the Committee on Wednesday the 9th April 2008.	DONE SOON). Lead Member Councillor J. Brunner, estimated completion date Wednesday the 9th April 2008.
27/02/08	The Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed that the District Centres Task and Finish Group could report final recommendations to the Committee on Wednesday the 9th April 2008.	The District Centres Task and Finish Group is due to present final recommendations to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on Wednesday the 9th April. (WILL BE DONE SOON) Lead Member Councillor A. Fry, estimated completion date Wednesday the 9th April 2008.
27/02/08	Officers were asked to present community safety performance data to Members using both of the templates that had been provided for the consideration of Members. Officers were asked to present this information to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee alongside the quarterly performance reports.	The Overview and Scrutiny Support Officers have informed the relevant lead Officer of this request. (WILL BE DONE). Head of Strategy and Partnerships, June 2008.
27/02/08	The Overview and Scrutiny Committee to discuss ways to develop relations between the Committee and the Executive Committee.	Members are due to consider this issue further during the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Planning Day in May 2008. (WILL BE DONE SOON). Responsible Officers - Overview and Scrutiny Support Officers, estimated completion date (May 2008).
27/02/08	Officers to incorporate information about monitoring scrutiny recommendations in to the Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report.	The Annual Report is due to be presented for Member consideration on Wednesday the 9th April 2008. (WILL BE DONE SOON). Responsible Officers – Overview and Scrutiny Support Officers and estimated completion date – Wednesday the 9th April 2008.

19/03/08	The Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed that the Fees and Charges Task and Finish Group proposed planning fees and charges recommendation be considered by the Executive Committee.	The Fees and Charges Task and Finish Group report is due to be considered at the Executive Committee due to be held on Wednesday the 2nd of April. (WILL BE DONE). Lead Member –Councillor C. MacMillan
19/03/08	The Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed that the Fees and Charges Task and Finish Group could present their charging policy to the Committee on Wednesday the 9th April 2008.	The Fees and Charges Task and Finish Group is due to present their charging policy to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on Wednesday the 9th April. (WILL BE DONE SOON) Lead Member Councillor C. Macmillan, estimated completion date Wednesday the 9th April 2008.
19/03/08	Members requested that further information be provided to the Committee regarding the dredging of ditches. In particular, this information should highlight responsibilities for dredging ditches.	Relevant Officers have subsequently provided further written information regarding the dredging of ditches in the Borough. (DONE)
19/03/08	Members requested that the Overview and Scrutiny Planning Day to take place in the Civic Suite on Friday the 23rd of May. Officers to invite all Members, all Directors and the Member and Committee Support Services Manager, and the Democratic Services Manager.	The Overview and Scrutiny Support Officers to begin organisation of the Overview and Scrutiny Planning Day. (WILL BE DONE SOON) Lead Officers - OSSOs, estimated date of completion Friday the 23rd of May.
27/03/08	Members requested that a letter be drafted to send to the Gypsy Liaison Officer (GLO) at Worcestershire County Council	The Overview and Scrutiny Support Officers to draft a letter in consultation with the Chair to send to Worcestershire County

	<p>requesting that a meeting be held of all partners signed up to the joint policy to deal with the unauthorised encampment of Gypsies and Travellers.</p> <p>Members requested that Councillor Hill be approached to attend and observe at this meeting as a representative from Redditch Borough Council.</p>	<p>Council. (TO BE DONE).</p> <p>The Overview and Scrutiny Support Officers in consultation with the Chair Cllr Macmillan.</p>
<p>27/03/08</p>	<p>Members agreed that a series of actions should be undertaken as preparatory work for carrying out scrutiny of economic development role at the Council. Members requested several actions as detailed below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Jobs, Employment and Economy Review report be circulated to all Committee Members. • The Economic Development Manger post job specification be reviewed in line with the three themes of the Regional Economic Strategy: business; place; and people. • Relevant officers from Worcestershire County Council be invited to the Committee to discuss their roles and responsibilities for economic development in Redditch. • Further information be provided on roles and responsibilities for other bodies / agencies contributing to economic development in Redditch. • The latest secondary school attainment figures be obtained and distributed to Committee 	<p>The Overview and Scrutiny Support Officers to complete these actions as an on-going exercise. (TO BE DONE)</p> <p>Members agreed to postpone consideration of these items until after the work programme planning day. The OSSOs to work around these timeframes.</p>

	<p>Members.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Education representatives from Worcestershire County Council be invited to a future meeting to educational attainment levels in Redditch schools.	
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WORCESTERSHIRE SUMMER FLOODS 2007

Joint Scrutiny Task Group

2.00pm, Monday 7 April 2008

Lakeview Room, County Hall, Worcester

AGENDA

1. Welcome, apologies and introductions
2. Notes of 31 March meeting
3. Discussions with:
 - West Mercia Police (2.00-4.00)
 - H&W Fire & Rescue Authority (2.00-4.00)
 - Local Resilience Forum (2.00-4.00)
 - Severn Trent Water (4.00 approx)
 - Environment Agency (5.30 approx)
 - Land Drainage Partnership (7.00 approx)

There will be a break for sandwiches at about 5pm

ITEM 3

WORCESTERSHIRE SUMMER FLOODS 2007

Joint Scrutiny Task Group

2.00pm, 7 April 2008

DISCUSSIONS WITH:

- **West Mercia Police**
- **H&W Fire & Rescue Authority**
- **Local Resilience Forum**
- **Severn Trent Water**
- **Environment Agency**
- **Land Drainage Partnership**

Format of meeting

1. Attendees will be asked to set out their views or experiences on the immediate response to the floods and recovery since, and whether there are any possible areas for improvement. This will then be followed by a general discussion with each group. Suggested issues to discuss are set out below.

2. The Police, Fire Authority and Local Resilience Forum will each be asked to set out their views separately at the start of the meeting. There will then be a joint discussion with all three.

3. It is hoped to send comments to the national Pitt Review, so relevant recommendations and interim conclusions from the Review are listed. Members will recall that these recommendations were circulated with the last agenda.

West Mercia Constabulary:

Chief Inspector Matt Mead and Steve Pooler, Emergency Planning Officer

4. Following a flood the Police are responsible for:

- co-ordinating the response of all public bodies
- evacuating the public from properties at risk
- providing advice and assistance at the scene
- controlling traffic to prevent bow waves from flooding properties and vehicles from breaking down in floodwaters.

West Mercia's Chief Constable is also the Chairman of the Local Resilience Forum.

5. Chief Inspector Matt Mead will do a presentation setting out events during the summer 2007 floods and the response from a police perspective. West Mercia Constabulary have carried out their own review of the response to the summer flooding emergency and Steve Pooler will be able to advise Members of the main

lessons learned.

**Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Authority:
Ray Rogers, Emergency Planning Officer**

6. The Fire Service is responsible for rescue work, extinguishing fires and dealing with dangerous chemicals or substances. They help the ambulance service with casualties and the Police to recover bodies. The Fire Service is responsible for the health and safety of staff from all the agencies working within the inner cordon at the scene of an incident and for liaising with the Police about access to the site. They do not have a statutory duty for flood rescue.

7. Sir Ken Knight, the Chief Fire and Rescue Adviser, has recently published a report into the [Fire and Rescue Service Operational Response to the Summer 2007 floods](#). Some of his key findings are that:

- the Fire and Rescue Service should be given even greater capability to undertake flood rescue
- local Fire and Rescue Authorities should ensure that firefighters have appropriate personal protective equipment and training
- the fire service should NOT have a statutory duty for flood rescue for the fire service, particularly as it does not guarantee interoperability between FRS around the country
- common standards of training with multi agency accreditation for inland water rescue operations should be considered by the appropriate Government Skills Council within the skills business network
- utilities providers such as gas and electricity should consistently take part in the coordination arrangements for responses to major emergencies.

8. The report also makes recommendations for the sharing of information on flood planning and weather risks, media and communications. Sir Ken's recommendations will feed in to the final Pitt Review and will be for Government, regional and local resilience forums, individual Fire and Rescue Authorities, utilities and other bodies to take forward.

9. Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Authority have carried out their own scrutiny into the response to the summer flooding emergency. Their terms of reference were to explore:

- The contribution made by the specialist rescue teams
- The effectiveness of local multi-agency pre-planning through the Local Resilience Forum
- The effectiveness of the multi-agency response and joint working between Local Resilience Forum members
- The effectiveness of regional and national support and mutual aid during the response phase.
- The effectiveness of multi-agency working arrangements and communication with the public during the recovery phase.

10. Outcomes were reported to their Best Value Policy and Performance Committee on 18 March 2008 and will be considered by the Authority on 21 May 2008. Mr Rogers can discuss the main findings from the Authority's review.

**West Mercia Local Resilience Forum:
Eamonn Croft, Coordinator**

11. West Mercia Local Resilience Form (LRF) is a multi-agency group comprising bodies within West Mercia such as local authorities, national and local health agencies, the three emergency services and the Environment Agency. It is currently chaired by Paul West, Chief Constable of West Mercia Police.

12. The LRF ensures partner agencies co-ordinate resources so they can respond effectively when incidents occur. The LRF also exists to warn, inform, advise and educate the public about developments in the area of Civil Protection.

13. Suggested issues for discussion with Fire, Police and LRF:

- How well did the West Mercia Local Resilience Forum function to meet the needs of Worcestershire during the July event?
- How effective was the emergency response in July and what improvements could be made?
- Do they have a view about whether there was effective coordination between Districts and County Council in the response to the floods and during the recovery?

Pitt Review recommendations	4 - 5
interim conclusions	38 - 41 and 50

**Severn Trent Water:
Peter Leatherland, Business Resilience Security Manager**

14. Severn Trent Water have a statutory duty to provide potable (drinking) water as well as treating and disposing of waste water. Unusual heavy rainfall can overwhelm drainage systems and cause flooding and in these circumstances, untreated sewage may spill out into streets and gardens. The water companies will assist where possible to reduce the amount of water escaping from the system and will treat areas where sewage has been deposited once the flooding has subsided.

15. Suggested issues for discussion:

- How effective are communication channels with other organisations (eg the Local Resilience Forum) in relation to emergency flooding events and plans
- How are cross regional operational issues managed?
- Does Severn Trent have any plans to alleviate the effects of flooding in future?
- What was Severn Trent's rate of capital expenditure for the last financial year?
- Did Severn Trent spend all of the planned capital expenditure in that year?
- What rate of capital expenditure will Severn Trent be seeking in future years and do they think that OFWAT will look on that favourably?

Pitt Review interim conclusions	55 – 59
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Environment Agency:

Anthony Perry, Area Flood Risk Manager and Mark Bowers, Planning and Corporate Services Manager

16. The Environment Agency has a statutory responsibility for flood management and defences and to manage flood risk to existing properties and assets. Some of the main duties are:

- To maintain or improve main rivers
- To install and operate flood warning equipment
- To control actions by riparian owners and occupiers which might interfere with the free flow of main rivers
- Preparation of River Basin Management Plans under the Water Framework Directive

17. The Environment Agency is responsible for the maintenance of "main rivers and strategic streams." For non main rivers and streams the responsibility for their maintenance and the removal of obstructions etc. lies with the riparian owners of the land adjacent to the water course. Where a stream passes through a culvert underneath a highway for which the County Council is the highway authority, then the Council is the responsible authority for the watercourse.

18. Some suggested issues for discussion:

- How should any extra funding for flood defences be prioritised and what alternative forms of flood defences are there?
- What dredging of rivers in the County has taken place in the past, present or is planned for in the future?
- How are cross regional operational issues managed?
- How will the Environment Agency influence the West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy in terms of allowing further development on flood plains

Pitt Review interim conclusions	8 – 18, 20 – 28, 29, 31, 32 and 54
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Land Drainage Partnership:

Ian Bamforth, Service Leader to Highways and Countryside Division, Worcestershire County Council and Steve Jordan, Director of Environmental Services, Wychavon DC

19. The Worcestershire Land Drainage Partnership comprises a range of organisations including Worcestershire County Council, the Environment Agency, National Farmers' Union and District Councils.

20. The group first met in October 2007 where it adopted an action plan to address key issues such as how the organisations can further work together to identify improvements that can be made to the county's network of watercourses,

ditches, drains and culverts. Notes of that meeting were circulated to Members as part of a background information pack for members in November 2007.

21. Some suggested issues for discussion:

- Who is responsible for ensuring that watercourses, ditches, drains and culverts are adequately maintained and that problems are addressed?
- Are landowners fully aware of their responsibilities for dredging ditches on their land and how is this enforced?
- What support is provided for riparian landowners?
- What resources are needed for land drainage and are any additional resources planned?

Pitt Review interim conclusions	17, 18, 20-26, 29, 30 and 32
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Chair's Foreword

It has been my pleasure to Chair the Communications Task and Finish Group.

On behalf of my fellow Councillor Colleagues I would like to offer our sincere gratitude to all our expert witnesses who took part in this exercise. It must be said that without their generosity of time and expertise this report could not have been achieved.

We have found this piece of work to be both challenging and interesting as well as a steep learning curve as we grappled with the new scoping documents of Overview and Scrutiny.

I also must take this opportunity to thank our supporting Overview and Scrutiny Officers Helen Saunders and Jessica Bayley for their hard work in assisting the Panel.

Last but by no means least thanks to Councillors Kath Banks, Robin King, Jack Field and Andrew Fry for the many hours you have given to helping produce this report.

I commend this report to you.

