



OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

Committee

24th September 2008

MINUTES

Present:

Councillor Phil Mould (Chair), Councillor David Smith (Vice-Chair) and Councillors K Banks, M Chalk, W Hartnett, R King, W Norton and D Taylor

Also Present:

Councillors B Clayton and B Quinney,
W Arthur and C Wilson (Worcestershire County Council)
A Birks and M Cooper (Diamond Bus)

Officers:

P Bellamy, M Bough, C Flanagan, A Heighway, S Horrobin, G Revans and L Tompkin.

Committee Officers:

J Bayley and H Saunders.

70. APOLOGIES AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES

An apology for absence was received on behalf of Councillor Thomas.

71. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND OF PARTY WHIP

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

72. MINUTES

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on Wednesday 10th September be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

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Chair

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73. ACTIONS LIST

Officers referred to item eleven on the Actions List regarding the Joint Scrutiny Exercise with Worcestershire County Council on flooding. Officers explained that they had arranged for Officers from Worcestershire County Council and the Chair of the exercise, Councillor M King, to visit the Committee to present the findings of the report. Officers had identified Wednesday 5th November as the most suitable date for this presentation. However, as the Council's fireworks display was due to take place on that evening, the Chair of the Committee had agreed to move the date of the Overview and Scrutiny meeting to Thursday 6th November and to include the presentation on the findings of the Joint Exercise on flooding at this meeting.

Members considered item thirteen regarding the Committee's request for information about the amount of revenue generated through Minor Land Disposals. Officers informed the Committee that they were still awaiting this information and would make this available as soon as possible.

RESOLVED that

- 1) **the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting due to be held on Wednesday 5th November be moved to Thursday 6th November;**
- 2) **the findings of the Joint Scrutiny exercise on Flooding be presented at this meeting; and**
- 3) **the contents of the Actions List be noted.**

74. CALL-IN AND PRE-SCRUTINY

There were no call-ins and no proposed items for pre-scrutiny.

75. TASK & FINISH REVIEWS - DRAFT SCOPING DOCUMENTS

Members considered a draft Scoping Document in respect of a potential review of "Neighbour Nuisance", proposed by Councillor Hicks.

Officers explained to the Committee that Anti-Social Behaviour Officers had provided written comments on the document and Legal Services Officers were in attendance at the Committee to answer questions from a legal perspective. The Committee noted that the

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scope of the exercise focussed on individual complaints about neighbour nuisance.

Following discussion, the Committee agreed that there were adequate mechanisms in place to address any such complaints and therefore further work on this issue would be unnecessary.

RESOLVED that

the proposed scrutiny of neighbour nuisance not be pursued.

76. TASK AND FINISH GROUPS - PROGRESS REPORTS

The Committee received update reports in relation to current reviews.

a) Council Flat Communal Cleaning – Chair, Councillor P Mould

The Chair explained that three other Councillors had been nominated to the Task and Finish Group. These were Councillors A Clayton, Quinney and Taylor. The first meeting of the Group was due to take place on Friday 3rd October.

b) The Role of the Mayor – Chair, Councillor M Chalk

Councillor Chalk explained that the Group had conducted its first interview of a past Mayor and that this meeting had gone well. He informed the Committee that the next meeting was due to take place on Thursday 2nd October.

c) Third Sector – Chair, Councillor D Thomas

Officers reported that the Group had interviewed Officers from Gloucester City Council and had begun to plan a consultation event that was due to take place on 21st November. The Group were due to attend a meeting to interview Officers from Worcestershire County Council on Monday 29th September.

RESOLVED that

the Task and Finish Group update reports be noted.

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77. BUS SERVICES

The Committee welcomed Officers from Worcestershire County Council who had been invited to the Committee to discuss the proposed Bus Provision Scrutiny Exercise. Officers explained that they had prepared a response to the comments made within the proposed review's scoping document.

In response to comments made in the document regarding the withdrawal of the service to the Alexandra Hospital, Officers explained that the County Council had negotiated with the bus companies to ensure that a service was provided to the hospital from both the east and west sides of the town, with Diamond Bus operating a 40 minute service to the Hospital on the 57 and 58 route.

Members commented that they had received complaints that this new service to the hospital was unreliable, with some residents experiencing delays of up to an hour. Officers explained that, if members of the public were experiencing problems, they should report the issue to the relevant bus operator.

Members commented on the terms of reference for the proposed scrutiny exercise. They felt that as this was a complex topic, careful consideration should be given to the focus of the scrutiny. Several outcomes could be achieved through a review of the subject: including achieving better coverage of routes; and better dialogue between the Council and its partners. In addition to examining the coverage of bus routes, the Smartcard initiative was also cited as a possible area for scrutiny.

