



Overview & Scrutiny

Committee

15 October 2008

MINUTES

Present:

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

Also Present:

Councillors C MacMillan, B Quinney, W Arthur, Harrison, Rowe and Wilson (Worcestershire County Council)

Officers:

J Staniland

Committee Officers:

J Bayley and H Saunders

84. APOLOGIES AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES

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

85. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND OF PARTY WHIP

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

86. MINUTES

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on Wednesday 24 September be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

87. ACTIONS LIST

The Chair referred to item one on the Actions List regarding the visit by Members of the Committee to observe a Select Committee meeting in London. All members that had attended the meeting agreed that it had been a useful exercise and had demonstrated

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Chair

how scrutiny was conducted at central government level. Members were informed that it would be useful in the future for Members to attend one of the annual Parliamentary Seminars provided by the Centre for Public Scrutiny.

Officers explained that in response to item eight, information regarding the disposal of minor land disposals had been sent out to Members on 9th October. Officers also confirmed that information regarding items eleven, twelve and thirteen, relating to the report from Environmental Services Officers, had been sent to Members on 10 October.

RESOLVED that

- 1) **Officers be requested to provide Members of the Committee with further information about the Parliamentary Seminar series provided by the Centre for Public Scrutiny when this information becomes available; and, subject to this,**
- 2) **the report be noted.**

88. CALL-IN AND PRE-SCRUTINY

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

89. TASK & FINISH REVIEWS - DRAFT SCOPING DOCUMENTS

There were no draft scoping documents to consider at this meeting.

90. 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 one meeting had taken place where the Group had considered the Scope of the review. A visit was planned for the following Friday. The Group planned to examine council flats that had cleaning arrangements which were subject to the Council's cleaning contract as well as Council flats which had cleaning arrangements which were not covered by the contract. A further meeting had been scheduled in November for the Group to consider the

cleaning contract in detail. Relevant Officers would be interviewed during the meeting.

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

Councillor Chalk advised that the Group had completed interviews with expert witnesses including a representative from the press. He explained that at its next meeting, the Group would be discussing its recommendations. These recommendations were due to be presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 6 November.

c) Third Sector – Chair, Councillor D Thomas

Councillor Thomas explained that the Group had undertaken interviews with expert witness and had recently interviewed Officers from Worcestershire County Council. The purpose of this interview was to learn more about the Shopping, Investing and Giving (SIG) process that the County used to allocate grants to voluntary and community sector organisations.

In addition, the Committee were informed that invitations had been sent from the Group to third sector organisations inviting them to a Third Sector consultation event. This event would provide third sector organisations with an opportunity to comment on the Group's funding proposals.

RESOLVED that

the Task and Finish Group update reports be noted.

91. JOINT SCRUTINY EXERCISE ON FLOODING

The Chair explained that the presentation of the findings of the Worcestershire Joint Scrutiny Exercise on Flooding was no longer due to take place at the Committee meeting on 6 November.

Councillor Chalk explained that the County Group had decided that the external individuals and organisations involved in the exercise should be given an opportunity to comment on the report. The process of gathering feedback from these individuals and organisations had postponed the finalisation of the report. Officers clarified that, as the Committee meetings scheduled for 26 November and 17 December had busy agendas it was likely that this report would be presented to the Committee in the New Year.

RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

92. PASSENGER TRANSPORT IN REDDITCH

The Chair welcomed Officers from the Integrated Passenger Transport Unit, based at Worcestershire County Council, to the meeting. A presentation was given to the Committee (attached as Appendix A) which explained the background to the Redditch Passenger Transport Area Review. It was explained that the basis of the review was to provide evidence to support the development of sustainable schemes to improve public transport in Worcestershire. There were eight stages to the review.

Officers explained that they had completed a strategic analysis of passenger transport in Redditch. One of the three key outcomes of this analysis was that the western circular route in the town needed to be improved. Development of this route was deemed a priority, owing to the high demand for this corridor. One bus operator had expressed an interest in operating this service and it was anticipated that the western circular would be launched in the following year.