Councillor Juliet Brunner
Chair of the Communications Task and Finish Group

**Communications
Task and Finish
Group**



Cllr Kath Banks



**Cllr Juliet Brunner
(Chair)**



Cllr Andy Fry



Cllr Jack Field



Cllr Robin King

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Recommendations

We would like to make the following recommendations, which have been set out in seven subject themes. We recommend that:

1. Prioritising Communications

- a) the Council adopts communications as an underpinning principle of the key priorities of the Council;
- b) Officers and Members undertake further work to establish what key messages the Council wants to promote;
- c) the Council website be updated on a weekly basis in order to convey the Council's key messages effectively;

2. Communications Strategy

- a) the Council's Communications Strategy be rewritten to:
 - i) improve the presentational style of the strategy;
 - ii) maintain a consistent report style throughout the document;

Recommendations

- iii) shorten the document making it easier to read; and
 - iv) make the information contained within the strategy personalised to Redditch and Redditch Borough Council;
- b) the Communications Strategy include a Public Relations Strategy to promote the image of Redditch;
 - c) the Communications Strategy include a Members Communication Strategy detailing how Members communicate with the local media;

3. Internal Communications

- a) Communications Officers regularly attend key meetings at the Council including Full Council, the Executive Committee, and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee;
- b) Committee Services Officers and Lead Service Officers to proactively engage with Communications Officers on a regular basis regarding key decisions taken at meetings;

4. Joint Working

- a) the Council Communications Officers to utilise opportunities to receive informal advice and support from Worcestershire County Council Communications Officers;

Recommendations

5. Civic Newspaper

- a) Redditch Borough Council produces a section of 'Redditch' pages that can be inserted in each edition of Word On Worcestershire;
- b) this arrangement to be reviewed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in twelve months. Prior to this, Officers from the Communications Unit to investigate options for reinstating the civic newspaper and buying pages in the local press to communicate information about Council activities;

6. Corporate Branding

- a) all service areas of the Council should adhere to the Redditch Borough Council Corporate Identity Guidelines for all external communications;
- b) all external communications material must be sent to the Communications Unit for verification before being released;
- c) the Council to provide a briefing, at least once a year, for all members of staff regarding corporate branding and customer contact standards;

Recommendations

7. Media Relations

- a) the Communications Officers produce a new local media strategy and protocol to improve channels of communication between the Council and the local media;
- b) the Council designates an Officer in each service area to act as a 'publicity champion' and the Communications Officers to work proactively with the 'publicity champions' to increase the number of press releases sent to the local media; and
- c) Communications Officers ensure that, where appropriate, all press releases contain a comment from a relevant spokesperson. If Portfolio Holders are approached for a comment, they should be contacted as soon as possible and given 24 hours to provide a comment.

Introduction

This report presents the final findings and recommendations of the Communications Task and Finish Group and is a culmination of the work undertaken in both Stages One and Two of the exercise.

Stage One of the exercise began in July 2007 and was completed in January 2008 with a formal presentation and short report presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on Wednesday the 16th January 2008.

The overarching objectives of Stage One were to:

- ascertain what perceptions of Redditch Borough Council and the Borough currently exist;
- establish what key messages the Council wants to communicate to residents; and
- establish what profile the Council wishes to achieve and maintain at the local, regional and national levels.

While the work undertaken in Stage One aimed to measure current perceptions and highlight the desired perception and profile of the Council, the aim of the work in Stage Two was to identify how current tools and processes could be improved to achieve these aims.

Introduction

Communications at Redditch

Redditch Borough Council adopted its current Communications and Consultation Strategy at full Council on Tuesday the 13th of March 2006. This Communications Strategy was based on national research into best practice in local authority communications particularly details contained in the Reputation report published by the Ideas and Development Agency (IDe&A) and Market and Opinion Research International (MORI) in 2005. However, with growing national evidence of the strong link between the reputation of a Council and the effectiveness of its communications, both Officers and Members felt that it would be an opportune time to undertake a review of the effectiveness of communications processes in Redditch.

Stage One

We decided when determining the scope for the review that the work should be completed in two stages. Stage One was designed to ascertain what key messages the Council wanted to communicate to residents and what profile we wished to achieve and maintain at the local, regional and national levels.

Key Findings from Stage One

During Stage One, we decided to undertake some primary research in the form of a questionnaire and in-depth face to face interviews with Members, Officers and partners of the Council plus communications managers from our family local authorities and local media representatives. This research aimed to gather participants' views on what they believed the perception of Redditch as a town and as a Council to be and what profile the Council should be aiming to achieve and maintain at the local, regional and national levels. The Group found that participants believed that perceptions of the Council were very poor. Participants believed there was a general lack of awareness of what the Council does and that the Council was 'unapproachable' and 'uncommunicative'.

Stage One

Key Findings from Stage One

The Group found that perceptions of Redditch were not much better. Participants noted that Redditch contained too many roundabouts, had cultivated a low wage economy, and lacked facilities, especially for young people.

These results were not very encouraging. However, through the same process, we were able to establish what profile participants felt that the Council and the town should be aiming to achieve. Many of the participants recognised that Redditch already featured many key facilities but that these needed to be marketed and promoted in a more effective manner. These features included the abundance of greenery, lack of congestion, and the accessible location of the town. They also included facilities run and maintained by the Council including both the Arrow Valley and Morton Stanley parks, the Abbey Stadium and the Palace Theatre.

Participants were also asked to give an opinion on what key messages they felt that the Council should promote about itself. Participants came up with a number of key messages, a selection of which included that:

- the Council provides high quality services;
- the Council is accessible to all; and
- the Council honest and accountable to its residents.

Participants were also asked to comment on what level they thought the Council should focus its communications. The majority of respondents felt that the Council should predominantly channel its energies into improving communications at the local level before concentrating on the national and regional levels.

Stage Two

Objectives of Stage Two

The objective of Stage Two was to examine the Council's communications processes and make recommendations about how these can be improved to tackle the negative perception of the Council and the town that was highlighted in Stage One. This would firstly involve examining the strategic approach that the Council takes to delivering communications at the Council. Secondly, we felt that examining the tools and mechanisms used in the day to day running of the Council's communications would be a crucial part of the exercise.

The Council's current Communications Strategy focuses on six key tools in its approach to communications:

- an A-Z of Services;
- media relations;
- branding;
- internal communications;
- a regularly published civic newspaper; and
- the Council website.

The key aim of Stage Two was to establish whether these tools were an effective way of communicating the Council's key messages.

Background

Recent National Research

Research commissioned by the Local Government Association (LGA) and undertaken by Ipsos MORI in 2005 demonstrated that even as service delivery by Councils had improved, the public perception of councils was not improving with it. Generally, the research showed that most people view their council as being low profile, bureaucratic and inefficient (<http://reputation.lga.gov.uk/lga/core/page.do?pagelid=109165>) . These findings were confirmed by the research we conducted in Stage One of our review.

Reputation Campaign

The Ipsos MORI piece of work paved the way for the development of the LGA's Reputation Campaign, the purpose of which was to heighten local councils' awareness of the importance of achieving and maintaining a good reputation. This campaign has recognised that Councils with the highest satisfaction ratings are the ones that best demonstrate their services offer value for money. These councils are also the ones that tend to invest heavily in their communications processes. The LGA Reputation campaign promotes some core actions that councils can take when trying to improve their council reputation. These are to:

- manage the media effectively to promote and defend the council;
- provide an A-Z guide to council services;
- publish a regular council magazine or newspaper to inform residents;
- ensure the council brand is consistently linked to services; and
- communicate well with staff so they become advocates for the council.

(<http://campaigns.lga.gov.uk/reputation/home/>)

We have taken these core actions into consideration when considering recommendations for Stage Two.

Prioritising Communications

Making Communications a Priority

During interviews in Stage One with key stakeholders and other local authority communications managers, many participants commented that one of the most fundamental actions a Council can take to improve communications is to ensure that the function is adequately resourced. Participants commented that the importance of communications should be understood by all Officers and Members and that this should translate through the prioritising of the function within Council activities.

We discussed the possible implications of making communications a priority for the Council. We could see that if we were to make communications a priority then we may have to forgo one of the current priorities. However, we decided that each of the current priorities of the Council was reflective of the current aims and structure of the Council. We therefore decided that communications should not be a stand alone priority but one which interlinks and underpins all of the other priority areas.

We therefore recommend that the Council adopts communications as an underpinning principle of the key priorities of the Council.

Key Messages for the Council

It emerged, through our primary research, that one of the potential barriers for the Council to achieving a positive perception and profile is that we do not have a clear set of key messages to promote to the general public. Participants in our research did give an idea of the types of key messages the Council should promote but a set of agreed messages was not established. As a Group, we feel that we could report these suggestions made to us but that it is not for us to agree these messages. This is a wider debate that needs to be addressed by the whole Council and not just by a small group of Members.

We therefore recommend that Officers and Members undertake further work to establish what key messages the Council want to promote.

Prioritising Communications

The Council Website

With regards to promoting the Council's priorities and key messages, we felt that using the Council website would be an effective way of doing this. However, all of the Group recognised that the Council Website was frequently out of date, inaccurate and generally ineffective as a tool of communication for the Council.

We noted that more work was needed on the website. The website could be the subject of a further scrutiny review. However, we all agreed that work should be undertaken now to look at how the website could be modified to promote the Council's key priorities and messages.

We therefore recommend that the Council website be updated on a weekly basis in order to convey the Council's five key messages effectively.

Increasing Perception and Profile

As part of our research in Stage One, we visited Stevenage Borough Council to interview their Communications Manager and find out what approach, as a comparable Council to Redditch, they took to communications. As part of our discussions we found that whilst not experiencing as severe an image problem as Redditch, the Council had taken a very proactive approach in tackling the image of the town. We found that they had introduced such measures such as 'Stevenage Day' and had also employed a Projects Officer who was in charge of implementing mini projects and campaigns that helped to improve the image of the town with residents and people living outside the Borough.

Best practice, cited in the Local Government Association's reputation campaign literature, also refers to the benefits of utilising campaigns in order to provide residents with information about the roles and activities of their Council. The best practice guidance cites evidence that by making a concerted attempt to inform residents about what we provide for them, they will think more positively about the Council

Prioritising Communications

We feel that bespoke campaigns undertaken by the Communications Unit are a proactive way of directly tackling the issue of poor reputation and negative perceptions. In addition to this we feel such projects would also help to develop civic pride in the town.

We believe that a public relations strategy should be included as part of the Communications Strategy.

We have also requested that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee review progress on the recommendations contained in this report in twelve months.

Communications Strategy

Background

One of the objectives of Stage One of the Communications Task and Finish Group was to examine Redditch Borough Council's Communications and Consultation Strategy and to judge whether it was continuing to fulfil the Council's needs. However, in Stage One, we made observations but did not make any recommendations about the Strategy.

Positive elements of the Strategy

We examined the Strategy and recognised that there were many positive aspects to the strategy. These, we felt, could provide the foundations for improving perceptions of the Council and the town. It was evident that the strategy was based on national best practice and used examples and quotes from leaders in the field.

We agreed that the strategy was very comprehensive in setting out a protocol for media relations. The Strategy also demonstrates that the Council is committed to engaging with all stakeholders. We felt that the strategy was aspirational, provides a plan of action with measurable targets and suggested some form of method for monitoring these targets.

Respondents and Interviewees Comments

The questionnaire undertaken as part of Stage One asked respondents to comment on the suitability of the current Communications and Consultation Strategy. This question elicited fewer responses than other questions. However, all the responses received were quite negative. Respondents felt that the Strategy was 'unrealistic, 'unachievable', 'not suitable' and generally needed to be reviewed.

In addition, some respondents commented that they did not believe the Communications Strategy had been fully acknowledged by Senior Officers and that some sections of the Council were not using the Strategy as a live, working document.

Communications Strategy

Respondents were also asked to suggest what overarching criteria the effectiveness of the Communications Strategy should be measured against. The majority of respondents felt that satisfaction levels with the Council were a good indication of the effectiveness of the Council's communications. Therefore, they felt the Council should track satisfaction levels from customer satisfaction surveys and citizens panels. Respondents also commented that the Council should develop an approach to monitoring communications based on good practice from other local authorities.

Presentational Style of the Strategy

Our own analysis of the Strategy revealed that it focussed on the six key tools (see page 8) that the Council uses to communicate and did not contain enough clear information about the strategic aims and objectives of communications at Redditch.

In addition to this, some expert witnesses commented on the importance attached to the tools in the strategy. They implied that such 'tools' were routinely used by Councils and that a Communications Strategy should focus on the wider, strategic picture.

As a group, we took the view that the current format of the Communications Strategy is not enhancing the profile and perception of Redditch and Redditch Borough Council. While undertaking our analysis of the Communications Strategy we also examined its presentational style and found that it was not easy to read because it:

- lacked a consistent report style;
- was weak at contextualising information;

Communications Strategy

- lacked full explanatory sentences;
- was too lengthy, discouraging Members and Officers from reading it; and
- ultimately looked disjointed.

Therefore, we wish to make a recommendation that the Strategy rewritten taking into consideration the comments contained within this report. We recommend that:

- a) **the Council's Communications Strategy be rewritten to:**
 - i) **improve the presentational style of the strategy;**
 - i) **maintain a consistent report style throughout the document;**
 - iii) **shorten the document, making it easier to read; and**
 - iv) **contextualising and making the information contained within the strategy personalised to Redditch and Redditch Borough Council**
- b) **the Communications Strategy to include a Public Relations Strategy to promote the image of Redditch; and**
- c) **the Communications Strategy to include a Members Communication Strategy detailing how they communicate with the local media.**

Joint Working

Joint Working Opportunities

During interviews with communications managers from other local authorities, we found that there may be the possibility of establishing informal joint working arrangements to enhance delivery of communications for the Council. In particular, Officers from Worcestershire County Council's Communications Unit felt that there were some key areas where they could provide assistance.

Secondment Opportunities

Officers from Worcestershire County Council discussed with us the possibility of seconding one of their senior press officers to the Council's Communications Unit. These discussions occurred at an opportune time for the Council as the only press officer in the Communications Unit was due to leave. We recognised that this would leave a gap, at least until a replacement could be found and that it appeared to be a logical step to take up this offer from the County Council, if only for 3 months. The benefits of doing this were clear to both parties. It would mean that the Council would be able to employ an experienced Communications Officer almost immediately. It would also enable the seconded person to experience communications in a different environment. Most of all, it would facilitate the sharing of good practice and expertise for all Officers involved.

We have already brokered this process, along with Officers at Redditch Council with the relevant Officers at the County Council and this process is now underway. We decided we would be unable to make this a recommendation of the exercise. However, Members felt that they wanted to highlight this as a positive response to our review.

Joint Working

Advice and Support

We considered a further collaborative opportunity offered by Officers from Worcestershire County Council, of offering informal advice and support to our Communications Team. Communications Officers at the County explained that they offered an informal mentoring service to the District Councils, whereby Officers at the County Council would provide on-tap guidance and support when needed by Officers at the some of the District Councils.

Therefore, we recommend that the Council Communications Officers make use of opportunities to receive informal advice and support provided by Worcestershire County Council Communications Officers.

