

# Overview and Scrutiny Committee

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Wednesday, 18 March 2009

## MINUTES

### Present:

Councillor D Smith, K Banks, W Hartnett, R King and W Norton

### Also Present:

Councillors C Gandy, D Hunt, C MacMillan and B Quinney

### Officers:

M Bough, T Kristunas, S Skinner, J Smith and C Wilson

### Committee Services Officer:

J Bayley and H Saunders

## 184. APOLOGIES AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors Chalk, Mould, Taylor and Thomas.

## 185. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND OF PARTY WHIP

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

## 186. MINUTES

### RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on Wednesday 25 February be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

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Chair

## 187. ACTIONS LIST

The Committee considered its agreed list of actions and specific mention was made of the following matters:

a) Fly tipping

Members were informed, under action two on the Actions List that relevant Officers were in the process of developing a three year action plan to tackle fly tipping within the Borough. This action plan was due to be finalised by March 2010. Officers were therefore proposing to report before the Overview and Scrutiny Committee early in 2010 to provide Members with an opportunity to scrutinise the contents of this document prior to consideration at a meeting of the Executive Committee.

b) Emergency Planning Briefing Session

Officers reported that, in relation to action five on the Actions List, Worcestershire County Council was proposing to deliver a basic presentation on the subject of emergency planning for the consideration of the Committee. This presentation could be delivered in April 2009.

c) Hereford and Worcester Fire Brigade

Members were informed that, as requested at the previous meeting of the Committee, Councillor Brunner had contacted Hereford and Worcester Fire Brigade to enquire about the organisation's rationale for reducing the number of fire fighters and the potential impact that this might have on community safety. She had been informed that this was being treated as a Freedom of Information request. A response to her request was due to be delivered by 2 April 2009. Therefore Members were advised that they should expect to receive further details in relation to this matter in April.

d) Corporate Plan Part II

Officers reported that consideration of the Corporate Plan Part II by the Executive Committee, as well as of the recommendations in relation to this matter that had been agreed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at their previous meeting, had been postponed until 1 April 2009.

e) Children's Centres

Members referred to action twelve on the Actions List, relating to the request for clarification as to the reasons for references to Bromsgrove when discussing Children's Centres Services in the Corporate Plan Part II. Officers explained that in Bromsgrove three new Children's Centres would be established and organisations would be invited to submit tenders to deliver the Children's Centre service in each of those venues on behalf of Bromsgrove District Council. The Executive Committee was due to consider whether to approve the submission of a bid by Redditch Borough Council to deliver this service. The contract for delivering this service was likely to come into effect from March 2010.

f) Performance Indicator WM05

Members were informed that, as requested at the previous meeting of the Committee, further clarification about Performance Indicator WM05, "percentage of calls answered within twenty seconds", had been requested. Officers explained that the response referred to in this performance indicator related to calls answered by an individual rather than by an automated response machine.

**RESOLVED that**

- 1) an Emergency Planning Briefing item be scheduled onto the Committee's Work Programme for consideration at a meeting of the Committee on 30 April;**
- 2) all Members be invited to attend the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 30 April to consider the Emergency Planning presentation; and**
- 3) subject to the comments above, the contents of the Actions List be noted.**

**188. CALL-IN AND PRE-SCRUTINY**

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

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

The Committee considered draft terms of reference for three proposed Task and Finish Reviews.

a) National Angling Museum – Proposed by Councillor Hunt

Councillor Hunt presented the scoping document for the proposed review of whether to establish a National Angling Museum in Redditch. He suggested that a National Angling Museum would provide the people of Redditch with a primary focus for promoting one of the key elements of the town's heritage. He also noted that a National Angling Museum could attract more tourists into Redditch, and therefore could have a positive impact on the local economy.