The second key outcome from the review was the recognition of the need for improvements at the Alexandra Hospital. Worcestershire County Council had been working in conjunction with the Primary Care Trust and the Council to develop a passenger interchange at the hospital. However, funding had not yet been secured for the scheme.

The third key outcome from the review was that of the taxi bus service. The review had identified that public transport users based in the Crabbs Cross area of the town were isolated, especially in the evening. As a result the evening taxi bus services on the western and eastern circular routes had been introduced. It was reported to the Committee that, when the service was introduced in 2005, monthly passenger numbers totalled 193. By May 2007, this figure had risen to 464. With the addition of extra routes, passenger numbers between July and September 2008 had risen to 2,375. The subsidy level had been reduced from £9.99 in 2007 to £2.32 in 2008.

Officers explained that they were in the process of reviewing future funding for the taxi bus service, as the original funding provided by the Urban Bus Challenge was due to run out. Interest in the service

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had been expressed by the bus operators and it was envisaged that the service would be continued.

Members asked whether the implications of the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) for extra homes in the Borough had been taken into account in the study. Officers explained that the RSS contained specific requirements for sustainable land use planning and it was widely understood that additional infrastructure would need to be in place for any additional housing that was built. Any developers building new homes would be required to work with the County Council through Section 106 agreements to meet the sustainability agenda.

Members commented that Redditch relied on the bus network for movement around the town and that it was important to maintain the bus only routes in order to preserve this. Members also commented that there were many partners that worked together to provide bus services in the town but communication between them was inconsistent. Furthermore, elected Members felt that they were often left out of communication on transport issues. Officers from the County reminded the Committee that there was the opportunity to receive information about transport related issues through the Joint Member and Officer Transportation Forum.

Safety issues regarding the buses were discussed by the County Council Officers. Safety was a factor that influenced the use of buses in the evening. Officers suggested that this was an issue for a community safety partnership to address. Officers also informed the Committee that there had been an increasing problem of safety at the bus station, in particular with dangerous vehicle movement around the station. Officers reported that an independent health and safety inspection had been commissioned to examine this issue further.

Members questioned safety in relation to accidents on the bus only routes within the town and whether these issues had been addressed in the review. Officers explained that a lack of public road safety awareness, in particular of bus only routes, might contribute to the cause of accidents. Bus Groups within the County had considered this issue and decided to implement an education programme within schools to raise awareness of the dangers of the bus only routes.

Members commented on the problems experienced on the eastern circular route, particularly the regularity of buses in the morning. The Committee was informed that this issue was a symptom of the early morning peak period when, owing to heavy congestion, buses

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became increasingly late. Members questioned whether there were any plans to increase the regularity of services to the Alexandra Hospital on this route. The Committee were informed that the operator had withdrawn this service because of difficulties in operating the service reliably. Extensive highway works were needed to resolve the access issue to the hospital.

The Committee thanked the County Officers for attending the meeting. The Committee, in light of the information with which they had been provided, considered the need for a scrutiny exercise on public transport in the town. Members decided that, because of the extensive nature of the review conducted by the County Council, there was no immediate need for a scrutiny of the subject. However, Members agreed to invite Officers from the County Council back to a future meeting of the Committee to receive an update on the progress of the review.

RESOLVED that

- 1) **Officers from Worcestershire County Council be invited to attend a meeting of the Committee on Wednesday 8 April 2009 to provide an update on the progress of the Redditch Passenger Transport Area Review; and**
- 2) **the report be noted.**

93. FEES AND CHARGES TASK AND FINISH GROUP – UPDATE REPORT ON RESPONSES TO RECOMMENDATIONS

Officers introduced a report which provided an update on recommendations made by the Fees and Charges Task and Finish Group in March 2008 regarding planning charges. The Committee heard that the report was a draft of a report which was due to be considered by the Executive Committee on Wednesday 19 November.