Internal Communications

Staff as Advocates for the Council

The remit of the Task and Finish Group did not require us to make any recommendations about internal communications. However, we recognised that good internal communications are of paramount importance in projecting clear and consistent messages to the public. We understand that if all staff were well informed about issues affecting the organisation, they would be more likely to act as good advocates for the Council. This is backed up by evidence from the Reputation Campaign where internal communications is listed as one of the key core actions that Councils should aim to achieve to improve their communications (www.campaigns.lga.gov.uk/reputation/communications/communicate/).

Dissemination of Council Key Decisions

With this in mind, we felt that internal communications were not always as effective as they should be. The Group agreed that opportunities to disseminate information about key decisions made by Full Council and other Committees in the Council were frequently missed. We felt that this was mainly due to a lack of internal communication between the relevant lead service officers, Committee Services Officers and Communications Officers.

In order to address this, we believe that Communications Officers should be proactive in attending key meetings of the Council. However, we recognise that this may increase Officer workload. We felt that more emphasis should be placed on Lead Service Officers and Committee Service Officers liaising with Communications Officers to notify the Communications Team about key decisions due to be considered. Communications between Officers should also increase after key decisions are made so that Communications Officers can communicate this information to the public.

Essentially, we believe that there should be a proactive approach and an increased two way communication between these Officers to increase the quantity, quality and timeliness of communications regarding decisions that are made at the Council.

Internal Communications

Therefore, we recommend that:

- a) **Communications Officers regularly attend key meetings at the Council, including Full Council, the Executive Committee, and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee; and**
- b) **Committee Services Officers and Lead Service Officers proactively engage with Communications Officers on a regular basis about key decisions taken at meetings.**

Corporate Branding

Linking the Council's Brand to Services

During our investigation, we examined the issue of corporate branding. Again, the LGA's Reputation Campaign has cited this as one of the key core areas for action that enables Councils to maintain good communications. The Reputation Campaign literature emphasises the need for the visual brand to be consistently linked to all services that the Council delivers so that people can recognise that the service is provided by the Council.

Corporate Identity Guidelines

Currently, the Council produces the Redditch Borough Council Corporate Identity Guidelines which provides guidance for all departments on how the logo should be presented on all information sent out by the Council. These guidelines state that subsidiary brands are permitted (e.g. for the Palace Theatre or Forge Mill) and a variety of approved colours can be used on the literature. However, we found that the Council Website, and many leaflets and promotional information produced by different service areas, did not conform to these guidelines. We all agreed that it was imperative that these guidelines were followed.

While interviewing Officers about this issue, we found that it was very difficult to enforce these guidelines. However, we felt there was a clear need for this to be done. We suggested, therefore, that the most effective way of enforcing this would be for an Officer (s) from the Communications Unit to take responsibility for carrying quality control checks on all printed information that is released by the Council.

Corporate Branding

We also recognised that corporate branding was not only about portraying a consistent visual identity but also about making sure that customers recognise branding through our verbal messages. We all agreed that it is important for all front line staff to reinforce the corporate image through their interactions with the public. Stating the name of the Council when answering telephones, being polite and courteous and as helpful as possible are all actions that staff should be taking to ensure that the corporate brand is conveyed to customers. We believe that by taking these small actions, the reputation and the profile of the Council with our customers will be improved.

We therefore recommend that all service areas of the Council should adhere to the Redditch Borough Council Corporate Identity Guidelines for all external communications and that all external communications material must be sent to the Communications Unit for verification before being released.

We also would like to recommend the Council provide briefings, at least once a year, for members of staff regarding guidelines on corporate branding and customer contact standards.

Civic Newspaper

Redditch Matters

Prior to the commencement of the Communications Task and Finish Group, the Council made the decision not to continue publishing their civic newspaper, *Redditch Matters*, due to a lack of funding. The last edition of this newspaper was published in March 2006. The annual cost of producing this newspaper for 2006 was £11,000. We were very keen to examine the impact of not publishing a regular newspaper on the Council's profile and reputation and felt that the Task and Finish Group exercise would provide a good opportunity to examine this issue in depth and perhaps reassess the Council's position on this issue.

Good Practice

The importance of a Council publication has been stressed in all recent research published on council communications. One of the key core actions of the Reputation Campaign is for councils to "publish a regular council magazine or newspaper to inform residents" (www.campaigns.lga.gov.uk/reputation/home/). Information given as part of the Reputation Campaign clearly sets out the reasons for councils producing a regular newspaper or magazine. Some of these reasons include:

- keeping residents informed helps to improve overall satisfaction with the Council;
- residents prefer to receive information directly from the Council; and
- it is the most direct and cost effective way of getting the Council's message across to the community.

(www.campaigns.lga.gov.uk/reputation/communications/magazine/)

We also heard much evidence from our interviewees that strengthens this argument for keeping our civic newspaper. All of the local authorities interviewed emphasised how important a council newspaper or magazine is to communicate the key messages of a council.

Civic Newspaper

Resources

We wholly agreed that producing a regular newspaper was the only way to portray key messages about the Council and give information about what the Council does across to residents and in a way that the Council can control. However, we noted that the resources may not be available to implement this at the current time. We felt that in the long term the newspaper or magazine should be reintroduced and that Officers needed to carry out some in-depth investigations which would consider factors such as the design, delivery mechanism and number of editions but also the most influencing factor of cost.

Word on Worcestershire

While discussing the options for informal joint working arrangements with officers from the County Council, the possibility of Redditch having dedicated pages in the Word On Worcestershire (Worcestershire County Council's publication) was raised. Officers explained that this could involve Redditch Borough Council taking out an eight page insert with the overall name of the publication tailored to those editions going out to Redditch residents as "Word on Worcestershire – Redditch Edition". Redditch Borough Council would have complete control over the content and style of the insert. Officers provided the Group with some approximate costs. For one edition involving the production and delivery of 40,000 copies the approximate cost would be **£1,200**. If the Council wanted to utilise the skills of the Worcestershire County Council Print and Design Unit, they could also design the pages for the Council at a cost of £500 per issue.

We felt that this offered extremely good value for money especially when compared with the costs of producing the previous civic newspaper. We felt that it would be a relatively straight forward process to implement and may also help residents understand the different responsibilities that the District and the County Councils have. However, as a group we did feel that there were some disadvantages to effectively sharing a publication. We still felt that the Redditch message may not be clear in a joint publication. There may also be the increased likelihood that readers would not get as far as the Redditch inserts and therefore fail to see any reference to Redditch Borough Council.

Civic Newspaper

However, after taking into consideration all of the evidence, we felt that the joint publication with Worcestershire would be a chance to get some kind of publication out to residents in Redditch. This would at least mean that Redditch Borough Council would have a consistent channel for the publicity and promotion of its activities. We all agreed that this should only be a temporary measure that could be used while Communications Officers at the Council undertook a full investigation of potential methods of delivering a Council produced publication that could be considered at a later date.

Using the Local Media

We also explored the possibility of using inserts in the two free local newspapers. Some of the local press representatives when interviewed suggested that the Council could produce an insert that would be distributed as part of the newspapers. Again, we considered this offer carefully and believed it to have similar benefits and problems as the proposal that we share a publication with Worcestershire County Council. However, the cost implications for this option were much higher.

Therefore we recommend that:

- a) **Redditch Borough Council produces a section of 'Redditch' pages that can be inserted in each edition of Word On Worcestershire;**
- b) **this arrangement be reviewed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in twelve months. During this twelve months, Officers from the Communications Unit should investigate potential options for reinstating the civic newspaper and buying pages in the local press to communicate information about the Council's activities.**

Media Relations

Interviews with Local Media Representatives

The Group conducted a number of in depth interviews with representatives from the local media. These interviews helped us to gain a useful insight into how the Council's communication with our local media representatives works in practice and how successful it is deemed to be by our local media representatives. There were a number of issues that were identified by local media representatives about the way in which current communication channels are structured. These issues are detailed below.

Promotion of Good and Bad News

Many interviewees felt that the Council did not do enough to promote itself to the press and media. It was suggested to us that it is important for the Council to deal with the negative stories as well as the positive stories. They believed it was better to be open and honest about all issues, good or bad, than to try and cover up potential bad news stories. We were also advised never to provide a 'no comment' response to a story as this often does more harm than good to the Council's reputation in the long term.

Frequency of Press Releases

Some local media representatives commented that the number of press releases they receive from the Council is particularly low, especially compared to the number of press releases they receive from other organisations. In addition, some interviewees felt that by not utilising press releases often enough, the Council was restricting the potential this tool could provide for them in getting their message across to the residents of Redditch. We agreed that the Council needed to be more proactive and less reactive when sending out press releases.

Timeliness

The timeliness of press releases was also identified as an issue. Some interviewees commented that press releases would often be received too late for them to use and therefore a potential wasted opportunity to promote the Council's message.

Media Relations

Interviews with Local Media Representatives

A key issue for many of the interviewees was the opening of the channels of communication between Council Officers and Members and reporters. It was explained to us that it could be difficult to gain access to Officers for information on key stories and that there sometimes was a less than satisfactory exchange between officers and reporters. The media representatives that we interviewed felt that more could be done to build professional relationships between Officers and reporters, which they felt would enhance the sharing of information and result in more balanced media coverage. Some suggestions proposed by interviewees to enhance working relationships included:

- providing reporters with a list of key contacts of Officers and Members in the Council whom they can contact for information about a potential story;
- enabling Members to make a greater input into press releases. In particular, a comment from key Members of the Council such as the Leader or the relevant Portfolio Holder would be useful;
- the Council designating a 'Publicity Champion' in each service area who would work closely with the Communications team. This person would have responsibility for releasing accurate and up to date stories so that the Communications team would always be aware of the key issues affecting each service area; and
- continuing communications and media training for all Members and key Officers in the Council.

Media Relations

Therefore we recommend that:

- a) **Communications Officers produce a new Local Media Strategy to improve channels of communication between the Council and the local media;**
- b) **The Council designates an Officer in each service area to act as a ‘publicity champion’; Communications Officers to work proactively with the ‘publicity champions’ to increase the number of press releases sent to the local media; and**
- c) **Communications Officers to ensure that, where appropriate, all press releases contain a comment from a relevant spokesperson. If Portfolio Holders are approached for a comment, they should be contacted as soon as possible and given 24 hours to provide a comment.**

Conclusion

Stage One of this review provided us with a clear insight into how Redditch Borough Council and Redditch as a town is perceived at the local, regional and national level. It demonstrated to us that the Council is suffering from a poor reputation and that the town is known for a number of negative points rather than for the many positive features and facilities it has to offer.

Understanding these issues has helped us to focus on what the Council should be doing to tackle these perceptions. For Stage Two of the exercise we concentrated on examining the following key themes:

- making communications a priority;
- internal communications;
- joint working;
- corporate branding;
- civic newspaper; and
- media relations.

Where possible we have followed national good practice and have built our review on the 'core actions' that the LGA Reputation Campaign proposes as crucial to achieve effective communications.

We urge you to accept the recommendations contained within this report. We believe these recommendations would be instrumental to improving the way the Council communicates and engages with the residents of Redditch and would help to tackle negative perceptions that currently exists of Redditch Borough Council.

Acknowledgements

Redditch Borough Council

The Members of Redditch Borough Council who took part in the research

The Officers at Redditch Borough Council who took part in the research

Redditch Student Council

The Corporate Management Team

Chris Smith

Sue Hanley

Elaine Storer

Redditch Borough Council Communications Team:

Suzanne Bennett

Bobbie Ashby

Finance Officer:

Jackie Young

Acknowledgements

Representatives from the Local Media

Steve Dyson (Editor of the Birmingham Mail)

Andrew Powell (Editor of the Redditch Standard)

Gurvinder Sidhu (BBC Hereford and Worcester)

Alan Wallcroft (Editor of the Redditch Advertiser)

Local Authority Communications Officers

Fiona Narburgh (Wychavon District Council)

Nicola Pelligrini (Stevenage Borough Council)

Lee Shrimpton (Worcestershire County Council)

Simon Trickett (Worcestershire County Council)

Jo Wilkinson (Stevenage Borough Council)

References

Local Government Association – Reputation Campaign Web Pages:

The MORI Research behind the campaign

(<http://reputation.lga.gov.uk/lga/core/page.do?pagelId=109165>)

Why Reputation?

(<http://campaigns.lga.gov.uk/reputation/home/>)

Publish a Regular Council Magazine / Newspaper to inform Residents

(www.campaigns.lga.gov.uk/reputation/communications/magazine/)

Key Documents:

Redditch Borough Council Communications and Consultations Strategy, 2006 – 2010

Redditch Borough Council Corporate Identity Guidelines – Summary Version, January 2007

Overview & Scrutiny

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Chair's Foreword

The role of the District Centres Task and Finish Group was to make recommendations on how the three purpose-built District Centres – Matchborough, Winyates and Woodrow, could be improved on a short term basis as well as to identify options for long-term redevelopment. We explored many issues during the exercise including installing cash machines into the Woodrow Centre and the upgrading of pedestrian access to local centres. We also considered the issue of opening up access to the bus route in order to generate greater trade for the local shopping centres. However, the Group were split on how this should be done.

We recognised that any recommendations may not be implemented immediately as the cost implications of improving the District Centres could potentially run into hundreds and thousands of pounds. Much of the work that would be needed would require a capital bid. The review built on an earlier scrutiny recommendation that the proposed development at Church Hill go ahead and I am confident that with these recommendations and other developments, the remaining three District Centres can be improved, updated and be active for generations to come.

On behalf of the District Centres Task and Finish Group, I would like to thank all Members, Officers from both Redditch Borough Council and Worcestershire County Council, outside bodies, and residents and commercial tenants of the Centres for contributing to the work of the District Centres Task and Finish Group.