Councillor Hunt proposed that the review would be undertaken in stages. The first stage of the review would focus on establishing the costs involved in developing and maintaining a National Angling Museum and the sources of funding that could be used to deliver this project. The aim of this stage would be to identify the feasibility of the project. Councillor Hunt explained that the second stage of the project, focusing on support within the Borough for a National Angling Museum and the types of information that could be displayed within the museum, would only be launched if, during stage one, Members could demonstrate the feasibility of the project.

Officers explained that the Leisure Services Team was already committed to working on a number of projects. This impacted on Officer capacity to support any such review within Leisure Services at the present time.

Members suggested that, if the review was approved, it would be in the Council's interests to book the website domain name for the British National Angling Museum at the earliest possible opportunity.

b) Neighbourhood Groups – Proposed by, Councillor Gandy

Councillor Gandy explained that she had proposed a review of the Council's Neighbourhood Groups at a meeting of the Executive Committee. It was anticipated that this review would involve consultation with local residents. In particular, a Task and Finish Group would be commissioned to investigate current arrangements and how local consultation should be arranged to achieve value for money.

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c) Overview and Scrutiny – Proposed by Councillor R King

Councillor King explained that he felt there were a number of weaknesses in the current Overview and Scrutiny structure and processes at Redditch Borough Council. In particular, Councillor King questioned the ability of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to hold the Executive adequately to account and expressed concerns about the current level of involvement of the full pool of scrutiny Members in the Overview and Scrutiny process. He also noted that more work could be undertaken to identify topics suitable for pre-scrutiny from analysis of the Council's Forward Plan.

The Chair questioned whether a review of the Overview and Scrutiny structure could be undertaken as part of the Member Development process involving all Councillors. Furthermore it was noted that the involvement of the wider pool of Overview and Scrutiny Members in the process received consideration when Members were appointed to new Task and Finish Groups.

Officers suggested that an alternative might be for the Council's Constitutional Review Working Party to undertake any review of Overview and Scrutiny. However, Members noted that a long-term review of Overview and Scrutiny could equally be undertaken by a Task and Finish Group, if that was the Committee's wish.

The Chair commented that there was clearly a finite capacity within the Overview and Scrutiny Team at Redditch Borough Council and that this would impact on the timeframes involved in launching and completing any additional Task and Finish reviews. Members noted that there were other potential Reviews in the pipeline which might impact on the priority attached to the two reviews approved at this meeting.

**RESOLVED that**

- 1) **a Task and Finish Group be established to undertake the National Angling Museum review;**
- 2) **a Task and Finish Group be established to undertake the Neighbourhood Groups review;**

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- 3) the proposed review of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny process be rejected as a Task and Finish Group exercise;
- 4) the Chairs of the two agreed reviews be appointed at the following meeting of the Committee; and
- 5) in view of the fact that there were other potential reviews in the pipeline, a decision as to when to launch each of these reviews be made at the following meeting of the Committee.

## 190. TASK AND FINISH GROUPS - PROGRESS REPORTS

The Committee received reports in relation to current reviews.

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

Officers reported that the Group had had to postpone a consultation event which had been designed to provide leaseholders with an opportunity to contribute to the review. This would instead be taking place on either 14 or 15 April 2009.

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

The Chair explained that he would be liaising with Officers to organise the first meeting of this Task and Finish Group. He reported that he hoped that this meeting would take place at the beginning of April 2009.

**RESOLVED that**

**the reports be noted.**

## 191. PORTFOLIO HOLDER ANNUAL REPORT - COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP AND PARTNERSHIP (COUNCILLOR CAROLE GANDY)

The Chair welcomed the Portfolio Holder for Community Leadership and Partnership, Councillor Gandy, to the meeting. Councillor Gandy presented her Portfolio Holder Annual Report in accordance with the questions set by the Committee.

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a) What do you wish to achieve for Redditch?

Councillor Gandy noted that when considering this question it was important to distinguish between what she wanted to achieve and what was possible to achieve, (as set out in her answer to question b) below).

