

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Wednesday, 26 November
2008

MINUTES

Present:

Councillor Phil Mould (Chair), and Councillors K Banks, M Chalk,
W Norton, D Taylor and D Thomas

Officers:

A Heighway, T Kristunas and J Smith

Committee Services Officer:

J Bayley and H Saunders

109. APOLOGIES AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors
Hartnett, R King and Smith.

110. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND OF PARTY WHIP

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

111. ACTIONS LIST

The Chair referred to item nine of the Actions List that related to training for Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. He explained that he had attended the Scrutiny of Performance Seminar held by the Institute of Local Government Studies (INLOGOV) at Birmingham University. He informed the Committee that this was a useful event and that it would be worthwhile inviting the facilitator, Philip Whiteman, to provide in-house training on this subject for Members of the Committee. Representatives from Hounslow and Blythe Valley Councils had also formed part of the training day and they had provided information about the methods they used to scrutinise performance.

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Chair

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The Chair explained that Hounslow had moved away from using statistical reports provided by Officers and were instead pursuing a narrative style of investigation to assess the Council's performance.

The Committee agreed to invite Philip Whiteman to facilitate a future training event. Members agreed that Members from Bromsgrove and Wyre Forest District Councils should also be invited to attend this training. Members commented that if possible, the training session be held in the evening so that Members who worked during the daytime could attend.

Officers reported under action ten that the Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS) had offered one place for the Select Committee training due to take place on Wednesday 11 February. Officers enquired if any Member had a particular interest in attending the training. The Chair suggested that as not all Members were in attendance at the meeting, that Officers email the details to the Committee members and that any Councillors who wished to attend the training liaise with Officers directly to arrange this.

RESOLVED that

- 1) Officers to contact Philip Whiteman of the Institute of Local Government Studies (INLOGOV) at Birmingham University to enquire if he would be able to deliver the Scrutiny of Performance training at Redditch Borough Council;**
- 2) Officers to email Members of the Committee with the details of the training offered by the CfPS on Wednesday 11 February;**
- 3) Officers to liaise with Bromsgrove and Wyre Forest District Councils about the possibility of providing this Scrutiny of Performance Session as a shared training arrangement;
and**
- 4) the contents of the Actions List be noted.**

112. CALL-IN AND PRE-SCRUTINY

The Chair noted that the Council had an extremely low Call-In rate compared to other authorities. Members commented that this was indicative that the decision making system was working at the Council. However, Members questioned the effectiveness of the Committee at undertaking pre-scrutiny. Officers explained that pre-scrutiny should not be conducted out of general interest but should

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be undertaken when there would be clear benefits from undertaking the scrutiny. Members suggested that pre-scrutiny should be added as a further topic for training on the Committee's Work Programme.

There were no call-ins or suggestions for pre-scrutiny.

113. TASK & FINISH REVIEWS - DRAFT SCOPING DOCUMENTS

The Chair reported that the proposed scoping document from Councillor R. King on Equalities had been withdrawn. Officers explained that this decision had been taken between Councillor R. King and Officers to withdraw consideration of this item owing to potential duplication of work between Overview and Scrutiny and the Policy Team. The Committee was informed that resources had been made available to employ an Officer to review the emerging equalities framework. In addition, support had been offered by Bromsgrove District Council to assist with this.

RESOLVED that

the Equalities Scoping document be withdrawn as a potential exercise for scrutiny.

114. 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 at the Group's previous meeting, they had interviewed an Asset Maintenance Officer regarding the Council's cleaning contract during a recent tour of Council flat properties. The Group were due to meet on the following Friday to interview a Community Safety Officer and to consider their approach to consultation with representatives of Council tenants, the Borough Tenant's Panel and the Leaseholders Group.

The Chair informed the Committee that it had been evident which communal areas were cleaned under the contract. Members questioned the Group's approach to consultation and queried how the Group would proceed with any recommendation to introduce or raise service charges if not all tenants agreed with the arrangement. The Chair agreed

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that the Group needed to think about how they would address this problem.