Councillor Andy Fry
Chair of the District Centres Task and Finish Group



Task and Finish Group Membership

Task and Finish Group Members

Cllr A Fry (Chair)
Cllr D Taylor (Vice Chair from July 2007 until January 2008)
Cllr K Banks
Cllr M Chalk
Cllr D Dudley
Cllr D Enderby
Cllr N Hicks
Cllr D Hunt

Overview and Scrutiny Support

Helen Saunders
Jess Bayley



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Recommendations

We would like to recommend that:

1. an Improvement Fund be established to provide a continual source of funding for improvements in Matchborough, Winyates and Woodrow District Centres, subject to further work being undertaken by Officers to develop the proposed Improvement Fund further;
2. the Council consider entering into arrangements with local companies to sponsor local bus shelters and roundabouts in order to generate further income that could be used to make improvements to the three Centres;
3. Officers work with the landlord of the Old Sticky Wicket Public house in Matchborough to facilitate the creation of a pub garden;
4. a free 24 hour cash dispenser machine (ATM) be installed at the Woodrow Centre, outside the Costcutter supermarket;
5. where there is scope, the Council work with the Probation Service to deliver specific enhancement works in Matchborough, Winyates and Woodrow District Centres;
6. the Council consider allocation of £500 for basic work on upgrading the security of residential properties in Winyates District Centre; this funding to be used to finance work by a Community Support Officer and a skilled manual worker / joiner / labourer;
7. the Council approach What's Your Point community group to carry out painting and decorating works on the commercial shutters in the District Centres. A budget of £5,000 should be made available for these works. What's Your Point to work with the commercial tenants to agree a colour scheme or appropriate design for the shutters;



Recommendations

8. Officers to arrange for the purchase of 20 road side signs at a total cost of £4,500, directing traffic from the main arterial roads to the relevant District Centres. The signs must include 'Shopping Centre' as part of their wording;
9. a capital bid is made for 2009/10 to undertake resurfacing and remodelling works within the Winyates centre in two key phases:

Phase 1: resurfacing the bus lane and either footpath immediately left and right of the bus lane.

Phase 2: remodelling of the footpath, entrances to the Winyate Pub and the old toilets.
10. the sections of the bus only lanes that travel through Matchborough, Winyates and Woodrow District Centres be maintained as bus only routes.
11. the Council investigates the relative costs of either contracting out or buying machinery to remove chewing gum from the paved surfaces in the three District Centres; and finally
12. the Council redevelops all of the remaining three District Centres in the future and that the Council considers Woodrow Centre as the next centre for redevelopment after the redevelopment of Church Hill District Centre has been undertaken.



Introduction

Aims and Objectives of the Review

The District Centres review began in 2005 and originally had two distinct, objectives. These were:

1. to decide which of the four purpose-built District Centres (Church Hill, Matchborough, Winyates and Woodrow) should be the subject of a wholesale redevelopment; and
2. to explore viable ways to carry out piecemeal improvements to the remaining Centres that were not selected for redevelopment.

The first stage of the exercise was completed in October 2006 when Church Hill was selected for redevelopment. The Church Hill redevelopment was shaped by the contents of a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD). Church Hill consequently ceased to be included within the remit of this review.

The District Centres Task and Finish Group was established in May 2007 to complete the second stage of the exercise. The aim of the second stage of the review was to investigate what piecemeal improvements could be made to Matchborough, Winyates and Woodrow District Centres.



Methods

Bus Tour

At the beginning of the 2007/08 municipal year, new Members were appointed to the District Centres Task and Finish Group. To familiarise ourselves with the conditions in the District Centres we felt that it would be a useful exercise for us to undertake a bus tour of the four purpose-built District Centres. This trip took place on Tuesday the 4th of September 2007.

In each of the centres, we met with the representatives of various interest groups in order to learn more about the problems that the centres were facing. These included:

- representatives from the local Police;
- Officers from Redditch Borough Council's Anti-Social Behaviour Team;
- commercial tenants; and
- residential tenants.

We used the bus trip to help us identify the key problems for each of the three remaining centres. Shortly after the bus tour took place a debriefing meeting was held where we in turn listed each of the areas we were concerned about in the three centres and where we felt we might be able to make some recommendations for improvement. This list was used as the basis for a work programme for the review.

At subsequent meetings we invited relevant Officers from within the Council to present information about the issues we had identified. We have discussed the information provided by Officers. Based upon these deliberations we have either made recommendations or, where considered necessary, requested further information from Officers.



Methods

Structure of Report

The following discussion section of the report is split into four parts as follows:

- issues relevant to Matchborough Centre;
- issues relevant to Winyates Centre;
- issues relevant to Woodrow Centre; and
- overarching issues relevant to all three of the District Centres.

A brief account of our discussions has been provided with information detailing what recommendations were made, if any, from our deliberations.



Matchborough Centre

Introduction

We felt that there were some very positive features contained within and around Matchborough District Centre. We felt that the 'Matchborough Water Gardens' constituted a very pleasant, well looked after green area with a duck pond, a large grassy area and benches for people to sit and enjoy their surroundings. We were all in agreement that this provided users of the Centre with an extra facility they could use in addition to the usual District Centre facilities. However, there were some elements in the centre that we felt could be improved or enhanced.

Matchborough Toilets & Plaque

An issue that stood out to us when we visited Matchborough Centre was the fact that the de-commissioned toilets stood empty. We agreed this was a wasted opportunity and that it would be useful to make use of the space left by the old toilets by turning it into a new unit. Officers explained that it would be extremely difficult and expensive to carry out this type of conversion. This was because the building was situated on a split level. Officers pointed out that the building would have to be reconfigured for it to be changed into a useful space. As a result of this advice, we decided to take no further action on this item.

During the bus trip to the District Centres, we observed that a plaque was attached to the exterior of the old Matchborough toilets unit. This sign advertised opening times for the toilet facilities. We discussed whether to remove the plaque, given that the toilet facilities were no longer available for public use.

The Old Sticky Wicket Pub at Matchborough

We all felt that the grassy area adjacent to the Old Sticky Wicket Public House had potential to be greatly improved by creating a pub garden. We felt that this would compliment the existing 'Matchborough Water Gardens'. At our suggestion, Officers negotiated with the landlord of the Sticky Wicket and reported to Members that the Landlord was happy to introduce a pub garden in time for the summer months.

We recommend that Officers work with the landlord of the Old Sticky Wicket Public house in Matchborough to facilitate the creation of a pub garden.



Winyates Centre

Introduction

When visiting Winyates Centre, it was immediately obvious that this centre faced a series of more complex problems than Matchborough. Winyates Centre has a reasonable sized residential community living above and in close vicinity to the centre. This was in contrast to Matchborough, which had only one tenant living above the Centre. It was clear to us that this created a number of additional issues that needed to be addressed. However, we did recognise that Winyates provides a diverse range of shops and services including a butchers, a hair salon, a nursery and a craft centre. In addition, the Centre benefits from the fact that the Council's Anti-Social Behaviour team are based in the Centre.

Security in Winyates Centre

During our visit to Winyates Centre, Officers from the Anti-Social Behaviour team demonstrated to us the types of anti-social problems that had developed because there was no secure access to the residential flats located above the shopping units. It was evident that a greatly improved system was needed to combat these issues.

We were shown some options for increasing the security. One proposed option involved the possibility of installing an electronic secure access system on the communal access doors, similar in arrangement to that recently installed at Woodrow Centre. After we heard evidence from Officers, we decided that this scheme was too expensive and would take a considerable amount of time to implement. However, Officers were able to show us a cheaper and possibly quicker alternative which involved simple upgrading of the current security system. Officers suggested that it would cost approximately £500 to make basic upgrades to communal access points, gas cupboards, front doors and windows in the form of bolts, locks, chains and jammers. This would cover the cost of materials but not the cost of labour. In order to address this, we propose that a skilled Officer employed by the Council undertake the work.

We recommend the Council consider the allocation of £500 for basic work on upgrading the security of residential properties in Winyates District Centre; this funding to be used to finance work by a Community Support Officer and a skilled manual worker / joiner /labourer.



Winyates Centre

Benches in Woodrow and Winyates

We were concerned about the high number of reported incidents of anti-social behaviour that occurred in the centres. It was reported that benches within the some of the Centres were acting as a focal point for this anti-social behaviour. We also noted that some of the benches were in poor condition. Officers investigated further the costs for removing the benches. However, we decided to take no further action on this item.

Removal of Low wall in Winyates

As a Group, we were very were concerned by reports of youths congregating around a low wall opposite the supermarket in Winyates Centre. Officers examined whether it would be feasible to knock down this wall. However, there were concerns that this wall formed part of the drainage system. We therefore decided to take no further action on this item.

Vacant Toilet in Winyates

As in the case of Matchborough, Winyates Centre had decommissioned toilet facilities and we noticed that again the space left was not being used. We felt it would be useful to utilise this space and Officers explained that it may be possible to convert into a storage facility that could be used by the Council. However, we made no further recommendation on this issue.

The Central Ground Space at Winyates

We agreed that the central ground space within Winyates District Centre did not appear to serve any useful purpose and that it would be beneficial to the centre if a purpose could be agreed. We discussed a variety of ideas on how to fill the space. The ideas discussed included allowing The Winyate Public House to expand their outside seating area into this space; inviting market stalls to utilise the space; and using the area for public performances. However, we made no recommendation about how we could fill this space.



Winyates Centre

Ground Surface Renewal at Winyates

During our discussions about Winyates Centre, Winyates Ward Members raised concerns that the bus lane was splitting the Centre into two distinct parts. Some of us felt that the shopping centre and the Winyates Barn felt like two separate entities. However, we agreed it would be beneficial for them to be seen as part of one large complex. We discussed the possibility of linking the two sections together through the physical fabric of the centre. One suggested way of achieving this would be to replace the current ground surface with a coloured surface that incorporates the shopping centre with the bus lane and Winyates Barn / Craft Centre. Winyates Ward Members also stated that they had received complaints from constituents that the surface in Winyates had deteriorated to the point that it was considered dangerous and a tripping hazard and therefore argued that the Centre was in need of resurfacing.

While discussing possible resurfacing options, it became clear that if we were to recommend that part of the centre be resurfaced, it would be sensible to carry out other needed works at the same time. Officers explained that footpaths and entrances to buildings were not compliant with Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) legislation and would benefit from work being carried out to raise the Centre to the required standard. Further details of all the proposals and a map detailing the areas for proposed changes can be found in Appendix 1. Officers provided costs for three phases as follows:

- Phase 1** Remodelling the pedestrian crossings and resurfacing the ground surface on the bus lane and the adjacent footpaths either side of the bus lane. **Total cost: £70,000.**
- Phase 2** Remodelling some of the pathways and the entrance to the Winyate Public House to make it DDA compliant. It also includes some work on walled features surrounding the vacant Dentist and toilet units that would help to remove problems of vandalism and anti-social behaviour. **Total cost: £65,000**



Winyates Centre

Ground Surface Renewal at Winyates

Phase 3 This option involves resurfacing the area around the main shopping precinct.
Total cost: £22,000

If all three phases are constructed concurrently, the total cost of the scheme is estimated at £151,000. However, if the scheme is constructed phase by phase then the aggregated scheme cost would be £157,000. The Group felt that these costs could be covered either by submitting a capital bid or by the money that could be generated from other schemes recommended in this report.

After considering all of these proposals, we decided that it would be prudent to implement all three options if possible. We were aware of the high cost implications of this recommendation. In order to reduce these costs, we decided that the idea of introducing raised landing platform for buses at the bus stop would be unnecessarily costly and could be removed from the proposals. We agreed that if possible the work should occur in stages in order to spread out the costs of the work.

Officers have subsequently informed us that the funding for Phase 3 will be made available through the allowances of the repairs and maintenance capital expenditure for 2009 / 10. Therefore, the total cost based on the above workings for the two phases would be approximately **£135,000**.

Therefore, we recommend that a capital bid be submitted to carry out resurfacing and remodelling works within the Winyates Centre in two key areas:

Phase 1: resurfacing the bus lane and either footpath immediately left and right of the bus lane.

Phase 2: remodelling of the footpath, entrances to the Winyate Pub and the old toilets.



Woodrow Centre

Introduction

We found Woodrow Centre to be very similar to Winyates in that it provides housing for a large number of people above the Centre. We felt that Woodrow Centre again, offered local residents a diverse set of facilities including a library in addition to the usual shops and a public house. We also agreed that there was some development potential, with open land adjacent to the Centre that could be used for any future expansion or development plans.

Bank services

We all agreed that it was important that all of the District Centres offered visitors banking facilities. However, one of the key differences of Woodrow from the other Centres was that it did not provide a banking facility. Officers were asked to approach commercial tenants at the Centre and ascertain if any of them would be willing to provide a banking facility on their premises. The new Costcutter tenant was keen to pursue this idea. Members specified, in descending order, their preferences for the location of a cash dispenser machine:

- outside the Costcutters unit and free of charge;
- inside the Costcutters unit and free of charge;
- outside the Costcutters unit and subject to charge; or
- inside the Costcutters unit and subject to charge.

We recommend that a free 24 hour cash dispenser machine (ATM) be installed at the Woodrow Centre, outside the Costcutter supermarket.



Woodrow Centre

Kwik-Save Unit at Woodrow

During the District Centres Task and Finish Group exercise, the Kwik Save shop in Woodrow District Centre closed. We all agreed that it was of paramount importance that a supermarket was maintained in all Centres and were keen to ensure that another supermarket took its place quickly. Officers were able to provide updates for us at each meeting about the Council's negotiations with possible supermarket replacements and we were very pleased when this issue was resolved when Costcutter was brought in as a replacement.

Vacant Land in Woodrow Centre

As mentioned above, we were informed early on in the exercise that land had become available at the Woodrow Centre where the old Health Centre used to be situated. During meetings, we did discuss possible uses for this land. However, we did not agree any recommendations for this issue.



General Issues

Introduction

During our investigations, we found that many of the issues discussed were pertinent to all of the District Centres. The following section of the report highlights these issues and any recommendations that were made while considering the items.

Improvement Fund

It was very clear once we started this review, that making improvements to the Centres would inevitably involve spending large sums of money. In order to make tangible recommendations that would make an impact on the Centres, we agreed we would need to identify how to make extra resources available to finance any recommendations that had large cost implications.

A proposal by Officers, and one that we were keen to pursue, was the establishment of an Improvement Fund for Matchborough, Winyates and Woodrow Centres. This was proposed as a way to raise income for work in the centres. The Improvement Fund would work by top-slicing the rental income received from commercial tenants and ring-fencing the funds for improvement works in the District Centres for a specific number of years. We acknowledge that further work is need by Officers to develop this idea further.

We recommend that an Improvement Fund be established to provide a source of funding for improvements for Matchborough, Winyates and Woodrow District Centres subject to further work being undertaken by Officers to develop the Improvement Fund further.

Sponsorship

Officers and Members discussed the possibility of encouraging local companies to sponsor bus shelters and roundabouts in Redditch in order to raise additional income. It was noted that this had been successfully undertaken by other authorities in the local area. We agreed that any income raised through sponsorship could be utilised for improvements to the three remaining District Centres.



General Issues

Use of the Probation Service

We recommend that the Council consider entering into arrangements with companies to sponsor local bus shelters and roundabouts in order to generate further income.

