



OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

28th May 2008

Committee

MINUTES

Present:

Councillor Phil Mould (Chair), Councillor David Smith (Vice-Chair) and Councillors M Chalk, W Hartnett, D Taylor and D Thomas

Officers:

J Smith

Overview and Scrutiny Support Officer:

H Saunders and J Bayley

1. APOLOGIES AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES

There were no apologies for absence.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND OF PARTY WHIP

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

3. MINUTES

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on the 9th April 2008 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

4. ACTIONS LIST

The Committee considered a record of actions requested at meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and details about Officers' and Members' responses to these requests.

Officers informed Members that an action requested on the 27th March 2008, relating to the Joint Policy on Unauthorised Gypsy and Traveller Encampments, was due to be addressed by the Committee. Members agreed that the Joint Policy on Unauthorised Gypsy and Traveller Encampments should be discussed at a subsequent meeting of the Committee on the 9th July 2008. Officers were asked

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Chair

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to append a copy of the Joint Policy to the agenda for that meeting for the consideration of Members.

Officers explained that former Councillor Pattie Hill had been involved in facilitating the review of the Joint Policy. Members agreed that former Councillor Pattie Hill should therefore be invited as an expert witness to attend the meeting of the Committee on the 9th July.

Officers referred Members to the final entry on the Actions List, which contained information about the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's Annual Report for 2007 / 08. Members were informed that a press release had been issued on the subject, as requested by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the 9th April. Subsequently an article had appeared in local newspaper, The Standard, on the work of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee during the year. Officers also informed Members that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's Annual Report could be accessed on the Overview and Scrutiny Web Pages on the Redditch Borough Council website.

Members requested that a glossary be appended to the Actions List to clarify the acronyms contained within the document.

RESOLVED that

subject to the details recorded in the preamble above, the contents of the Actions List be noted.

5. TASK & FINISH REVIEWS - DRAFT SCOPING DOCUMENTS

Members were informed that no draft scoping documents had been proposed for Members' consideration.

Officers explained that a report containing a Scrutiny Scoping Check List had instead been provided for the consideration of Members. The Scrutiny Scoping Check List contained a list of questions for Members to address when discussing a draft scoping document. Officers suggested that this list would not need to be addressed on a question-by-question basis. Instead, the Scrutiny Scoping Check List would provide guidance for Members whilst they were considering whether to approve a proposed Task and Finish review. Members agreed that this document should be attached to the draft scoping document item on a regular basis.

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RESOLVED that

subject to the details contained in the preamble above the Scrutiny Scoping Check List be approved.

6. TASK AND FINISH GROUP PROGRESS REPORTS

Officers explained that this item had been included on the agenda to ensure that the members of the Committee were informed about the Executive Committee's responses to the final reports issued by the three Task and Finish Groups that concluded in April 2008: Communications; District Centres; and Fees and Charges.

Members were informed that the final reports produced by all three Task and Finish Groups had been considered at a meeting of the Executive Committee on Wednesday the 23rd April. The Executive Committee had noted the contents of the reports and referred the documents to the full Council for consideration. Officers explained that the reports were due to be considered at the following Council meeting on Monday the 30th June.

Members discussed Task and Finish Group arrangements and agreed that both Members and Officers would need to ensure that reviews were completed in accordance with specified deadlines. Members also expressed concerns that the reports had contained too many recommendations and agreed that a smaller number of recommendations would have been more appropriate. For following Task and Finish reviews Members agreed that recommendations should be concise and take account of any financial implications.

Officers explained that Members would be exploring potential subjects for scrutiny during the Work Programme Planning event.

RESOLVED that

subject to the details contained in the preamble above the Task and Finish Group updates be noted.

7. JOINT SCRUTINY EXERCISE ON FLOODING - PROGRESS REPORT

The Committee considered an update report in relation to the Joint Exercise on Flooding from the Redditch Borough Council representative, Councillor Chalk.

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Councillor Chalk explained that he had produced notes for the consideration of Members following each meeting of the Joint Scrutiny exercise. Members were informed that the Group had considered the contents of the Pitt Review and had also interviewed representatives of a number of relevant organisations. Councillor Chalk explained that the following meeting of the Joint Scrutiny Group would take place on Monday the 30th June.

The wet weather at the time of the meeting was discussed by Members, who expressed concerns that the weather might cause flooding in the ditches in Batchley. Members therefore requested that the Operations Manager provide information about the impact of the weather on the condition of the ditches in Batchley.

RESOLVED that

subject to the details contained in the preamble above the Joint Exercise on Flooding update report be noted.

8. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PROCEDURES DOCUMENT

Officers provided an oral report on the draft Overview and Scrutiny Procedures Document. Members were informed that the Procedures Document had been produced prior to the annual meeting of the Council on Monday the 19th May. Members agreed to alter the Introduction to refer to accurate details about the number of Members respectively on the Overview and Scrutiny and Executive Committees.

Officers referred Members to page 8 of the document to discuss the membership of Task and Finish Groups. Members noted that Chairs of Task and Finish Groups would be derived from the membership of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Members further noted that the number of Members on each Task and Finish Group would not exceed five Councillors. Officers explained that this would help to reduce the problems with Member capacity that had occurred during the previous year.

Members discussed the requirement for Portfolio Holder Annual Reports, detailed on page 14 of the Procedures Document. The Chair proposed that the new Portfolio Holders should not be required to present their reports until three or four months had elapsed to provide them with time to settle into their roles. The Chair further proposed that the Portfolio Holders should be invited to identify scheduled meeting dates from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee calendar when they would be available to present their

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reports. However, Members agreed that the Annual Reports should occur at separate meetings spread out throughout the year.

