

# Overview and Scrutiny Committee

---

Wednesday, 4 February  
2009

## MINUTES

### Present:

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

### Co-opted Members:

T Buckley and R Colebrook (UNISON)

### Also Present:

J Jordan, (Worcestershire County Council), Councillor M King (Wychavon District Council) and Councillor B Quinney

### Officers:

S Hanley, E Storer and C Wilson

### Committee Services Officer:

J Bayley and H Saunders

## 147. APOLOGIES AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Hartnett.

## 148. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND OF PARTY WHIP

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

## 149. MINUTES

### RESOLVED that

**the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on Wednesday 14 January be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.**

.....  
Chair

# Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Wednesday, 4 February 2009

---

## 150. ACTIONS LIST

**RESOLVED** that

**the contents of the Actions List be noted.**

## 151. CALL-IN AND PRE-SCRUTINY

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

## 152. TASK & FINISH REVIEWS - DRAFT SCOPING DOCUMENTS

There were no draft scoping documents for consideration at the meeting.

## 153. TASK AND FINISH GROUPS - PROGRESS REPORTS

The Committee received reports in relation to current reviews.

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

The Chair explained that the members of the Council Flat Communal Cleaning Task and Finish Group had attended a meeting of the Borough Tenants' Panel to discuss possible arrangements for cleaning communal areas. He informed Members that the Group were also due to host a consultation event with leaseholders, though this might be postponed due to hazardous weather conditions.

### b) Housing Mutual Exchange – Chair, Councillor D Smith

Councillor Smith reported that, in addition to himself as Chair of the Group, the following members had been appointed to participate in the review: Councillors Cookson; Field; Hartnett; and Thomas. He informed Members that he had organised a briefing meeting with Officers to discuss the objectives for the review.

### c) Role of the Mayor – Chair, Councillor Chalk

The Chair informed Members that the Role of the Mayor Task and Finish Group's final report was due to be considered at a meeting of the Executive Committee on Wednesday 18 February.

**RESOLVED that**

**the reports be noted.**

**154. JOINT SCRUTINY INTO FLOODING - REPORT OF FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Chair welcomed the Chair of the Worcestershire Joint Scrutiny into Flooding Task and Finish Group, Councillor Martin King, and Mr John Jordan, the Democratic Services Manager from Worcestershire County Council. He informed members that they were attending the meeting of the Committee to present the Group's final report and recommendations.

The Chair of the Task and Finish Group explained that the Group had been established following the flooding that had affected Worcestershire and other parts of the country in July 2007. The main aim of the review had been to assess the responses of various agencies during the floods and actions that could be taken to improve responses in the future. He informed Members that the review had also had the broader remit of assessing appropriate arrangements for responding to other emergencies.

The Group had also analysed ways to empower people at the local level to act constructively during such emergencies. They had recognised that local empowerment would be significant in the event of an emergency as local people were likely to know where essential resources were located and might be available more quickly to assist people adversely affected by the situation than the emergency services.

The Chair of the Group explained that they had received some positive news during the course of their review. In particular, they had been impressed by suggestions from the local press. Representatives of the press had suggested that in such an emergency there should be one overarching reporter disseminating information about the situation across the County, as this would be less time consuming and less confusing than requiring emergency response teams to liaise with separate press offices.

During the course of the review the Group had interviewed representatives of a number of relevant organisations. A number of these organisations revealed that they had or would be undertaking reviews of their performance during the floods and actions that they could take to improve their responses during future emergencies.

# Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Wednesday, 4 February 2009

---

The Chair of the Group explained that responses to emergencies were dealt with in accordance with the Civil Contingencies Act, which applied to areas coterminous with the area covered by the local West Mercia Police authority: Herefordshire, Shropshire and Worcestershire. The Group had discovered that one problem with this arrangement was that not all of these areas had been equally affected by the flooding and they felt that there may therefore have been some reluctance to treat the situation as an emergency as quickly as might have been appropriate. The Group had concluded that in future there needed to be greater recognition that an emergency did not need to affect all areas for the civil contingency powers to be used.