Officers suggested one way of making savings and improving the visual appearance of the centres would be to utilise individuals on probation undertaking community service to undertake work in the three centres. It was explained by Officers that the Probation Service was already working with the Council over the delivery of other projects. We agreed that individuals undertaking community service could help by carrying out additional specific enhancement works in the Centres that are not already undertaken by the Council, therefore improving and maintaining the appearance of the Centres.

We recommend that where there is scope, the Council work with the Probation Service to deliver specific enhancement works in Matchborough, Winyates and Woodrow District Centres.

Canopies

A common feature of the three District Centres was the overhanging canopies over the shops, particularly in Matchborough Centre. We felt that the canopies overhanging the shop units contributed to an overall bleak appearance at the three centres. As a group, we were all keen to see these canopies removed. However, Officers reported that it would be extremely difficult to remove the canopies as they made up an integral part of the building structure. Therefore, we agreed not to pursue this issue any further.

Cleaning in all of the Centres

As a Group, we recognised the necessity for the Centres to be kept clean and tidy at all times. While we did not feel the Centres we visited were overly dirty covered in litter we wanted to ensure that proper cleaning levels were being maintained. Officers did inform us that cleaning takes place regularly in the centres: twice a day in the week and once a day at weekends. We felt that this frequency was adequate and should be maintained by the Council.



General Issues

One issue of cleansing that we were particularly concerned with was the large amount of chewing gum that was found on the pavements of the Centres. Members agreed that they wanted to investigate further the possibility of incorporating the regular removal of chewing in the three Centres into the cleansing schedule either by buying machinery to undertake the task or by contracting the work out to an external company.

We recommend that the Council investigates the relative costs of either contracting out or buying machinery to remove chewing gum from the paved surfaces in the three District Centres.

Empty Units

We agreed there was an issue regarding the vacant units in all of the centres, but we were particularly concerned with the empty Dentist unit at Winyates Centre. Using information provided by Officers we decided that there was little that could be recommended at this stage. However, Officers from Property Services are due to present a report on this issue to the Executive Committee in the near future.

Shutters on Commercial Properties

One feature common to all of the District Centres was the metallic shutters used to protect the frontages of the commercial units when the units were closed. All of the Group agreed that these shutters contributed to the creation of an uninviting appearance in the centres, especially at night and weekends when the units were more likely to be closed. Initially, we felt that replacing these shutters would be the most suitable course of action to take. However, there was a significant cost implication for this and we were informed that new shutters would require planning permission.

We therefore decided that the best method of refreshing the shutters was to repaint them. Officers discussed the possibilities with the commercial tenants of the three centres and presented us with three options for redecorating the shutters:



General Issues

- painting the shutters one agreed, uniform colour;
- painting the shutters alternating, different colours; or
- painting different patterns and designs onto the shutters.

We also felt that the repainting of the shutters provided an opportunity to engage members of the local community in revitalising their local environment. We were very impressed by the recent work carried out in some of the underpasses in the town by the local group “What’s Your Point?” .

We agreed that we would invite ‘What’s Your Point?’ to undertake the repainting work on the Shutters, in consultation with Officers from the Council. Rather than making any decisions about the three proposed options for a colour scheme, as highlighted above, we felt it would be beneficial “What’s Your Point?” to consult with the commercial tenants to agree on a colour scheme. Officers informed us that the work carried out by the What’s Your Point? Group on the underpass in the town centre had cost the Council £6,000. We therefore expect that the group would charge a similar figure for the repainting of the shutters in the Centres.

We recommend the Council approach What’s Your Point community group to carry out painting and decorating works on the commercial shutters in the District Centres. A budget of £5,000 should be made available for these works. What’s Your Point to work with the commercial tenants to agree a colour scheme or appropriate design for shutters.



General Issues

Signage to Centres

While driving between the different Centres on the bus tour, we noticed that the signposting on the highways was inconsistent and unclear. We all agreed that there was the need for more effective sign posting indicating the location of the centres. We agreed that all signs should be standardised and each district centre should be clearly labelled as a "shopping centre". Officers investigated the costs of installing new signs to the District Centres and reported that for twenty signs it would cost £4,500.

We recommend that Officers to arrange for the purchase of 20 road side signs at a total cost of £4,500, directing traffic from the main arterial roads to the relevant District Centres. The signs must include 'Shopping Centre' as part of their wording.

Bicycle and Footpath Access

A further issue we considered during the exercise was that of making it easier to reach the Centres on foot or by bicycle. We discussed installing lockable cycle racks in the centres and increasing the provision of cycle routes into the centres. However, this issue was not prioritised and therefore we did not make a recommendation.



General Issues

Lighting and other Security Measures

An important contributing factor to the overall appearance of the Centres was the quality of the lighting. We discussed this in great detail and came to the conclusion that the lighting might not be adequate in all of the Centres especially around some of the covered areas entrances into the Centres. However, this issue was not prioritised as highly as some of the other issues that we discussed and as a consequence no recommendation was made about lighting in the Centres.

Future Development

As a conclusion to our review of the three District Centres, we decided that we would like to make a recommendation on which of the three remaining purpose-built District Centres should be redeveloped once the redevelopment of Church Hill has been completed. We agreed that all of the Centres were most in need of redevelopment. However, we did feel that Woodrow, as the oldest Centre, was showing its age the most. We acknowledged that redeveloping Woodrow Centre would present difficulties, especially given the large number of flats and maisonettes built above the Centre. However, it was clear from our visit that there were a large number of physical, environmental and social problems associated with the Centre which needed to be addressed.

Further to this, we felt that this review had produced a number of in-depth recommendations for the improvement of Winyates Centre, that if accepted and implemented, would result in considerable changes to the Centre in the long term. This was not necessarily the case for Woodrow Centre.

Therefore, we recommend that the Council redevelops all of the remaining three District Centres in the future and considers Woodrow Centre as the next centre for redevelopment after the redevelopment of Church Hill District Centre has taken place.



General Issues

Opening of Bus only Routes

We have conducted several discussions about the possibility of opening up the small sections of the 57 / 58 bus route running through the three centres. This idea was originally proposed by tenants of the centres, who felt that if these routes were opened up to all traffic this would be an increase in passing trade to the centres.

To aid our discussions, we invited representatives from Worcestershire County Council to talk to us on behalf of Integrated Passenger Transport about the feasibility and implications of opening up this particular bus only lane. We also heard evidence from representatives from the two bus companies operating in Redditch: First and Diamond. These three expert witnesses were all opposed to opening up the buses only route. (The case put forward by the three witnesses can be seen in more detail in Appendix 2). However the main reasons for their opposition to opening up the bus lanes are highlighted below.

- **Bus operating speeds.** Utilising bus only lanes has the advantage that higher bus speeds can be maintained compared to a normal carriageway. Lack of congestion results in shorter journey times, higher frequency of buses, and lower operating costs. The impact of this is that these services are more commercially viable and therefore are more likely to be sustained.
- **Strategic policy framework.** The opening up of the bus only lanes contravenes principles of the Integrated Passenger Transport strategy which closely follows guidelines set out in other related local, regional and national policies.
- **Best Practice.** We were informed the 57 / 58 bus only route is routinely used by the County Council as an example of best practice in demonstrating how bus only routes can improve efficiency, sustainability, and reliability for customers.



General Issues

Opening of Bus Routes

- **Environmental sustainability.** It was stressed to us that maintaining bus only routes was important to addressing issues of environmental sustainability. Bus priority measures are imperative to offering a real alternative to private modes of transport and to help in supporting an improved environment for local people.
- **Low accident rates.** The current rate of accidents is low on the bus only routes. It was argued to us that if the bus only routes were opened up to other traffic, this would increase the likelihood of pedestrian and vehicle conflict and lead to a rise in accidents of this nature.

We fiercely debated this issue but no consensus was reached about what recommendation we collectively wished to make. Some of us have been convinced by the expert witnesses' arguments whilst other Members feel that these points simply represent conjecture. Therefore, the three viewpoints put forward by various Members of the Group were considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. These three viewpoints were as follows:

- a) opens up the whole of the 57 / 58 bus only route to all traffic in order to increase passing trade to the District Centres;
- b) opens the sections of the bus only routes that travel through Matchborough, Winyates and Woodrow District Centres to all traffic in order to increase accessibility to the District Centres;
or
- c) maintains the 57 /58 route as a bus only route.



General Issues

Opening of Bus Routes

Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee debated this issue at a recent meeting. The Committee were informed that they could put forward either one recommendation or propose a majority and minority recommendation which would represent two viewpoints of the Committee.

The majority of the Committee agreed that the whole of 57 / 58 bus route should be maintained as a bus only route. **Therefore, we recommend that the sections of the bus only route that travel through Matchborough, Winyates and Woodrow District Centres be maintained as a bus only route.**



Appendix 1

Report of Operations Manager, Asset Maintenance Regarding Winyates Centre Resurfacing

The following items need to be considered in conjunction with the possibility of a review of the operation of some or all of the bus-only lanes. For Members' guidance, these are sited at:

Church Green West (Town Centre)
Park Way (Easemore Rd.) to Matchborough Way (Icknield Street Drive)
Studley Road (Woodrow)

The main route passes through the District Centres of Church Hill, Winyates and Matchborough. The major residential areas are served independently, off the Local and District Distributor Road network. However there is no direct access to serve residential properties off the bus lanes except at Winyates Centre (including Holy Oaks Close) and Matchborough Centre. In both instances these are the sole means of access. As a consequence of these arrangements access to these areas is gained in four places:

Winyates Centre (N) via Winyates Way off Moons Moat Drive

Winyates Centre (S) via Matchborough Way off Warwick Highway

Matchborough Centre (N) via Matchborough Way off Warwick Highway

Matchborough Centre (S) via Matchborough Way off Icknield Street Drive

This results in considerable lengths of all-purpose highway, except in the immediate vicinity of the District Centres.



Appendix 1

Any alterations to the existing arrangements will necessitate corresponding revisions to the Traffic Regulation Orders (TROs). This is a formal and lengthy (32 weeks) process in addition to anticipated design and construction factors.

For the sake of clarity, I have for ease of reference only, split up the various areas and listed the perceived problems and possible solutions. With regards to adoptions, it would appear that only Winyates Way and the paving immediately adjacent, on either side, is public highway (Worcestershire County Council). The areas in and around the District Centre are Redditch Borough Council's responsibility.

As a final footnote, preliminary layouts had already been prepared (in October 2006) showing how the bus lanes at both Winyates and Matchborough Centres could to be modified to accommodate through traffic, whilst retaining priority for buses.

Phase One: Winyates Way

On the west side, the path has been partially reconstructed and is in generally good area. Pedestrian crossing points have been formed but do not comply with current standards in respect of tactile surfaces and DDA. There are remnants of earlier fixtures/fittings which have been cut-off flush with the surface.

There is evidence of earlier works to pave a former soft landscaped area to the south of the bus shelter. This is in poor condition and was probably not carried out in an appropriate fashion at the time.

The carriageway surface is in reasonable condition, and appears to have been locally resurfaced at some previous time. On the east side, works of a similar nature have been carried out, but not to the full width of the paved area.



Appendix 1

Phase Two: The Winyate-Dentist-Health Centre

There are no proper tactile crossing points. The existing crossing points are not truly sites on the natural desire lines. The layout of the existing bus stops partially creates a hazard for pedestrians, particularly on the southbound services. It is recommended that these deficiencies are rectified.

The paths on the south side, leading away from the bus shelter are in reasonably good order. There is some evidence of statutory undertakers activities, and other than patching, do not appear to have had any adverse impact.

On the north side, the path leads towards The Winyate Public House. The access to these private premises does not appear to be DDA compliant. There is a 15m long ramp – gradient 1 in 10 (which is not acceptable) and also leaves a step of more than 150mm to enter the building. Also, there are steps at either end in addition to the ramp and a visually adverse effect is created by the additional 1-1.2m in elevation that needs to be gained.

It is possible to reshape paths to reduce the difference in levels thereby eliminating both visual and safety problems. There is considerable exposed brickwork (18 courses) below floor level at the corner nearest to Winyates Way, and levels can be raised sympathetically.

At the eastern end, there is an additional ramp and steps leading to the former public conveniences. These latter are purely retained for the distribution of electrical services. The dividing wall between the high-low sides has failed. It may be possible to modify the access to the former public conveniences for service access only, and eliminate this hazardous and visually unattractive area.



Appendix 1

Phase Three: Main Precinct and Access to South Car Park

By the former Dentist's unit, there is a narrow staircase leading to the lower level which is currently effectively redundant. Consequently, to achieve a reasonable access for the less mobile, there is a brick planted area with an adjacent ramp. This varies in relative height between 675mm and 525mm. There is also a ramped dividing wall to protect the difference in height and it appears, as happened at Church Hill, that this is being mis-used to facilitate vandalism of the canopy guttering. This feature can be removed and the area re-shaped to eliminate these problems.

This area is in generally good order. The brick-paved areas in front of the shop units only require re-pointing. The tarmac paths have had various repairs as well as suffered from the effects of utility services. These latter areas can be readily improved by resurfacing works.

The exit towards the south car park is principally ramped, although there are steps on either side 4 next to empty corner unit and 6 near to the former video store. These cannot be removed to comply with DDA standards, and therefore the earlier suggestions to remove steps are not practically viable. This naturally forms the limit of any proposed works in the vicinity. A limited levelling exercise has been carried out to determine the extent of any required re-shaping.