Councillor Gandy explained that she wanted Redditch to be a place that people were proud to live and work in. Consequently, reviews of the Arrow Valley Countryside Centre and of Forge Mill Needle Museum had recently been proposed. She informed Members that she aimed to ensure that there were attractive places within the town. The estate enhancements process had therefore been encouraged as a way to ensure that this principle was met within the Borough.

She also explained that she wanted to promote the positive aspects of the town and of living and working in the town to members of the public. The Council's newspaper, Redditch Matters, had been re-introduced to help facilitate this process. Moreover, she wanted to attract more businesses into the town. Consequently, a new Council priority of Sustainable Communities had been introduced.

In addition, Councillor Gandy explained that she wished to ensure that the services delivered by the Council were of a high quality. She was keen to learn about the weaknesses, successes and opportunities for Council services and had recently joined the Council's refuse collectors to observe service delivery at first hand.

Finally, she added that she wanted to ensure that there was a thriving Voluntary and Community Sector within the Borough. She had been pleased with the work of the Third Sector Task and Finish Group and had been impressed by their recommendations.

b) What difficulties, if any, are you encountering in achieving your aims and objectives for Redditch?

Councillor Gandy noted that, when she became Leader of the Council in May 2008, few people could have anticipated the scale that the economic crisis would reach. She informed Members that the economic crisis had impacted on the Council's ability to deliver all of the projects which she had hoped to complete, such as the Abbey Stadium project.

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She informed Members that, in the previous month, the number of new people applying for Job Seekers' Allowance had been the highest in the West Midlands area. She praised the Benefits Services team for their hard work during this time.

Members were informed that unfortunately some members of the public continued to have negative assumptions about Redditch. Councillor Gandy noted that this represented a barrier to creating civic pride in the town. She suggested that all Councillors and Officers could help to alter this view by speaking positively about the Borough.

c) What are your views on partnerships? The future of local government?

Councillor Gandy explained that she felt that partnerships, in large part, represented the future of local government. She noted that the new local authority performance framework, the Comprehensive Area Assessment, would incorporate a review of how local partnerships were working. One of the main challenges of this new performance assessment framework would be to make local partners aware of how important their roles and activities would be in the Comprehensive Area Assessment process.

Members were informed that Worcestershire County Council, through negotiation with partners, including local district authorities, had set the Local Area Agreement targets and stretch targets. However, although these targets applied across the County they did not always necessarily correspond with the needs of the Borough.

Members discussed how local services could be delivered so as to achieve value for money for local customers. Councillor Gandy explained that any review of services would be undertaken not with a view to increasing profit margins but rather to identify the most efficient method for delivering services. This could involve the delivery of services currently provided by the Council by a local partner organisation.

Members discussed the level of understanding within the Council and local community of partnerships and the contribution made by partnerships to local service delivery. There was some question as to whether local partnerships were adequately held to account and whether the Overview and Scrutiny Committee could do more to assess the work of those partnerships.



Officers informed Members that the Local Strategic Partnership had recently been reformed. The priorities for the partnership would be agreed in due course. Moreover, Officers reported that local partnerships within Redditch had made a number of significant achievements such as the introduction of the Smart Water scheme by the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership (CDRP).

- d) In the current budget basked of service cut options, which would you keep and which would you save?

Councillor Gandy noted that there had only been a limited number of proposals for service cut options. These had included a reduction in the number of Neighbourhood Group meetings during the year; the closure of Pitcher Oak Golf Course; cancellation of the Council fireworks display; and cancellation of the Christmas lights.

She noted that as part of the budget review, a basket of options for further consideration had been identified. These comprised a number of non-mandatory services that were delivered by the Council. For example, the Forge Mill Museum had been identified as a service appropriate for review. Councillor Gandy acknowledged that the museum was an important cultural asset for the town staffed by enthusiastic volunteers. However, she suggested that more needed to be done to promote the museum and that there was a need to assess whether an alternative provider would achieve greater value for money in delivering the service.