Members discussed the potential benefits of joint working arrangements when responding to emergencies. They noted that during the floods in 2007 Officers from Redditch Borough Council living in other parts of the County had helped Councils in neighbouring authorities with their recovery efforts. However, this arrangement had been organised after the event and the Chair of the Group suggested that it might be useful for all authorities to be aware at all times of Council staff who could be invited to help neighbouring authorities.

Members discussed the monitoring arrangements that had been agreed by the Task and Finish Group to help assess responses to the Group's recommendations. The Chair of the Group explained that the Group would be re-forming in late 2009 to evaluate the responses to their recommendations. They had already reported their findings before the Overview and Scrutiny Committees at other local authorities within Worcestershire. Following these presentations Worcestershire County Council's Emergency Planning Group had undertaken to review the content of the report and the implications for their own work on preparing for local emergencies. The Emergency Planning Group was scheduled to report its findings before the Wychavon District Council Overview and Scrutiny Committee at a later date.

Members questioned whether the central utility networks had been interviewed as part of the review process, on the basis that emergency events could potentially impact on electricity and gas supplies. The Chair of the Group explained that the Group had not interviewed representatives of the central networks mainly as a result of the time constraints involved in the review process.

Members commented that ensuring the continuity of businesses in this type of emergency situation had also not been assessed as part of the review. They noted that it might be appropriate for the

# Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Wednesday, 4 February 2009

---

Economic Development Advisory Panel to assess this subject in further detail.

Members discussed paragraphs 7.34 – 7.37 of the final report and were particularly interested in the suggestion that each District Council should have a suitably qualified Officer in position to advise district Planning Committees about drainage issues and the flood risk implications for each development. The Chair questioned whether this could leave Councillors who served on the Planning Committee liable for compensation claims. However, it was noted that developers were required to incorporate a flood alleviation strategy into any application for a development that would be built on a flood plain. This Flooding Alleviation Strategy was then considered by Councillors when assessing whether to award planning permission for that development.

The Chair of the Group explained that the Worcestershire Land Drainage Partnership had been conducting some excellent work to address flooding issues. The partnership approach ensured that there was a co-ordinated response to drainage issues within the County. The Partnership was also driving best practice across the County as it encouraged Officers from different local authorities to share knowledge. This was considered particularly appropriate for an issue that tended to affect local areas without regard to local authority boundaries.

Members agreed that the recommendations contained within the report were suitable for approval. The Chair noted, however that there were a number of implications, both in terms of requirements from Officers and in terms of the financial costs that might be involved in implementing the recommended actions. He therefore suggested that the report should be considered by a working party of relevant Officers, who would be required to report their findings before the Executive Committee, alongside the Group's final report, at a later date.

Councillor Chalk, the Redditch Borough Council representative who had served on the Group noted that during the course of the review he had developed greater familiarity with emergency planning arrangements. Members agreed that it would be useful for all Members to receive further information about emergency planning. They therefore requested that an all Member emergency planning training session be offered at the Council.

The Chair thanked Councillor Martin King and Mr John Jordan for attending the meeting.

**RECOMMENDED that**

- 1) a working party of relevant Officers assess the implications of the Worcestershire Joint Scrutiny into Flooding final recommendations for Redditch Borough Council;**
- 2) the working party of Officers present the Task and Finish Group's final recommendations at a meeting of the Executive Committee alongside their comments;**
- 3) an all Member emergency planning training session be set up; and**

**RESOLVED that**

- 4) subject to the comments contained in the preamble above, the report be noted.**

**155. SHARED SERVICES BOARD AND JOINT WORKING**

The Chair welcomed relevant Officers and the co-opted members of the Committee, representatives of UNISON. He invited Members to ask questions about the Shared Services arrangements and to consider the content of a presentation that had been prepared by Officers. (Appendix A).

Officers informed Members that the Shared Services Board was not a decision making body. The Board considered information about the potential for sharing specific services and reported recommendations to the respective Executive Committees at Redditch Borough Council and Bromsgrove District Council. Throughout the shared services process Council staff and union representatives had been consulted. Officers explained that both Councils had agreed to proceed on the business cases for sharing two specific services and had reached a stage where there was a requirement for a formal period of consultation.

