

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Thursday, 6th December, 2018

MINUTES

Present:

Councillor Joe Baker (Chair), Councillor Debbie Chance (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Joanne Beecham, Michael Chalk, Andrew Fry, Wanda King, Anthony Lovell, Gemma Monaco and Jennifer Wheeler

Also Present:

Councillor David Bush – Portfolio Holder for Economic Development, Town Centre and Commercialism

Councillor John Smith, Worcestershire County Councillor Liz Altay, Tracy Furlow, Sally-Anne Osbourne and Dr. Bill Spice

Officers:

Derek Allen, Kevin Dicks, Luke Samuels and Judith Willis

Democratic Services Officers:

Jess Bayley and Farzana Mughal

60. APOLOGIES AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES

An apology for absence was received on behalf of Councillor Pattie Hill. Members were advised that Councillor Wanda King was attending as substitute.

61. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND OF PARTY WHIP

Councillor Wheeler declared an other disclosable interest in respect of Minute no. 66 in relation to the review of the Voluntary and Community Sector Grants Policy, as she was a Member of the Redditch Town Centre Partnership. However, as she had been awarded a dispensation in respect of this matter by the Audit, Governance and Standards Committee she was allowed to speak and vote on any matters related to this item.

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Chair

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62. MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 18 OCTOBER 2018

The minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 18th October, 2018 were submitted for Members' consideration.

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 18th October, 2018 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

63. SEXUAL HEALTH SERVICES IN REDDITCH UPDATE

The Committee was provided with an update in respect of the range of Sexual Health Services in Redditch, the commissioning process for these services and the arrangements that were in place locally.

Written responses were provided to questions that had been asked by Members in advance of the meeting. There were supplementary questions asked by the Committee and the following points were raised during a subsequent discussion of the matter:

- Training would be rolled out to all health professionals to help increase understanding of services required for transgender patients.
- Outreach nurses could provide support across the voluntary sector, schools, and colleges.
- There had been some challenges engaging with the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) community. The Chair suggested that services should contact him with regards to the activities of the Redditch LGBT community group.
- The requirement to collect data in respect of chlamydia had not been mandatory until recently and this was partly why the figures were low.
- It was anticipated that clinics would be in operation every Saturday once staff had been trained in order to meet patient demand.
- It was reported that the rates of teenage pregnancy in Redditch were falling.
- Screening kits for Sexually Transmitted Infections (STI) were available online.
- It was difficult to say if there would potentially be further reductions in staff numbers as budgets for relevant services were constantly changing.

Members suggested that online booking arrangements for appointments would be useful to help meet patient demand. It was also noted that services for young people would more usefully be provided to young people in the afternoon rather than in the mornings.

Furthermore, the Committee suggested that more had to be done to raise awareness of the red and white ribbon campaign in Redditch.

It was acknowledged that more had to be done to work closely with partner organisations to promote awareness in the Borough and the Council could assist by providing ribbons for customers in the Town Hall.

64. PUBLIC BUS SERVICES IN REDDITCH UPDATE

Members were informed that representatives from Diamond Buses were unavailable to attend this meeting due to ill health. Therefore, consideration of this item in respect of the bus Services in Redditch had been deferred until March, 2019.

65. HOMELESSNESS POLICY (HOMELESSNESS REDUCTION ACT)

The Strategic Housing Manager and the Housing Options Officer provided a report in respect of the Council's policy in Homelessness Policy and the impact of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.

It was reported that the Homelessness Reduction Act profoundly altered the ways in which local authorities and their clients would work together to try and resolve housing issues. The Act recognised that there was a shortage of social housing and that by clients and the Council working together there was a much better chance of preventing homelessness.

The Act had transformed the way the Council tackled homelessness and the way the services were delivered by introducing two new duties in addition to the main housing duty:

- **Duty to prevent homelessness:** The Council had to help people at risk of losing suitable accommodation, as soon as they were threatened with homelessness, within 56 days. This meant that the Council would try to prevent the homelessness of everyone who was eligible and threatened with homelessness.

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- **Duty to take steps to relieve homelessness:** This duty was for those who were already homeless. The Council would provide advice and assistance to all those who were homeless to help them find suitable accommodation for themselves and their families.
- **The original Housing Duty:** If the Council had not been able to secure alternative accommodation, Officers would assess whether or not a main housing duty would be owed to the client after the relief duty ended. The main housing duty was owed to those who remained homeless after the relief duty, were in priority need and had not made themselves intentionally homeless.

In advance of the introduction of the Act in April, 2018, training events had been provided for all Housing Options staff to ensure that they had a good working knowledge of current local authority homelessness duties and associated policies and procedures.

The challenges and risk going forward were identified as follows:

- The additional administrative requirements associated with the Act could lead to backlogs in casework and lengthen waiting times for appointments;
- Accommodation options had not increased to cater for the greater focus on prevention and relief so the increase in duties had not been accompanied by an increase in resources; and
- Recruitment issues could impact on provision of the service - high turnover rates of temporary staff could be particularly challenging with a national shortage of experienced staff driving up the rates of pay.

The Chief Executive reminded the Committee that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had proposed a recommendation in September, 2018 that "Redditch Borough Council should take part in any opportunity to deliver Housing First in properties in the Borough. This should include applying to participate in any Housing first pilot schemes operated by the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA)". The Chief Executive stated that Officers were working closely with the WMCA on this and hoped to be able to deliver Housing First arrangements in the Borough in the future.

One of the key challenges that Housing Services were facing related to the availability of experienced and trained staff. To help individuals and families to avoid homelessness it was recognised that there was a need for more capacity in order to work with all

clients to help resolve any housing issues. As part of the review of the Housing department the number of staff and the specialisms required were being assessed.