Conclusion

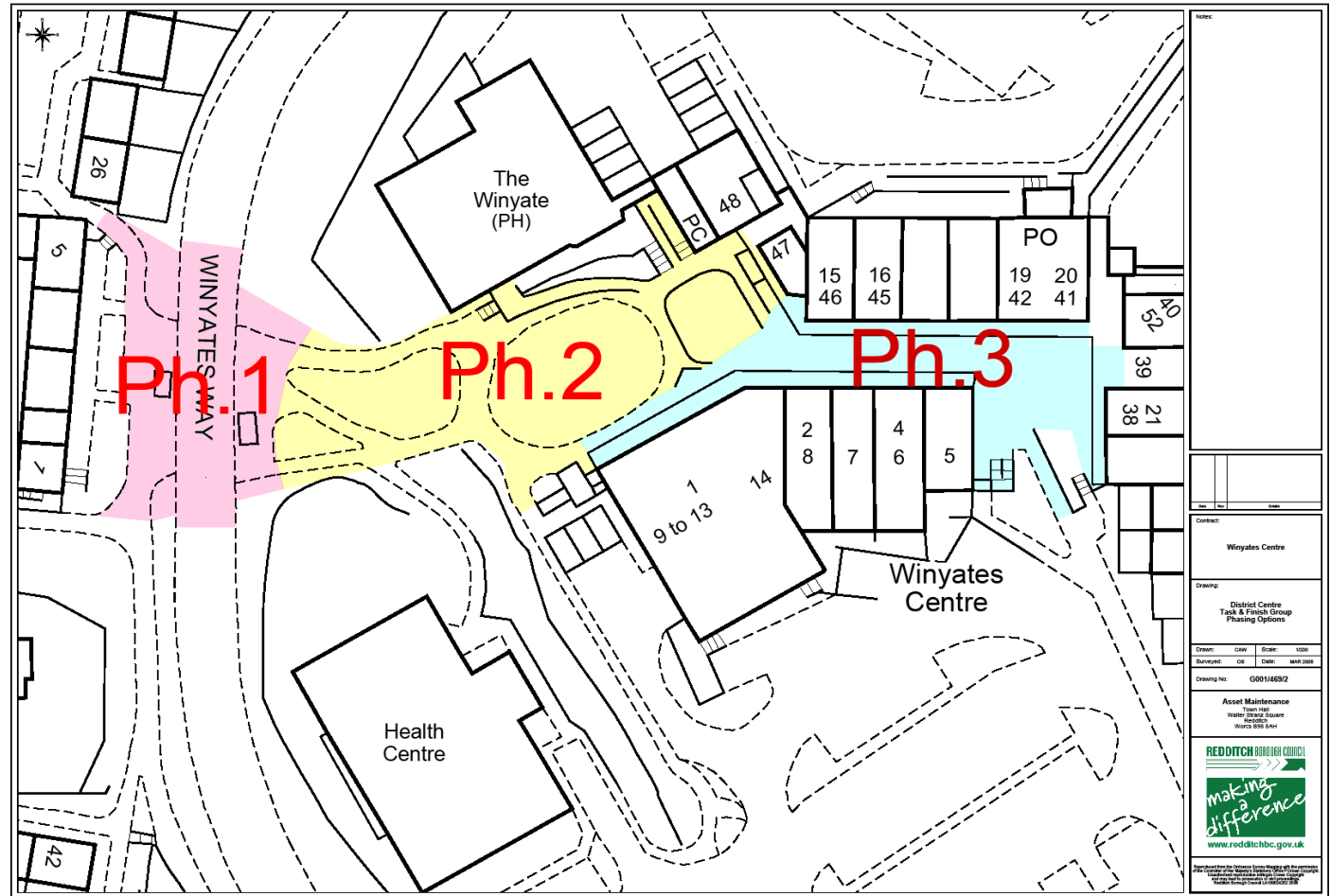
I'd stress at this stage that these are only broad-brush preliminary estimates. No account has been taken for utility apparatus and these will need to be factored into final budget proposals.

All costs subject to survey, etc. With the exception of Winyates Way, they allow for traditional materials only and any enhanced specifications would significantly impact upon final costs.



Appendix 1

Plan of Winyates Centre showing 3 Phases



Appendix 2

Written Response from Worcestershire Integrated Passenger Transport

A request has been received from Redditch Borough Council to consider the opening up of the sections of bus lanes running through the Centres (Winyates, Woodrow and Matchborough) to all traffic. The response from Integrated Passenger Transport at Worcestershire County Council is that it strongly opposes any relaxation of the restrictions of use of the busways (and other bus priority facilities) in Redditch which allows access to any vehicles other than buses, as it does not conform to Best Practice as detailed in the Integrated Passenger Transport Strategy (IPTS). The overarching vision of the IPTS is to provide for Worcestershire 'an affordable, accessible, safe, convenient, environmentally sustainable and integrated passenger transport network, capable of attracting an increasing market share for public transport, thereby, contributing to the achievement of the objectives in Worcestershire's LTP2'.

The purpose of the strategy is to establish the best possible passenger transport network and facilities, which will address the needs of both current and potential passengers in Worcestershire and deliver the transport objectives of the Government, the County Council and the District Councils. This includes accommodating in a sustainable way, the growth in travel demand likely to be generated by the Regional Spatial Strategy. This is completely consistent with national, regional and local policies and guidance on the environment, economy and transport, including:

The Stern Review – The Economics of Climate Change
The Sir Robert Eddington Transport Study – The Case for Action
Department for Transport – Towards a Sustainable Transport System
Department for Transport – Putting Passengers First
Planning Policy Guidance 13



Appendix 2

Regional Economic Strategy
Regional Spatial Strategy
Regional Transport Strategy
Worcestershire County Council – Second Local Transport Plan
Worcestershire County Council – Integrated Passenger Transport Strategy
Worcestershire County Council – Passenger Transport Integrated Passenger Transport

An effective transport network is essential in order to give people access to the opportunities and benefits that contribute to the enjoyment of a better quality of life.

Bus Priority forms a vital input to the IPTS, and can be summarised as the provision or amendment of infrastructure and/or traffic control and management systems designed to improve the performance, efficiency cost and image of bus travel. Busways and bus-only lanes are an integral part of a Bus Priority Strategy. The key aims are to generate greater use of passenger transport and encourage modal shift from private car to bus. These aims are in line with national, regional and local transport policies on encouraging the use of sustainable transport. The impact of the proposed growth in travel demand arising from the Regional Spatial Strategy puts further emphasis on the need to provide a sustainable and realistic alternative to the car for certain types of journey.

There is clear evidence that bus priority measures have a major role in supporting balanced and integrated transport strategies seeking to improve the quality of passenger transport. Bus priority measures can ensure that passenger transport (and walking and cycling) can offer a realistic and sustainable alternative to the private car, whilst supporting economic prosperity and an improved environment for residents and visitors alike.



Appendix 2

Bus priority measures are designed to give higher priority to bus services (high capacity/high efficiency) over low occupancy vehicles (lower capacity and less efficient) along congested sections of the road network, (particularly in urban areas). Where applicable bus priority measures should also provide priority access to key generators and attractors of travel demand.

Effective and systematic measures protecting buses from the effects of traffic congestion has been demonstrated to have a beneficial impact on bus journey times, service reliability and punctuality, passenger demand, revenue and the level of subsidy required to deliver a high quality passenger transport network. Decreasing journey time variability through the provision of bus only lanes :

- enables timetables to be constructed with greater certainty;
- reduces the need to provide additional time to allow for out of course delays, thereby reducing vehicle and crew requirements and costs;
- reduces the need to have differential journey times between peak and off-peak periods;
- enables more easily understood and simple timetables to be developed; and
- enables users to place greater reliance on the achievement of advertised journey times, increasing confidence in the dependability of the service.

Conversely, slow and unreliable bus services have a significant adverse impact on bus network performance in terms of:

- the numbers of vehicles and crew required to operate bus services;
- the cost of operating the bus network (as vehicle and crew requirements are the main determinants of operating costs); and



Appendix 2

- the attractiveness of the services to potential passengers (particularly those who have a choice of transport modes) with a consequent negative knock-on effect on farebox revenue and the level of financial support required to maintain and improve the bus network

Summary

The bus only lanes that are operational of bus routes 57 and 58 through the District Centres at Winyates, Matchborough and Woodrow are cited as best practice in Worcestershire (see attached leaflet) and are a fundamental contribution to their level of performance and the position of these services as the most highly used bus services in the county which deliver the highest operating speeds. The services are high frequency and are commercially run by two national bus operators in direct competition. Any measures which diminish these benefits, such as the withdrawal of busways or bus-only lanes, would lead to:

- a reduction in operating speeds as the roads become more congested;
- increases in bus journey times and operating costs;
- a decline in bus service reliability;
- a decline in passenger transport accessibility ;
- a decline in bus usage and revenue; and
- a decrease in the commerciality of these services. (This could lead to a reduction in the frequency of the services or to a withdrawal of the operation of the service on a commercial basis).

Conclusions

The Integrated Passenger Transport Strategy has been approved by the full Cabinet and therefore the Integrated Passenger Transport section of Worcestershire County Council unequivocally opposes the suggestion to open up the bus only lanes through the district centres at Winyates, Woodrow and Matchborough as it does not conform to best practice as detailed in the IPTS and as detailed above. As the IPTS is approved by Cabinet, there can be no deviation from the policy without reference back to Cabinet members.



Appendix 2

There are adequate access roads to each of the centres that are open to general traffic, and there are car parks from these access roads for each of these centres. The rationale, that by opening up these small sections of bus route it would make it easier for people to access the centres and thereby increase the number of visits to them is contrary to current environmental and sustainable transport policies which seek to improve access by sustainable transport modes (walk, cycling and bus) rather than the private car. It is probable that the roads around the centres would become more congested, having a detrimental effect on the bus services and passengers boarding and alighting at the centres, and making the centres less attractive to visitors as access becomes more difficult.



Acknowledgements

Redditch Borough Council Officers

Property Services:

Rob Kindon
Jim Prendergrast (until August 2007)
Ian Tingling (until December 2007)

Asset Maintenance:

Clive Wilson

Anti-Social Behaviour Team:

Liz Bellaby
Victoria Stenton

Community Safety:

Peter Hill

Landscape and Countryside Services:

Carl Walker

Worcestershire County Council

Integrated Passenger Transport:

Chris Wilson

Bus Companies

Representatives from First Bus Company:

Sean Simpson
Nick Parker

Representative from Diamond Bus Company:

Stef Webb



Acknowledgements

West Mercia Police

Representatives from West Mercia Police including

PC Paul Kennedy

PC Paul Downes

PC Martina Dudley

Commercial and Residential Tenants

Mr Redding – Redding's Butchers, Winyates Centre

Residents of Woodrow Centre

Mr Danson - Chemists at Woodrow Centre



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Overview & Scrutiny Committee

No Direct Ward Relevance

9th April 2008

10. CHARGING POLICY AND PROCEDURES

(Report of the Borough Director))

1. Purpose of Report

To present for Members' consideration a draft Charging Policy and Procedure for Redditch Borough Council.

2. Recommendation

The Committee is asked to RECOMMEND that

the Council approve and adopt the Charging Policy and Procedure, as set out in Appendix A to the report.

3. Financial, Legal, Policy and Risk Implications

Financial

- 3.1 The Charging Policy and Procedure will facilitate a holistic approach to setting fees and charges at Redditch Borough Council. A comprehensive summary of the financial implications are set out in the covering report below.

Legal

- 3.2 There are no direct legal implications.

Policy

- 3.3 The Charging Policy and Procedure will constitute a new policy for Redditch Borough Council.

Risk

- 3.4 There is a risk that with formal policy and procedures individuals might not be treated equitably. However, equity of access is addressed in the Charging Policy and Procedure with concessions recommended for particular social groups including; young people less than 16 years of age; full time students; senior citizens in receipt of means tested benefit; people with a disability in receipt of means tested benefit; and individuals on low incomes or in receipt of means tested benefit.

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Report

4. Background

- 4.1 Local authorities have a wide range of powers to charge for a variety of services. The revenue generated through fees and charges is an increasingly important source of income for local authorities. However, currently Redditch Borough Council does not have an adopted Charging Policy.
- 4.2 Currently charges are reviewed annually by the Executive Committee. Fees and charges are generally increased in line with inflation. Members have not tended to carry out detailed reviews of charging levels in comparison with the Council's Priorities in part because the volume of information is large and timescales are short.
- 4.3 The Fees and Charges Task and Finish review was initiated in July 2007 to scrutinise the Council's approach to charging. There were a number of overarching objectives for this review:
- a) to assess the contribution charging can make to funding efficiency and the strategic effectiveness of the Council;
 - b) to make recommendations that would enhance the ability of the Council's approach to charging to support the Council's strategic objectives; and
 - c) to examine and recommend ways to manage the impact of charging on equity.
- 4.4 During the course of the review the Audit Commission published a comprehensive report on the subject of local government approaches to charging, which was entitled "Positively Charged: Maximising the Benefits of Local Public Service Charges" (January 2008). This report revealed the multipurpose use of charging: as a source of income to pay for services; as a method for encouraging particular patterns in the use of services and as a significant policy instrument that can help a local authority to achieve its strategic objectives.
- 4.5 The Fees and Charges Task and Finish Group agreed that it would be useful to develop a Charging Policy for Redditch Borough Council to enable the authority to work strategically to meet its core priorities in the manner outlined by the Audit Commission. During the course of their review Members scrutinised the contents of other local authority Charging Policies and identified examples of best practice. Finally, the Group agreed the contents of the Charging Policy as set

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out in Appendix A to this report.

5. Key Issues

- 5.1 Redditch Borough Council raised £4,814,325 from Council Tax and £3,786,236 directly from the users of its services through charging in 2006/07.
- 5.2 The Charging Policy attached in Appendix A has been divided into two main sections. The first section proposes procedures for reporting information about fees and charges per service level for Members' consideration. The second section contains an overarching policy and principles for charging for activities provided by the Council.
- 5.3 The Charging Policy proposes that Members should receive a Headline Review of Charges on an annual basis. This would contain information about charging arrangements for each service, though not for each activity. The Charging Policy will apply across all Council services and is intended to facilitate a strategic approach to charging.
- 5.4 The Group proposes that the charging principles adopted by each service should be reviewed at least every four years. However, actual charges for each activity will continue to be reviewed annually, when Members receive the fees and charges report that is already provided for their consideration under current arrangements.
- 5.5 There are a variety of charging arrangements for different Council services including: services where no charges are set; charges set by central government; charges set, either by central or local government, at the level of full cost recovery; and charges set at a discretionary level. A number of charges for statutory services are set at a statutory level by central government, such as the land charges fee for a personal search. The Council has no discretion to alter such statutory charges.
- 5.6 There are other statutory service arrangements which are not subject to a statutory charge, such as the proposed fee for pre-application planning advice which was recommended by the Fees and Charges Group at a previous meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. There is further flexibility available to Councils when charging for discretionary services as these are not subject to statutory fees.
- 5.7 Councils do have the power to set charges differentially so that different service users are charged different amounts. Due consideration has been given to the legal requirements by the Fees

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and Charges Task and Finish Group in the development of the draft Charging Policy.