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

Councillor Chalk explained that he had meet with the Overview and Scrutiny Support Officer to decide what elements of the recommendations needed to be costed. These costings were in the process of being determined by relevant Officers. He reported that it was highly likely the Group would reconvene to finalise this information. With regards to the recommendation of redecorating the Mayor's Parlour and installing an entry to the balcony, Councillor Chalk explained that if the costs for this were higher than £15,000 then the Group would be minded to withdraw this recommendation.

c) Third Sector – Chair, Councillor D Thomas

Councillor Thomas informed the Committee that the Group had decided on a model they wished to recommend for funding third sector groups from 2010. This model was the Shopping, Investing and Giving (SIG) funding framework, currently used by Worcestershire County Council. A Consultation Event had been held where views had been sought on this model from representatives of the third sector. Councillor Thomas acknowledged that the consultation event had been extremely well organised and she thanked all Officers, particularly Peter Rose and Jess Bayley for their hard work.

Councillor Thomas sought clarification from the Committee on the issue of costing recommendations for Task and Finish Group reports. She explained that the Group were likely to recommend that a dedicated officer be put in post to administer the grants process. However, she was uncertain whether the Group should specify where the resources should be found to fund the post. The Committee agreed that the Group did not have to be specific about the source of the funding but did need to be clear about the costs involved in establishing the post.

The Committee were informed that the final report would be a two page executive summary written by the members of the Group. Officers would be providing a lengthier, more detailed document, containing details about the evidence

collected by the Group during the course of their review. This would be used for reference purposes only.

RESOLVED that

the Task and Finish Group update reports be noted.

115. CIVIL PARKING ENFORCEMENT – UPDATE REPORT ON RESPONSES TO RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee considered the update report regarding the implementation of civil parking enforcement measures in the town. Officers explained that since the introduction of the Traffic Management Act 2004, the charge level for offences had changed from a £60 flat fee to higher charge of £70 for serious offences and £50 for a lesser offence. Members queried how a serious and lesser serious offence was determined. Officers explained that the Traffic Management Act specified the levels of seriousness for traffic offences and offered no local discretion. It was emphasised to the Group that the Council only gave out penalty notices and would not clamp offenders. The Council was required to provide a cancellation policy and to have rules for people who wished to challenge their alleged offences. Special dispensation was given to those drivers classed into certain categories such as diplomats or disabled people.

Officers informed the Committee that full Council was due to consider the report on Monday 8 December. At this meeting, two Members were due to be nominated to act as representatives on the Penalty Tribunal Committee. Recruitment for the Civil Parking Enforcement Officer was under way and the repainting of white lines and the renewal of signs was also being undertaken. The final implementation day had been set for 23 February 2009 subject to the Department for Transport being satisfied with the scheme.

The Committee was informed that a substantial amount of publicity had been undertaken to make people aware that the scheme was due to start. All residents in a parking permit area had been informed of the commencement of the scheme. It was emphasised that the Traffic Management Order related only to the enforcement of existing parking restrictions and not to the creation of new ones.

Members queried how the parking permits would work. Officers explained there would be three parking permits per property with an extra one provided for visitors. However, this did not guarantee that there would be the equivalent number of spaces available. One advantage of the scheme was that people who illegally parked in

residential side streets close to the town centre would no longer be able to do this, therefore freeing up more space for residents.

RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

116. JOINT POLICY FOR UNAUTHORISED ENCAMPMENTS OF GYPSIES AND TRAVELLERS - UPDATE

The Chair referred to the short report which detailed the number of incursions onto Council land by Gypsies and Travellers by year. The Chair suggested that as it appeared incursions had decreased over time, there was little need to undertake further work at the current time. The Committee agreed this suggestion.

RESOLVED that

- 1) no further work be undertaken with regards to the unauthorised encampments of Gypsies and Travellers in the Borough; and**
- 2) the report be noted.**

117. PORTFOLIO HOLDER ANNUAL REPORT - PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR CORPORATE MANAGEMENT (COUNCILLOR BRALEY)

The Chair welcomed the Portfolio Holder for Corporate Management, Councillor Braley, to the meeting. Councillor Braley explained that his Portfolio brief was very large and included internal systems, assets, risk management and performance management. Since he had last attended the Committee to present his Portfolio Holder annual report, the Information Technology Steering Group had been formed and had been acting as a useful forum for Members to raise issues about IT at the Council. Councillor Braley explained that he sat on a number of panels and groups in his capacity as Portfolio Holder. He felt that as the role of Portfolio Holder was time consuming that it would be best suited to a Councillor who did not work full time.