The UNISON representatives explained that they were keen to work closely with managers as part of the shared services process. They believed that as Union representatives they had a responsibility to ensure that all decisions were fair, both for their members and for other staff affected by the changes, and that there would be effective outcomes for both local authorities. The relevant policies at the two Councils would be assessed as a matter of course, though at this stage they did not feel that it would be appropriate to review every minute detail. They concluded by noting that they

# Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Wednesday, 4 February 2009

---

were pleased about the degree to which they had already been engaged in the process and were satisfied that they would continue to be consulted in a satisfactory manner as the shared services process moved forward.

The Chair explained that some Members had had concerns about the shared services agenda, particularly in relation to the implications for Human Resources arrangements. He noted that the two Councils had different Human Resources practices and conditions of service and it was felt some questions remained unanswered about how these differences would be addressed and what impact this might have on relevant staff.

Officers presented further information about the Shared Services arrangements that provided answers to many of these questions. They explained that no shared services arrangements would proceed without suitable business cases. These business cases were focusing not on making savings but rather on the extent to which service quality would be enhanced and the long-term sustainability of suggested shared service arrangements.

Officers explained that as part of the shared services agenda one of the main Human Resources considerations was regarding the impact upon individual staff. Wherever possible the aim would be to ensure that staff adopted the host Council's working arrangements. However, this would be discounted where any such change might have a detrimental impact on the individual concerned.

Members discussed the implications of the shared services agenda for a wider context of harmonising terms and conditions throughout the Council. Officers explained that the Board had not been asked to review the issue of harmonisation of terms and conditions across the whole of the Council. However, the Board had recognised that this was an issue that would need to be addressed in the long term.

Members noted that issues such as sickness benefits had been omitted from the presentation and they questioned whether these would be addressed as part of the process. Officers explained that these issues would be addressed by both Councils. However, it was not anticipated that the arrangements for sickness absence would be a problem as part of the negotiations because both Councils had based their sickness absence policies on national schemes.

Members noted that they were satisfied with the information that had been reported during the meeting and they thanked relevant

# Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Wednesday, 4 February 2009

---

Officers and the UNISON representatives for their contributions. They requested that regular updates on progress with the shared services process be received at following meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

## **RESOLVED that**

- 1) Officers be requested to provide updates on progress with the shared services agenda at following meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee; and**
- 2) subject to the comments contained in the preamble above, the report be noted.**

## **156. REFERRALS**

Officers advised of a referral relating to Neighbourhood Groups, detailed in Decision 205 of the Decision Notice for the 28 January Executive Committee meeting.

The Executive Committee had resolved that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee should be requested to set up a Task and Finish Group to consider the existing Neighbourhood Group process; how and whether the Groups worked; how to achieve the greatest value for money when informing local residents; and how to best achieve meaningful public consultation.

Members discussed this proposal and agreed that Officers should arrange to meet with the Leader of the Council to complete a scoping document for this proposed scrutiny exercise. This scoping document would be submitted for the consideration of Members at a following meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The Chair expressed some concerns about the capacity of both Councillors and relevant Officers to support the scrutiny process. He noted that there were two ongoing Task and Finish Group exercises as well as three suggested subjects for scrutiny that might be approved as Task and Finish Group exercises. He suggested that these capacity issues would need to be considered when scheduling the start of new Task and Finish Reviews.

## **RESOLVED that**

**Officers arrange to meet with the Leader of the Council to complete a scoping document for the proposed review of the Neighbourhood Group process.**



# Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Wednesday, 4 February 2009

---

## 157. WORK PROGRAMME

Officers provided updates in relation to the Committee's Work Programme.

1) Additional Item – Call-in

Officers explained that an additional item would be added to the agenda for the following meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on Monday 16 February. This would entail the provision of further information about the operation of the call-in process at Redditch Borough Council.

2) Centre for Public Scrutiny Session –  
How to Win Friends and Influence Partners

Officers informed Members that places on the Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS) Session that was due to take place on Thursday 19 March had been booked for Councillors Banks, Hartnett, R King, Taylor and Thomas.

### **RESOLVED that**

**subject to the comments contained in the preamble above, the Committee's Work Programme be noted.**

The Meeting commenced at 7.00 pm  
and closed at 8.30 pm