6. Other Implications

- | | | |
|------------------|---|---|
| Community Safety | - | There are no specific community safety implications. |
| Human Resources | - | The Charging Policy and Procedures provide Heads of Service with additional powers over varying charges for particular services “in year”, following consultation with relevant Officers and Members. |
| Social Exclusion | - | Social exclusion is addressed in the Charging Policy and Procedures by reference to equity of access and concessions for certain user groups which are designed to prevent the exclusion of particular social groups. |
| Sustainability | - | There are no specific sustainability implications. |

7. Conclusion

The Charging Policy and Procedures clarifies how Redditch Borough Council should, in the opinion of the Task & Finish Group, approach setting fees and charges and should enable the Council to make strategic use of charging in support of the Council’s core priorities.

8. Background Papers

Audit Commission, “Positively Charged: Maximising the Benefits of Local Public Service Charges”, (January 2008).

Babergh District Council, “Strategic Charging Policy”, (February 2005).

Ballymena Borough Council, “Draft (Leisure) Pricing Specification, 2005/06”, (October 2005).

Cherwell District Council, “Charging Policy”, (2008).

Cornwall County Council, “Charging Policy: Charges to Parents”, (2008).

Essex County Council, “Discretionary Services Charging Policy”, (2008).

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Fees and Charges Task and Finish Group notes and agenda (Thursday the 10th January 2008; Thursday the 17th January 2008; Thursday the 28th February 2008; and Thursday the 20th March 2008).

The Local Government Act 2003.

Mid Bedfordshire District Council, "Mid Bedfordshire District Council Charging Policy Appendix A", (2006).

Nottingham City Council, "Fees and Charges for Sport and Leisure Parks Services 2007/08", (2007).

Rugby Borough Council, "Draft Medium Term Financial Strategy 2006/11", (2006).

Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council, "Lifelong Learning, Leisure and Cultural Services Scrutiny Committee Charging Policy for Sport and Active Recreation", (February 2005).

Thanet District Council, "Thanet Leisure Force: Your Return is our Reward", (October 2005).

Wyre Forest District Council, "Finance Strategy", (2006).

9. **Consultation**

Relevant Officers, particularly Officers in the Corporate Management Team, have been consulted by the Fees and Charges Group during the development of the attached Charging Policy and Procedures, and in the preparation of this report.

10. **Author of Report**

The authors of this report are the Chair of the Fees and Charges Task and Finish Group, Councillor Colin MacMillan, and Jess Bayley (Overview and Scrutiny Support Officer), who can be contacted on extension 3268 (e-mail: jess.bayley@redditchbc.gov.uk for more information.

11. **Appendices**

Appendix A - Draft Redditch Borough Council Charging Policy and Procedures.

DRAFT**Redditch Borough Council**
Charging Policy and Procedures**1. Introduction**

- 1.1 Charging is an important and appropriate way to finance services. It is, however, just one aspect of the Council's overall financial management and planning process. Members and Officers must ensure that services are provided efficiently and effectively and that costs are scrutinised and adjusted whenever necessary. When new charges are being considered, or current charges reviewed, Members and Officers must be confident that all steps have been taken to minimise the net cost of the service.
- 1.2 This Policy sets out clear principles to ensure the Council's overall approach to charging is effective. Therefore, the Council must determine:
- a) which services it should charge for;
 - b) which service users will be affected by charges; and
 - c) what levels of subsidy, if any, should be given for the use of specific services.
- 1.3 The Council must clearly communicate its approach and policy on charging to the public and must explain why it is appropriate to maintain, introduce or increase charges by following the principles and processes outlined in this Charging Policy.
- 1.4 The Council must set charges for services in a holistic manner, in line with the Council's corporate priorities. Members and Officers must review all relevant issues when considering the possible introduction of new charges or reviewing current charges.
- 1.5 The Council must adopt a strategic approach to charging. Members and Officers must review the impact of charges on the provision of services in terms of their effect on the community and the Council's financial position. When setting charges, the following considerations should be addressed by Heads of Service and Members:
- a) Why is the service being provided?
 - b) Who benefits from the service - individuals or the community?

- c) Should this service be subsidised?
- d) What is the subsidy achieving?
- e) How much do residents, communities and businesses value the service?
- f) How willing and able are residents and businesses to pay for the service?
- g) What effect does charging have on the supply and demand for a service?
- h) How can the level of charges affect behaviour and assist service objectives?

2. Reporting Procedures and Information Guidelines

- 2.1 Members must be provided with accurate and detailed information, and any rationale, about charges for consideration at meetings of the Executive Committee and full Council. Charges must be set in accordance with the terms set out in the Charging Policy and there must be a strategic review of charging principles, at service level, by elected Members and Officers, at least every 4 years.
- 2.2 Officers must present a 'Headline Review' of charges at activity level for the consideration of Members on an annual basis. This Headline Review should contain information about the total income generated by services and the level of subsidy particular services receive from Council Tax. In order to not overwhelm Members or Officers with the amount of information to be produced, collated and considered the dates on which charges are reviewed must be spread throughout quarters 3 and 4 of each year.
- 2.3 Subject to any requirements imposed by the Council's standing orders, charges for individual services may, by exception, be varied 'in year' at the discretion of the responsible Head of Service, following discussion with the Chief Finance Officer and the appropriate Portfolio Holder, and must be notified to the Executive Committee and full Council.
- 2.4 The responsible Portfolio Holder must review proposed changes to charges before they are submitted to the Executive Committee. The Portfolio Holder should append any comments they have to the proposals being placed before the Executive.

- 2.5 An information suite, comprising the following, should be developed and be made readily available to Members:
- a) categorisation of services, by the responsible Portfolio Holder, in accordance with the following headings;
 - i) 'No Charges set';
 - ii) 'Charges set by Central Government';
 - iii) 'Charges set, either by Central or Local Government, at the level of Full Cost Recovery'; and
 - iv) 'Charges set at a Discretionary Level';
 - b) provision of the following details for each service;
 - i) information regarding usage levels and patterns will be compiled and collated. This will be accumulated ideally by an actual count of users or if this is not possible by an appropriate sampling technique;
 - ii) information regarding costs, both direct and indirect and including an allocation of overall overheads will be logged and recorded;
 - iii) information regarding income generated by direct charges, grants and the amount of subsidy will be logged and recorded; and
 - iv) information regarding annual income generated will be available in a concise and entire form;
- 2.6 A review of charges (and the information contained in section 2.5b) must be made available to Members annually.

3. Policy and Key Principles

- 3.1 When charges are reviewed Heads of Service must carry out an analysis of charges for activities against the principles for charging set out in this Policy. This information must also be made available to Members so that they can make informed choices about the level of charge to be set. The result of such reviews must be included in the annual fees and charges report, so that Members can ensure that charges are fair, appropriate and comparable to local alternatives. The 'right' price for an activity must not be established solely by adding an inflationary increase to last year's charge.

- 3.2 Charging arrangements must be efficient and practical and should demonstrate responsible asset management for the benefit of the whole Borough.
- 3.3 Where charges are set by Central Government the Council must focus on the costs of delivering an activity and Members should be aware of what the Council has to pay to subsidise the activity.
- 3.4 Where the Council aims for full cost recovery (including all overheads) through charges there must be no subsidy.
- 3.5 Concessions must be service specific and not subject to a general rate set across the Council.
- 3.6 Services, where charges do not apply, must be regularly reviewed to establish whether they could be introduced. However, it is recognised that for certain activities there are important exceptions that make charging inappropriate. These include the following circumstances:
- a) where the Council is prohibited by legislation from levying a charge;
 - b) where the administrative costs associated with making a charge would outweigh any potential income;
 - c) where making a charge would be contrary to achieving one of the Council's corporate objectives. These include objectives contained within the Equal Opportunities Policy, Anti-Poverty Strategy, Leisure Strategy and Environmental Policy; and
 - d) where charging would be counterproductive (i.e. it may result in a substantial reduction in use of the service).
- 3.7 Charges may be levied to raise revenue for the general improvement of services, to offset Council Tax rises or to help fund specific projects.
- 3.8 Proposals for 'reinvesting' any additional income raised from charging in the expansion and development of a particular service will be considered as part of the annual review of charges, with each proposal being considered on its own merits.
- 3.9 Where appropriate, charges can also be used to influence demand and change behaviour in order to meet the Council's corporate objectives.

-
- 3.10 Unless there is good reason why an exception should be made, a charge should be levied for all discretionary services. Service users should make a direct contribution to the cost of providing services at their point of use. When charges for services are reviewed it will be against this background and in each case Members and Officers must consider whether any exceptions should be made.
- 3.11 Appropriate use of the discretionary powers introduced by the Government in 2003 to charge for services must be considered.
- 3.12 With regard to discretionary services everybody, even those in receipt of benefits/income support, must contribute something via charges at the point of use.
- 3.13 If equity of access is a policy objective then it should be achieved through a discount regime.
- 3.14 When charges are reviewed concessions may be applied for the following groups:
- a) young people less than 16 years of age;
 - b) full time students;
 - c) people with a disability in receipt of a means tested benefit;
 - d) senior citizens over state pensionable age and in receipt of means tested benefit; and
 - e) individuals on low incomes and/or in receipt of means tested benefit.
- 3.15 When setting charges the Council must have regard to:
- a) relevant Council Strategies or policies (e.g. Equal Opportunities), and any subsidy or concessions which may be appropriate;
 - b) market conditions and prices charged by competitors and/or other Local Authorities;
 - c) the need to avoid any potential distortion of the market which might otherwise occur from pricing services below the levels charged by private sector concerns for similar services;
 - d) the need for all charges imposed by the Council to be reasonable;

-
- e) the need to avoid any exploitation of customers who have no option, but to use the Council's services;
 - f) the desirability of increasing usage of a given service;
 - g) the need to increase Council income; and
 - h) the level of subsidy (contributions to the cost of the service from non-users via Council Tax, Housing Rents etc).
- 3.16 When setting charges users' views, when provided to the Council, must be considered.
- 3.17 Meaningful objectives for charges must be set and these should be viewed over the long-term, not just as short-term financial targets.

4. Definitions:

- Council** Redditch Borough Council as an organisation. (Where the document is referring to the formal body of all Councillors the text refers to 'full Council').
- Service** The Service area, for example Environmental Health or Planning.
- Activity** A particular activity delivered as part of one of the Council's services, for example hire of a badminton court at the Abbey Sports Stadium.

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Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2007/08

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Annual Report 2007/08

Foreword from the Chair



**Chair of the Committee:
Councillor C MacMillan**

The start of 2007/08 saw Redditch Council adopting a new approach to Overview and Scrutiny. With a new remit, new Chair, new Vice Chair and newly recruited Overview and Scrutiny Support Officers the Committee has gone through a year which required the development of new processes, procedures and policies. As the year has progressed and the Committee has become more experienced it has been able to build on its initial foundations to the point where Overview and Scrutiny is now fit for purpose and ready to accept the challenges that lie ahead.

As Chair I have been surrounded by hard working Officers and elected Members who really wanted Overview and Scrutiny to succeed. They were prepared to take a few risks and to put in the creative thinking that has been necessary to get us up and running. Starting with an almost blank piece of paper the Committee has built very firm foundations for the future. Overview and Scrutiny has, in the years ahead, a capacity to be a great force for good and to help deliver real benefits for the residents of the town.

During the year the Committee has undertaken some interesting work in a number of significant areas and all who have worked on these tasks should be congratulated. On behalf of the Committee I would like to thank residents, Members and Officers for their support throughout the year.

Councillor Colin MacMillan,
Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Annual Report 2007/08

Summary

There is an annual requirement for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to produce a report outlining their work and achievements during the previous year. The report also contains information about the reviews that have been undertaken by Task and Finish Groups during the year.

The Annual Report provides an opportunity for Members to consider future work programmes and amended working methods. Recommendations about how to further improve the Overview and Scrutiny process in future years have also been incorporated into this document. These recommendations have been developed via a process of consultation with the Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and relevant Officers.

This report has been produced by the Overview and Scrutiny Support Officers in conjunction with the Overview and Scrutiny Members, particularly the Chair and Vice Chair of the Committee.

“I think as the years go by Overview and Scrutiny just keeps getting better and better!”

Councillor A Fry, Vice Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

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Annual Report 2007/08



Members attending a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. In order from left to right these Councillors are: Councillor Colin MacMillan (Chair), Councillor Andy Fry, Councillor Diane Thomas, Councillor Jack Cookson and Councillor Kath Banks.

Introduction

For the first time, at the Annual General meeting of full Council, held on the 21st of May 2007, a single Overview and Scrutiny Committee was appointed.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee comprises eight Members. The Committee meets approximately every three weeks and convenes a week after meetings of the Executive Committee. This provides Members with an opportunity to monitor the work of the Executive to ensure that decision-making processes remain transparent and accountable.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee has a statutory role in the Council's local democratic process. The main aims of Overview and Scrutiny are to promote transparent decision making, ensure democratic accountability and to monitor the effectiveness of the policy and budget setting process at the Council.

“As the year has progressed and the Committee has become more experienced it has been able to build on its initial foundations to the point where Overview and Scrutiny is now fit for purpose and ready to accept the challenges it faces”

Councillor C MacMillan, Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Membership 2007/08

Councillor C MacMillan (Chair)

Councillor A Fry (Vice Chair)

Councillors Banks, Brunner, Cookson, Passingham, Taylor and Thomas.

Commissioning Body Role

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee at Redditch Borough Council is designed to act as a commissioning body. The Committee has the power to authorise policy reviews and to scrutinise issues of local interest in depth. This year the Overview and Scrutiny Committee has commissioned a number of strategic reviews that have been conducted by Task and Finish Groups.

Scrutiny Member Development

To ensure that all Members became familiar with the new scrutiny arrangements the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee led a Member Development evening on the 10th July 2007 introducing Members to the new scrutiny process. This training event also provided an overview of the new arrangements for proposing Task and Finish Group exercises.

There was a positive response from Members to this training which facilitated both Member understanding and engagement in the scrutiny process. To maintain this level of understanding and to ensure that scrutiny remains effective at the Council the Overview and Scrutiny Committee recommends that all new Councillors should attend at least one meeting of the Committee a year in future.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Performance and Budget Monitoring

The Committee performs an important role on behalf of the Council in that it receives and considers quarterly budget and performance monitoring reports from each of the Council's four Directorates. Through monitoring the Council's performance in comparison to local and national performance indicators, as well as any budget variances that may occur throughout the year, the Committee maintains a close eye on the Council's progress towards achieving its performance and budget targets.