In response to question two, regarding his priorities for his Portfolio brief, Councillor Braley explained that his main priority was to ensure that the Council was a well managed organisation. To achieve this he felt that it was important that the organisation strived to get the best out of its staff, partners, Members and its assets. An important factor in achieving this was getting residents involved in

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running the Borough. He also suggested that staff needed to be well trained, motivated, and ultimately as a result of this, satisfied. He explained that Members should not interfere in the day to day management of staff but should be available to listen to any concerns that staff may have.

Councillor Braley informed the Committee that he believed the most interesting area within his Portfolio was performance and asset management. The most challenging area was equality and diversity. He explained that he understood that by law, the Council was required to tackle these issues. He had attended a 'Dignity at Work' training event where he had learned about the Council's Phone a Friend initiative which he commended as a good idea to help diffuse difficult personnel and work situations before they could escalate.

When asked about the future direction for the Council's Asset Management Strategy, Councillor Braley explained that he felt property assets were vital to the organisation. Over a number of years, he felt that the public sector generally had not invested in its physical infrastructure which had resulted in inefficiency and greater running costs. Councillor Braley proposed that asset management should be viewed as an opportunity and that the visual appearance of the Council's buildings impacted on perceptions of the organisation. Councillor Braley viewed the sustained improvement to the Council's property portfolio and the increased sustainability of the Council's public buildings as a future priority for the Council's Asset Management Strategy.

Councillor Braley explained that he felt that assets should be rated in accordance with the value that the community placed on them. The community demonstrated how much it valued an asset in the amount of use that it made of a building: the more they used a building the greater the building's value.

In relation to shared services, Councillor Braley explained that he felt that the Council needed to progress the review quickly but should not rush. He explained that several areas were due for review within his Portfolio: including Lifeline; IT; Human Resources; and Asset Management. He felt that no service should be exempt from consideration but each service should be considered on its individual business case, risk analysis, and an evaluation of the impact on users and customers. Opportunities to share services should be sought from not only Bromsgrove but also the rest of the County.

The Chair thanked Councillor Braley for attending the meeting.

RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

118. QUARTERLY BUDGET REPORT

Officers explained that incorrect paperwork had been provided for this item. The budget figures for the Leisure and Customer Services Directorate only contained information for the previous quarter and not the half yearly figures. Officers offered to provide Members with this information after the meeting.

Members questioned how many cost centres were currently in existence. Officers explained that there were 136 cost centres that were live in the capital programme and it was estimated that there was around 600 cost centres in total.

RESOLVED that

- 1) Officers to send the correct information to Committee Members; and**
- 2) the report be noted.**

119. QUARTERLY PERFORMANCE REPORT

Officers informed the Committee that the Council were currently in the process of introducing the new National Indicators (NIs) for the performance management process. This had caused some problems although this had also been the case in many of the district Councils. The major cause of problems had been the lack of availability of baseline figures. This had made it difficult to set targets for performance. The Group were informed that information for the indicator relating to theft of motor vehicles was missing as Officers had been unable to access the system iQuanta to obtain this information.

Officers explained that they had also included further information regarding community safety performance, specifically crime and criminal damage figures for all of Redditch and at ward level. Officers informed the Committee that this type of information was accessed from sources in the Police Service and the Home Office and was tracked each month.

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RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

120. REFERRALS

There were no referrals.

121. WORK PROGRAMME

Officers informed the Committee that the final report of the Worcestershire Joint Scrutiny Flooding Group was due to be considered by Worcestershire County Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet.

Councillor Chalk explained to the Committee that the report was now available and that Members might be interested in looking at the recommendations intended for the district and parish councils contained on pages 57 onwards. Officers enquired which meeting Members wished to consider the report. The Chair noted that no business was scheduled for the meeting of the Committee on Wednesday 4 February and suggested that the report be scheduled for this meeting.

RESOLVED that

1) the final report of the Worcestershire Joint Flooding Scrutiny Task Group be received at the meeting of the Committee due to take place on Wednesday 4 February 2009; and

2) the Work Programme be noted.

The Meeting commenced at 7.10 pm
and closed at 9.00 pm