66. REVIEW OF THE VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SECTOR GRANTS POLICY - PRE-SCRUTINY

The Head of Community Services provided Members with an overview of the draft policy and Councillor guidance notes in respect of the Councillor Community Grants Scheme.

Members were reminded that on 19th November, 2018, full Council had agreed to change the way in which the Council allocated grant funding to voluntary and community sector in Redditch. From April 2019 all Members would have a budget of £5,000 from which they could provide funding to Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) groups.

The Committee was provided with full details in respect of the revised scheme. Members were advised that training would be provided to all Members which would be mandatory. In addition, guidance notes would be provided to all Members explaining the full process. The scheme would be piloted for one year with it being evaluated during the year.

In discussing the revised scheme, Members highlighted some concerns and expressed the view that this scheme would be more onerous for officers. Some Members commented that the scheme was not transparent and that they did not feel comfortable with the process. Clarity was requested in respect of who would make the final decision in relation to the £350 that would be dedicated from each Councillor's allocated projects. Questions were raised about how funding would be spent in some wards where there were very few Voluntary and Community Sector groups that would be eligible to apply for funding. Members also expressed concerns that £20k would be cut from the budget for 2019/20.

Councillor David Bush – Portfolio Holder for Economic Development, Town Centre and Commercialism, stated that the new scheme would be beneficial for the people of Redditch and that the money would be fairly distributed across the town. Councillor Bush also noted concerns that the existing grants systems was too bureaucratic and often smaller groups that did not have access to professional bid writers struggled to secure funding. There were lots of wards in the Borough where grant funding had not been

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received in recent years and Councillor Bush suggested that the new system would help to address this problem. A proposal was made for the Committee to endorse the resolution detailed in the report to approve the policy and guidance. On being put to the vote this proposal was lost.

A further proposal was made for the £20,000 that would otherwise be cut from the grants budget to be retained for use by all Members where needed to provide funding to address issues relevant to the town as a whole. This proposal was agreed.

RECOMMENDED that

the Council should retain the £20,000, due to be cut from the grants budget, to invest in town wide issues and issues of importance to Redditch.

67. TASK GROUPS, SHORT SHARP REVIEWS AND WORKING GROUPS - UPDATE REPORTS

Councillor Wheeler provided an updates in respect of the following Working Groups:

a) Budget Scrutiny Working Group

Redditch Business Improvement District

The Chair of the Budget Scrutiny Working Group presented a report detailing proposals in respect of the introduction of a Redditch Business Improvement District.

It was reported that on Friday 19th October, 2018, Members considered information about proposals for the introduction of a Redditch Business Improvement District (BID). The group had concluded that, should a BID be introduced in Redditch, this could have a positive impact on the economy in the town centre.

RECOMMEND that

the Executive Committee should support the introduction of a Business Improvement District in Redditch Town Centre.

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Fees and Charges for Shopmobility

On 26th November, 2018 the Head of Community Services was invited to a meeting of the Budget Scrutiny Working Group to address a number of questions in respect of the fees and charges for Shopmobility, Dial A Ride and homes for elderly and vulnerable people.

During their discussions Members had learned that the introduction of fees and charges for Shopmobility had led to a greater decline in customer numbers than had been anticipated. To encourage more customers to use the service Members had suggested that incentives should be offered.

RECOMMENDED that

the Council should investigate the potential to introduce special discount fees for frequent use of the Shopmobility service.

Enterprise System

It was reported that on 3rd December, 2018 the Budget Scrutiny Working Group considered a report in respect of the new Finance and HR system for the Council, also known as the Enterprise System. The Group was provided with an overview of the progress that had been made with the procurement of an Enterprise System for the Council.

Members had learned that the system, regardless of the choice of software provider, would cost the Council a lot of money.

To ensure that Members could make an informed decision on the matter the group was proposing that there should be a briefing for all Members prior to this matter being reported to full Council.

RECOMMENDED that

there should be an all Member briefing on the subject of the new Finance System before Council makes a decision on this subject on 28th January, 2019.

The Chair concluded by thanking the Group for their hard work and commitment.

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b) Performance Scrutiny Working Group

Members were reminded that the Measures Dashboard training was scheduled to be delivered on 10th December, 2018 and that all Members who were not on the group were also welcome to attend the training.

68. EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MINUTES AND SCRUTINY OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE'S WORK PROGRAMME - SELECTING ITEMS FOR SCRUTINY

Members considered the Executive Committee minutes held on 23rd October, 2018 and the Executive Committee's Work Programme.

The Committee was informed that the Executive Committee had rejected the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's recommendation in respect of the Corporate Peter Challenge.

Members considered the Executive Committee's work programme and agreed to pre-scrutinise the Homelessness Grant, Flexible Homelessness Support and Homelessness New Burden's Fund for 2019/20.

RESOLVED that

- 1) the minutes of the Executive Committee held on 23rd October, 2018 be noted:**
- 2) the Executive Committee's Work Programme be noted; and**
- 3) the following item be included to the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme for pre-scrutiny as agreed:**
 - a) Homelessness Grant, Flexible Homelessness Support and Homelessness New Burden's Fund for 2019/20.**

69. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

The Senior Democratic Services Officer (Redditch) presented the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's Work Programme for 2018/19.

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Members were reminded that currently there was no Task Group or Short Sharp Review and that there was capacity if Members had an appetite to undertake a review if there was a matter they felt needed to be urgently investigated.

RESOLVED that

the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's Work Programme be noted.

The Meeting commenced at 6.30 pm
and closed at 8.51 pm