Officers explained that Worcestershire County Council had been working closely with Diamond Bus to roll out a Smartcard project in the Redditch area by using Urban Bus Challenge funding. In response to the issue raised within the scrutiny document regarding evening bus services, Officers explained that the company operating the evening Taxibus service, on the 55 and 56 bus route, had introduced a similar service on the 57 and 58 route. The funding for these services was in place until December 2008. However, the County Council was committed to working with the service provider to extend this for a further six months with a view to tendering out the service in the future.

Officers explained that the main vehicle that Members from the Council could use to influence public transport in the town should be the County Council run Joint Officers and Members

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Transportation Forum. The Committee was informed that, while Officers had been attending this Forum, the Council had not yet been represented by an elected Member.

Representatives from Diamond Bus Company were invited by the Chair to address the Committee. The Committee was informed that in addition to operating services to the hospital, the company had been working to extend its service coverage to other key routes in the town such as the 51 and 64 routes. They also explained that £1.2 million had been spent on introducing new buses in the town. The Committee was also informed that the company had been focussing on marketing the bus services in the town and gathering the views of users to help improve its services.

Members commented that one of the public transport issues in the town was the lack of bus routes and bus stops at key locations in the town. The Arrow Valley Park was an example of where there were no direct routes and stops. Officers and the Diamond Bus agreed that this was something that could be reviewed. Members also questioned the feasibility of operating an evening bus service on Friday and Saturday nights from the centre of town. Representatives from Diamond Bus explained that this type of service could be operated if funding could be found to support it. Borough Environmental Services Officers explained that proposals had been submitted to secure Section 106 funds for a white light scheme on Unicorn Hill. It was suggested that representatives from the County Council should be involved in the Partnership Tasking Group to look at the possible linkages between these two proposals.

Officers from Worcestershire County Council explained that they had undertaken a comprehensive review of all passenger transport within Redditch, looking at: census figures; ticket sales; and public transport usage across the town Borough. Officers offered to attend the following meeting of the Committee to present this information to Members. This suggestion was approved. Officers requested that the bus timetables provided to Members at the meeting by Diamond Bus be copied and made available in the One Stop Shop areas.

RESOLVED that

- 1) Diamond Bus's service timetables be displayed in the Council's One Stop Shop areas;**

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- 2) **representatives from Worcestershire County Council attend the next meeting of the Committee to present a report on public transport in Redditch; and**
- 3) **the report be noted.**

78. PORTFOLIO HOLDER ANNUAL REPORT - HOUSING AND HEALTH (COUNCILLOR BRANDON CLAYTON)

The Committee received the Annual Report from the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Health. The report was structured around the themes that had been proposed by Members at the previous meeting of the Committee.

The Portfolio Holder began by discussing the Choice Based Lettings Scheme. He explained that demand for Council Housing in the Borough was higher than supply, with approximately 3,000 people on the waiting list and only 500 houses available. Residents using the system were assessed according to need and allocated to four bands which included priority, gold, silver and bronze bands. Residents could then bid in order to win the property of their choice. He explained that this system had yielded many benefits which included a reduction in the number of voids and the lessening of problems created by properties that were difficult to let. Officers explained that in the previous twelve months only twelve properties had been refused.

Members questioned whether access to the service had been a problem for vulnerable residents. Officers explained that this had not been the case but if residents had needed assistance in using the system, Officers were available to help them.

Councillor Clayton provided an update on the second theme of Homelessness. He informed the Committee that, following the implementation of many of the recommendations contained within the Overview and Scrutiny Homelessness report, the service had become better equipped at preventing homelessness. Members questioned whether many people who presented themselves as homeless came from outside the Borough. Officers explained that the Council had a duty to assess every case of homelessness and that the majority of cases involved local people.

Members commented on the possibility that the number of homelessness cases would rise as a result of the current economic climate. They queried whether any contingency plans had been put

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in place to address this problem. Officers explained that training had been offered to Officers to deal with potential problems. The Council was also planning to conduct an advertising campaign to raise awareness of the help that would be available for residents who may be struggling with their housing situation.

Councillor Clayton provided the Committee with his views on the Mortgage Rescue Scheme, which had recently been suggested by the government as a possible method for responding to the impact of the credit crisis on domestic home owners. The Committee were informed that the Government had pledged £400 million to help social housing providers bring house building schemes forward to 2009/10. Central Government had also recommended that social housing providers work with organisations that had a history of providing debt and housing advice to undertake independent eligibility assessments for the scheme. Councillor Clayton explained that he would not be in favour of the Council entering into arrangements whereby the authority would take responsibility for residents' mortgages.

Members commented that they felt it was important that the Council used every opportunity to bid for money from the Government to implement these measures for residents. Officers clarified that the risk associated with undertaking these measures would lie mainly with Registered Social Landlords as they would be in receipt of Government funds that would need to be allocated to shared ownership, rent back or equity schemes.