“The Overview and Scrutiny Committee continues to refine its strategies for ensuring an adequate overview on the Council's major budgetary and performance monitoring information”.

Steve Skinner, Democratic Services Manager

This year the Overview and Scrutiny Committee also received information about the Council's internal performance management system. The Committee was keen to ensure that all Members could access this system to enable them to scrutinise the Council's performance. At the instigation of the Committee, Officers will be working with Councillor volunteers to develop an appropriate training package which should enable Members to utilise the system effectively in future.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

This year Members have investigated ways to ensure that consideration of performance and budget data by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee is undertaken in a constructive manner. Following the submission of a quarterly monitoring report, the Committee requested a presentation on the subject of community safety, to which all Members were invited. At this presentation detailed information about the Council's performance in relation to its community safety responsibilities was considered and Members identified a preferred format for monitoring community safety data at future meetings.



Overview and Scrutiny Committee

“This year links with the Executive Committee have been strengthened and the Council’s Portfolio Holders have all attended meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to give presentations and discuss with Overview and Scrutiny Members their areas of responsibility. This closer relationship helps ensure both “wings” of the Council work better together”.

Steve Skinner, Democratic Services Manager

Portfolio Holder Annual Reports

For the first time this year the Council’s six Portfolio Holders were invited to present Annual Reports to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The objective of this exercise was to ensure that the decision making process was transparent and democratically accountable. All the presentations delivered by the Portfolio Holders have been gratefully received.

The Annual Reports this year have tended to provide broad overviews of the roles and responsibilities of the Portfolio Holders. In future, Scrutiny Committee Members have agreed that Portfolio Holders will be invited to concentrate upon updating the Overview and Scrutiny Committee about work undertaken in areas relevant to their portfolios. Scrutiny Members have also agreed that Portfolio Holders shall be required to incorporate a discussion of relevant performance and budget indicators, and the Council’s performance in relation to these indicators, into their Annual Reports.

It is envisaged that through introducing these changes Portfolio Holders will become more accountable to scrutiny Members and to the public.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Civil Parking Enforcement

This year the Overview and Scrutiny Committee published a final set of recommendations for a review of Civil Parking Enforcement. Members recommended that Redditch Borough Council enter into partnership with Wychavon District Council to deliver a parking enforcement service in the Borough.



The Committee considered a request from the Executive Committee to submit further recommendations. However, Members agreed that the recommendations contained within the report were appropriate and the report was forwarded to a meeting of full Council where the recommendations were approved. The Civil Parking Enforcement arrangements are due to be introduced in 2009.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Public Engagement

During the year attempts have been made to engage with the public. For example, the Members of the District Centres Task and Finish Group toured Matchborough, Winyates and Woodrow District Centres where they met with commercial and residential tenants to discuss redevelopment needs in the centres. However, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee has recognised that there is a need to improve and extend the level of engagement.

“For the District Centres Task and Finish review we sought knowledge from customers, residents and local business people to identify improvements that could be made to the centres.”

Councillor A Fry, Chair of the District Centres Task and Finish Group.

The Committee recognises that relations with local media representatives need to be enhanced to enable the Committee to engage more effectively with the Public. In future press releases will accompany the launch of scrutiny exercises and will be used to promote public involvement in scrutiny.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Monitoring responses to scrutiny recommendations

In the 2006/07 Annual Report it was reported that there was a need to develop an effective monitoring framework to track the response of the Executive Committee's responses to Scrutiny recommendations. This has proved difficult because the majority of recommendations have been produced for consideration late in the year. The Chairs of the Task and Finish Groups, following submission of their recommendations, will be asked to monitor the response of the Executive Committee and full Council. Where recommendations are approved, relevant senior Officers will be asked to produce an implementation plan for the consideration of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.



The Committee did monitor responses to the recommendations made by Members who scrutinised anti-social behaviour and homelessness in 2006. The Committee considered the Council's response to the Anti-Social Behaviour report on the 26th September 2007. Members were informed that since the publication of the report changes at the national level, such as the introduction of the Respect Agenda, had rendered some of the report's recommendations invalid. However, Members were provided with a detailed explanation about action undertaken by Officers to tackle anti-social behaviour.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Monitoring responses to scrutiny recommendations

The Committee received the Preventing Homelessness update on the 28th November 2007. Officers explained that Housing Services had altered working practices to focus upon preventing homelessness and managing individual cases, in accordance with many of the recommendations contained within the report.



Additional Scrutiny Monitoring

At the beginning of 2008 the Committee introduced an Actions List as a standard item on the Overview and Scrutiny agenda. The objective of this item is to enable scrutiny Members to monitor responses to actions requested at meetings of the Committee. The Committee intend that this should form the basis of future developments in the scrutiny monitoring process at the Council.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Work Programme Planning Day

At present at Redditch Borough Council the Work Programme for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee is reviewed regularly and Members have the opportunity to debate the contents of the Programme at each meeting of the Committee.

In early 2008 Members agreed that the Council should organise a Scrutiny Work Programme Planning Day. This Planning Day was identified as an example of best practice used at other local authorities which could facilitate continuous improvement in Overview and Scrutiny at the Council. The Planning Day was approved as an opportunity: for Members to discuss the objectives for scrutiny for the year; to identify subjects for review during the year; to identify ways to improve working relations between the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, the Executive Committee and the Council's local partners; and to set a realistic timetable for completing Task and Finish and Short Sharp reviews.

“Overview and Scrutiny has, in the years ahead, a capacity to be a great force for good and to help deliver real benefits for the residents of the town.”

Councillor C MacMillan,
Chair of the Overview
and Scrutiny
Committee.

Members agreed that the Planning Day should take place in May every year, following the appointment of Members to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at the Council's Annual Meeting. The first of these Planning Days is due to take place on the 23rd May 2008.

Task and Finish Groups

Scrutiny Scoping Document

This year the Overview and Scrutiny Committee reviewed the scoping document, which forms the basis for the work of Task and Finish Groups. As a result of this review proposed scrutiny exercises were required to adhere to SMART principles: to be Specific; Measurable; Achievable; Relevant; and Timely. The majority of reviews established under this new framework have focused on strategic issues and have therefore required long-term commitment from Members.

“During the year the Committee has undertaken some interesting work in a number of significant areas and all who have worked on these tasks should be congratulated.”

Councillor C MacMillan, Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Task and Finish Update Reports

The Committee has a standard agenda item dedicated to Task and Finish Group progress reports that are delivered by the Chairs of reviews. This arrangement provides Members of the Committee with an opportunity to advise a Group as well as to monitor whether they are adhering to the original objectives of their exercise. Members have committed to make this process more rigorous in future particularly to ensure that reviews are completed in a timely manner.

Task and Finish Groups

Task and Finish Membership

Task and Finish Groups this year have been chaired by Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Other non-executive Councillors have been involved in the Scrutiny process, by acting as members of review Groups and representing the Council on the Worcestershire Joint Scrutiny exercise into Flooding. The Task and Finish Groups have had either five or eight Members this year.



Councillor Field, Helen Saunders (Overview and Scrutiny Support Officer) and Councillor R King working on the Communications Task and Finish Group.

A membership of five Councillors has proved to be more manageable and helps to reduce the Member capacity problems that can arise in smaller local authorities. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee recommends that in future a maximum of five Members should be appointed to Task and Finish Groups.

Task and Finish Groups

Optimum Number of Groups

It has become increasingly apparent this year that the Council's capacity to support Task and Finish reviews with both Councillors and Officers is limited. In future years, to ensure that the Overview and Scrutiny process remains productive, it is recommended that there should be a mixture of Task and Finish Groups and short, sharp reviews.

Short Sharp Reviews

Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at a recent meeting agreed that the Committee should assume a greater role in scrutinising topics. Indeed, they concurred that in future the Committee would undertake more wide-ranging debates about any subjects proposed for scrutiny. If, as a consequence of this debate, Members consider that a Task and Finish Group review would be appropriate, a Group could be established. However, it was recognised that the Committee may decide to make recommendations directly to the Executive Committee. These Committee deliberations are likely to form the basis for short sharp reviews at the Council.

The likely impact of this approach upon the scrutiny process is difficult to ascertain at this stage. A trial run of these new arrangements occurred on the 27th March 2008 when the Committee met to discuss the subjects of economic development and the Worcestershire Joint Policy on Unauthorised Gypsy and Traveller Encampments. It is felt that the Committee will be in a stronger position to assess the outcome of these new arrangements in the 2008/09 Annual Report as this will enable the Committee to build experience in the area.

Task and Finish Groups

Communications Task and Finish Group

Membership 2007/08

Councillor J Brunner (Chair)
Councillors Banks, Field, Fry and R. King.



Chair of the Group:
Councillor J Brunner

The Communications Task and Finish Group was established in June 2007 and has been undertaken in two stages. During stage one Members explored the perceptions of Redditch and Redditch Borough Council and sought to establish what profile and key messages Members and Officers wanted to portray about the Council at the local, regional and national levels. During stage one of the exercise the group consulted with other Members; Officers the Council's partner organisations; expert Communications Officers; and with key local media representatives.

The aim of Stage Two was to explore ways of improving the Council's current communications processes in order to tackle the negative perceptions and to promote a more appropriate reputation for the Council and town. The Group have reviewed the strategic approach that the Council takes to delivering communications and scrutinised the Council's use of key communications tools to convey key messages to local residents: including the civic newspaper; press releases; and the corporate branding of services.

The Group are due to produce their final recommendations for the consideration of the Executive Committee on Wednesday the 23rd April.

Task and Finish Groups

District Centres Task and Finish Group

“This Task and Finish review has been an extremely interesting exercise and, through the redevelopment of Church Hill, should lead to the biggest change to the town of the last forty years.”

Councillor A Fry, Chair of the District Centres Task and Finish Group

Membership 2007/08

Councillor A Fry (Chair)

Councillors Banks, Chalk, Dudley, Enderby, Hicks and Hunt.



**Chair of the Group:
Councillor A Fry**

The District Centres review was launched in 2005 and originally had aimed to determine which of the four purpose-built District Centres (Church Hill, Matchborough, Winyates and Woodrow) should be the subject of a wholesale redevelopment. Church Hill was selected for this task in October 2006.

The second stage of the review began in May 2007. The objective for this stage was to investigate what cosmetic improvements could be made to Matchborough, Winyates and Woodrow District Centres.

In May some new Members were appointed to the Group. To familiarise themselves with the conditions in the areas Members toured the District Centres on the 4th September 2007 and met with local commercial and residential tenants.

At subsequent meetings Members have discussed numerous actions that could be taken to cosmetically improve the District Centres. The Group are due to produce their final recommendations for the consideration of the Executive Committee on Wednesday the 23rd April.

Task and Finish Groups



Membership 2007/08

Fees and Charges Task and Finish Group

Councillor C MacMillan (Chair)

Councillor A Fry (Vice Chair)

Councillors Chalk, Clayton, Cookson, Hicks, Hill and Passingham.



The Fees and Charges Task and Finish Group was established in July 2007. The overarching objectives of this review were to assess the contribution charging can make to funding efficiency and the strategic effectiveness of the Council; to ensure the Council's charging arrangements support the Council's strategic objectives; and to examine and recommend ways to manage the impact of charging on equity.

The Group have scrutinised charges on a service by service basis and have approved existing fees and charges for a number of services. Members have also identified areas where a charging framework might be appropriate and made recommendations that the Council should charge for some existing services such as for the provision of pre-application advice to individuals seeking planning permission. The Group is currently in the process of developing a draft charging policy for the Council.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee has agreed that recommendations can be forwarded to the Executive Committee on an ongoing basis. The Group are undertaking a strategic exercise which is likely to take a long time to complete. Members should therefore expect to receive an additional summary on the progress of the exercise in the 2008/09 Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report.

Task and Finish Groups

Worcestershire Joint Scrutiny Exercise on Flooding



**Redditch Borough Council Representative:
Councillor M Chalk**

Redditch Borough Council Member Representatives 2007/08

**Councillor M Chalk
Councillor A Fry (Substitute)**

The Joint Scrutiny Exercise into Flooding was proposed in response to the flooding which occurred in Worcestershire in summer 2007. The exercise was set up at the instigation of Worcestershire County Council in November 2007 and representatives from all district Councils in the County were invited to participate. The Redditch Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed to take part in the exercise and nominated Councillor M Chalk to represent Redditch Borough Council.

The Joint Scrutiny Group will be reviewing the immediate response to the floods by local public agencies; the recovery of the County since the flooding; and what action needs to be taken to ensure that there is a clear approach to deal with any future emergencies.

The Group are due to interview representatives from local public agencies at forthcoming meetings. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee will be receiving regular updates on the progress of the exercise from the Redditch Borough Council representative. A report containing the Group's draft recommendations are due to be considered by the Committee in summer 2008.

Outcomes: Scrutiny Reports

Overview and Scrutiny Reports

Reports presented to the Executive Committee / Council during 2007/08:

Full (Formal) Overview and Scrutiny Reports

Civil Parking Enforcement (15th August to the Executive Committee and 17th September to full Council)

Communications Task and Finish Group (due to report to the Executive Committee on Wednesday the 23rd April)

District Centres Task and Finish Group (due to report to the Executive Committee on Wednesday the 23rd April)

Smaller (Informal) Overview and Scrutiny Reports

Fees and Charges Task and Finish Group (20th February 2008)

Fees and Charges Task and Finish Group (2nd April 2008)

Fees and charges Task and Finish Group (23rd April 2008)

Membership Gallery



**Councillor Colin
MacMillan**



**Councillor Andy
Fry**



**Councillor Kath
Banks**



**Councillor
Juliet Brunner**



**Councillor Jack
Cookson**



**Councillor Betty
Passingham**



**Councillor
Debbie Taylor**



**Councillor Diane
Thomas**

Overview and Scrutiny Support Officers

Officer Support

Overview and Scrutiny Support Officers:

Jess Bayley and Helen Saunders (from July 2007)



Jess Bayley, Councillor David Hunt and Helen Saunders in March 2008

Overview and Scrutiny Contact Details

For additional copies of this report, or to find out more about Overview & Scrutiny at Redditch Borough Council please contact:

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Further information about the Overview and Scrutiny process at Redditch Borough Council can also be found on the Council's dedicated web pages. To access these web pages please use the web address attached here and then follow the links:

<http://hub.whub.org.uk/home/rbc-your-council-overview-and-scrutiny>

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