The proposed content of the Portfolio Holder Annual Reports was also discussed. Members agreed that the reports should not adhere to the presentation style adopted in 2007/08. Instead, Members agreed that a question and answer session would be more suitable and that Portfolio Holders should be informed of the themes around which they would be questioned in advance of their report to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Members discussed scrutiny practice at Select Committees in the UK Parliament and noted that it might be useful to attend one of these meetings to observe their approach to interviewing witnesses in a scrutiny context. Officers were asked to assess the Select Committee timetable and to make arrangements that would enable the Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to attend a Select Committee meeting. Members also discussed attending Select Committees as delegates from the Council and it was noted that this opportunity was made available to Members on an annual basis.

RESOLVED that

subject to the details contained in the preamble above the Overview and Scrutiny Procedures Document be approved.

9. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY SCOPING DOCUMENT

Officers explained that the draft scoping document had been simplified into a one page format. Members were informed that concerns had been expressed by some Councillors that the previous two page format had been too complex.

Members requested that a statement, explaining that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee reserved the right to refuse proposed subjects that were not within the remit of the Council, be recorded on the document.

RESOLVED that

subject to the details contained in the preamble above the Overview and Scrutiny Scoping Document be approved.

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10. WORK PROGRAMME PLANNING DAY

Officers explained that an Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme Planning Day had been organised in the previous municipal year. The Work Programme had been introduced to enable Members to plan the work that would be undertaken as part of the Overview and Scrutiny process at the Council during the following year. Members were informed that the Planning Day had been due to take place on Friday the 23rd May but had been postponed to provide Members appointed to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in May 2008 with an opportunity to contribute to arrangements for the event.

Officers presented a copy of the programme for the day that had been approved by the Committee in the previous year as well as a suggested alternative programme for the event. Officers explained that there were concerns that some of the group exercises originally scheduled to take place during the day might be more suitable for further debate at meetings of the Committee.

Members agreed that the Planning Day should focus on exploring potential topics for scrutiny. However, Members also requested that the session begin with an exploration of appropriate working relations between the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Executive Committee. Officers were asked to review and provide information about best practice in relations between the Executive and Overview and Scrutiny Committees, based on details obtained by Councillor Thomas during a scrutiny training event. Due to the reduced content of the programme for the day Members agreed that the event should take place in the afternoon only.

Members agreed that all non-Executive Committee Members should be invited to attend the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme Planning Afternoon. Members also agreed that Executive Committee Members should be invited to attend the first half of the event, to involve all Members in the discussions about relations between Executive Committee and Overview and Scrutiny Committee Members. However, Members did not believe that it would be appropriate for the Executive Committee Members to be involved in the second session, focused on exploring potential topics for scrutiny. Therefore, Members agreed that Executive Members would be asked not to participate in that second group exercise but rather to submit any ideas for scrutiny in writing.

Members also discussed the appropriate Officer presence for the Work Programme Planning Afternoon. Members agreed that senior Officers would not be required to attend. However, Members

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requested that the Democratic Services Manager attend to help facilitate the first session. The Overview and Scrutiny Support Officers were asked to attend both sessions.

Officers noted that one of the exercises that had been incorporated into the original programme for the event had related to a number of standard items considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee: quarterly performance reports; quarterly budget reports; and the annual review of the Council's Service Plans. Members were informed that Officers would appreciate further guidance from Members about the required presentation for these items. The Chair suggested that due to the change in membership for the Committee in May 2008 it would be appropriate to postpone any such review until all Members had familiarised themselves with the current format for presenting these reports.

Members approved Friday the 20th June 2008 as the date for the Work Programme Planning Afternoon. They agreed that a buffet lunch should be provided for all Members at the start of the event.

RESOLVED that

subject to the details contained in the preamble above the arrangements for the Work Programme Planning Afternoon be approved.

11. REFERRALS

There were no referrals.

12. WORK PROGRAMME

Officers explained that the Overview and Scrutiny DVD presentation detailed in the Work Programme would be screened during the new Members' Training Session on Thursday the 5th June 2008. Members were informed that the Training Session would provide an introduction to Overview and Scrutiny and would be suitable for new Members as well as for Members who were unfamiliar with the scrutiny process.

Officers explained that a number of subjects were due to be discussed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, though no dates had been established for consideration of these items. Members were informed that these items included a proposed review of the Council's Business Centres and that Officers were due to produce a report on the subject for the consideration of

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the Executive Committee in 2008. Members agreed to postpone consideration of the proposed review until this report had been submitted.

Members discussed the proposed discussion of ditches, as detailed in the Work Programme. The Chair proposed that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee should postpone consideration of this item whilst the Joint Scrutiny exercise on Flooding was taking place. Members agreed to reassess the need for this discussion following consideration of the Joint Scrutiny Report.

The Chair suggested that the Third Sector Task and Finish review should be launched as soon as possible. Members agreed that the item should be reviewed at the following meeting of the Committee on Wednesday the 18th June. Members also requested that the scoping document for this exercise be provided for the consideration of Members at the following meeting of the Committee. Councillor Thomas was appointed Chair of the Group and was asked to review the contents of the document in consultation with the Overview and Scrutiny Support Officers prior to the following meeting of the Committee.

Members agreed that the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Committee would make the final decision about membership of the Task and Finish Group.

RESOLVED that

subject to the details contained in the preamble above the Committee's Work Programme be noted.

The Meeting commenced at 7.05 pm
and closed at 8.30 pm