Members asked Councillor Clayton about the Council's five year investment programme. Councillor Clayton confirmed that the Council was in the second year of the second five year programme and that modernisation of properties completed under the programme had been successful. Councillor Clayton confirmed that sufficient funds were available to complete the full programme of works and that they would be completed in their existing order.

Councillor Clayton provided an update on the final theme of Health. He explained there were some wards in Redditch where statistics had shown there to be high levels of deprivation and health problems. He explained that work would be undertaken to address these problems including working with the Local Strategic Partnership, the Primary Care Trust and local GPs. Officers explained that work had been undertaken by SureStart Centres to promote healthy eating and healthy lifestyles to users of the service. A Health Improvement Co-ordinator had also been employed by the Council.

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RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

79. SELECT COMMITTEE - IDENTIFYING A MEETING TO ATTEND

Members discussed the possibility of attending a Parliamentary Select Committee meeting in London in October. Officers presented the Committee with several options and Members agreed to attend the Business Enterprise Select Committee meeting due to take place on Tuesday 7th October.

RESOLVED that

- 1) Members attend a Parliamentary Select Committee meeting on Tuesday 7th October; and**
- 2) Members be requested to inform Officers of their availability to attend this meeting.**

80. FLY TIPPING IN REDDITCH

Members received a report from Officers regarding fly-tipping in Redditch. Officers explained that the levels of fly tipping in Redditch appeared to be comparatively high for the size of the population, and that the types of waste tended to be domestic rather than commercial. An accurate measure of fly-tipping in the Borough was available through the Fly Capture Database which was used nationally and was used to collect data for National Performance Indicator 196.

Officers explained that the Council had a high level of enforcement action in relation to fly-tipping and had achieved a level two grade for its enforcement action. Further work on fly tipping was planned by the Council including undertaking further analysis of fly tipping trends, targeted publicity, and enforcement action.

Members complimented the service for taking quick action once fly tipping had been reported. Members commented on the scheme that had been piloted the previous year whereby once a fly-tip had been cleaned up, a card advertising the action was distributed to local residents and Ward Councillors to raise awareness of this work. Members questioned whether this scheme was still in operation. Officers were asked to provide further information on the current status of this scheme.

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Members queried if there had been a rise in the number of fly-tips when charges for bulky waste collections were introduced. Officers explained that this had not been the case and that in fact, the overall level of fly tipping had decreased. This was mainly attributed to the level of enforcement action that the Council had taken. Members questioned the number of people across the Borough who acted as volunteer litter pickers. Officers explained that incidents of street littering had also decreased and that the Council was one of the top performing Councils on this issue. Officers offered to provide further information about the numbers of volunteer litter pickers, and where these volunteers tended to perform this voluntary role within the Borough, for Members' consideration.

Members discussed the possibility of utilising the internet to report fly-tipping incidents. Some Members had used a third party system available through the internet that, once a fly-tip had been logged by users, would register the fly-tip with the local authority. Members were interested to see if this system was recognised by the Council in performance records. Officers explained that most electronic reports of fly-tips came through the Worcestershire Hub. Officers offered to provide further information regarding the use of electronic systems used by the Council to register fly-tipping.

Finally, Officers informed the Committee that they were planning to reintroduce the 'Worth It' advertising campaign that had been run in previous years. Members requested that Officers report on the progress of this campaign and on the developments in reducing fly tipping at a following meeting.

RESOLVED that

- 1) clarification of the status of the scheme designed to promote fly-tipping clean up operations be provided by Officers;**
- 2) a report on the number of people across the Borough who acted as volunteer litter pickers be provided by Officers;**
- 3) clarification of the electronic / internet systems that could be used to report fly-tipping be provided to Members;**
- 4) relevant Officers attend a future meeting of the Committee to provide an update on the 'Worth It'**

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campaign and on the progress made in tackling fly tipping in the town; and

5) subject to the above, the report be noted.

81. PORTFOLIO HOLDER ANNUAL REPORT - IDENTIFYING THEMES

Members proposed themes for discussion with the Portfolio Holder for Environment, Planning and Transport during his Annual Report, as detailed in Appendix A to the report.

RESOLVED that

the themes be noted.

82. REFERRALS

There were no referrals for consideration at this meeting.

83. WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered the Committee's Work Programme. Officers explained that consideration of the Civil Parking Enforcement item had been postponed until the 26th November.

Officers informed the Committee that the Chair had agreed the Committee should consider the proposed review of ditches at a meeting in 2009.

RESOLVED that

Subject to the above, the Work Programme be noted.

The Meeting commenced at 7.00 pm
and closed at 9.40 pm