Planning Officers had suggested that they attend a future meeting of the Committee in 2009 to inform Members about the impact of the implementation of these charges. The Committee was informed that relevant finance Officers would report back to the Committee in February 2009 regarding the implementation of the Charging Policy, which had been introduced following recommendations made by the Task and Finish Group.

Members queried the cost of a meeting. Officers explained that they had requested further clarification on this and that it would be

made clear by the time the report was considered by the Executive Committee.

RESOLVED that

subject to the matters recorded in the preamble above, the report be noted.

94. PORTFOLIO HOLDER ANNUAL REPORT - ENVIRONMENT, PLANNING AND TRANSPORT (COUNCILLOR COLIN MACMILLAN)

The Chair welcomed Portfolio Holder for Local Environment, Planning and Transport, Councillor Colin MacMillan, to the meeting. Councillor MacMillan explained that he had prepared answers to the six questions that the Committee had proposed. He informed the Committee that, since he had taken on the role he had focussed primarily on: the Planning Advisory Panel; Economic Development within the town; environmental issues; and waste management.

With regard to the progress of the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS), Councillor MacMillan explained that the Draft Preferred Options were currently being consulted upon. The document was due to be considered by the Executive Committee on 19 November with a full response expected after the full Council meeting on 8 December.

In response to question four, regarding carbon neutral housing, Councillor MacMillan explained that the RSS would be advocating that all new housing built by the year 2016 should conform to the national target set for carbon neutral housing. Members commented that some of the houses recently built in Redditch had been carbon neutral, though this had largely gone unrecognised within the mainstream media. Councillor MacMillan explained that a Climate Change Policy was due to be incorporated as part of the draft Core Strategy. The Council's policy recommended that 10% of any building's energy requirements should be met using renewable sources.

In response to question five, regarding identification of the Council's carbon footprint, Councillor MacMillan explained a report on this topic was due to be considered at an Executive Committee meeting in November. In order to tackle this issue, the Council needed to make extra resources available. Members commented that, as the Council was required to find 3% savings this year, it might be difficult for the organisation to find the resources to support this piece of work.

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Councillor MacMillan was unaware of plans by Worcestershire County Council to combine waste management into a county wide service. Members explained that the County Council was keen to operate collections and disposals for the whole County. Councillor MacMillan explained that, if there was a convincing business case for the County Council to assume responsibility for delivering this service, he would be willing to consider the option.

In response to the final question, on the subject of travelling around the Borough, Councillor MacMillan commented that he felt there was a good road system and bus network in the town. However, he believed that the town lacked comprehensive and connected cycle network. Members observed that the resourcing and promotion of both footpaths and cycle paths needed more attention. They suggested that examining the five year plan, the footpaths and cycle paths could be a potential subject for scrutiny.

The Chair thanked Councillor Macmillan for attending the meeting.

RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

95. REFERRALS

There were no referrals at this meeting.

96. WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered its rolling Work Programme.

Officers explained that the Committee was due to receive an update in April 2009 on progress in respect of the recommendations from the Communications Task and Finish Review. However, Officers explained that these recommendations had not been reconsidered by the Executive Committee or by full Council since June 2008, when further work was requested. Members requested that Officers contact relevant Officers and Members to clarify the date when the recommendations would be considered by the Executive Committee.

The Chair explained that the Work Programme Planning Day had been added to the Committee's Work Programme. However, he suggested that, as a number of topics for scrutiny had been suggested during the previous Work Programme Planning Day which had not yet been considered, they did not need to hold

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another event for 2009/10. Members instead requested a scrutiny training session for 2009.

RESOLVED that

- 1) Officers contact relevant Officers and Members to clarify the date when the recommendations of the Communications Task and Finish Group would be considered by the Executive Committee;**
- 2) Officers remove the Work Programme Planning Day from the Work Programme and arrange a scrutiny training session in its place for 2009; and**
- 3) subject to the above, the Work Programme be noted.**

The Meeting commenced at 7.00 pm
and closed at 9.00 pm