Councillor Gandy noted that responsibility for the Matchborough West Community Centre and Batchley Community Centre had been transferred to Worcestershire County Council and the Batchley Support Group respectively. However, she explained that these centres would remain a part of the community.

Councillor Gandy concluded that she ultimately felt the collective view of the budget basket was more important than any one individual's view of the budget options. For this reason the Council had sought views from local residents through consultation. Moreover, Council staff had been encouraged to make proposals about how to address the budget situation. Councillor Gandy hoped that by April 2009 both residents and Officers would feel that they had had an adequate opportunity to contribute to this debate.

**RESOLVED that**

**subject to the comments above the report be noted.**

**192. REVIEW OF DITCHES**

The Committee received an illustrated presentation regarding ditches in the Borough.

During the presentation, Officers explained the vast amount of legislation governing the management of local ditches and waterways. However, they advised that the majority of ditches and water areas were outside of the control of the Council because sources of flooding could cross local authority boundaries. Under these circumstances compliance with the Enforcement Policy for Worcestershire by local authorities within the County was crucial and the local authorities within Worcestershire were attempting to agree a core set of values. The aim was to introduce a primary list of aims for the County as a whole as well as a secondary list of aims for specific areas within the County.

Members were informed that, under the Council's existing Scheme of Delegation, relevant Officers were only empowered to take action that would require £500 - £1,000 expenditure. More expensive action had to be referred to Councillors for a decision which could lead to delays. Officers noted that often serving notice on a landowner encouraged that landowner to take action to address problems with blocked or flooded ditches. In cases where more expensive action had to be taken the Council was entitled to recoup the losses.

Members questioned the role of Lengthmen in addressing problems with ditches and whether any were employed within the Borough. Officers explained that the Council did not employ a Lengthman. However, Feckenham Parish Council had consulted with Worcestershire County Council about the possibility of a Lengthman undertaking work within the parish. This issue fell within the remit of Worcestershire County Council as Lengthmen tended to address problems with ditches in relation to local highways.

Members discussed the circumstances that had caused flooding of the Batchley ditches in previous years. Officers noted that some local residents had voiced concerns that the construction of the Brockhill estate had had an adverse effect on the state of the ditches within the Ward. However, Officers explained that the state

of the ditches had been affected by the flow of water from rural areas in Bromsgrove District.

Officers explained that one of the main problems was the impact of adverse weather conditions across local authority borders. This had further been compounded by climate change. In July 2007 the flooding that had originated in Bromsgrove would have been difficult for Bromsgrove District Council to manage, especially as it had resulted from a rare and unpredictable set of circumstances. Moreover, Bromsgrove, though having a similar population to Redditch, was geographically much bigger and had fewer water courses. Officers noted that a significant way to tackle problems was to ensure effective communication, sharing of knowledge and action between local areas. Redditch Borough Council and Bromsgrove District Council were both committed to doing so.

Officers explained that changes had been proposed to the Reservoir Act. There was some concern amongst Officers about the Hewell Grange Reservoir, particularly due to its location on high land close to Batchley and Brockhill. Officers would be monitoring the implications of any changes to the Reservoir Act for the Hewell Grange Reservoir.

Members were informed that the Council and other neighbouring authorities needed to take appropriate action in preparation for forthcoming pieces of legislation. In particular, the Council would need to assess the current level of resources that were available to manage drainage issues and any further resources that might need to be allocated to this area to meet the additional responsibilities that would be awarded to the authority in the new legislation. Officers also noted that they were working on a draft Land Drainage Policy for the Council. This policy would address the action required to tackle future flooding problems in local drains.

#### **RESOLVED that**

- 1) Officers report an update before the Committee in March 2010 on drainage issues;**
- 2) Officers produce a map to illustrate the Council's land drainage responsibilities;**
- 3) Officers submit the Enforcement Policy for Members' consideration alongside this update before the Committee; and**

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

**193. FEES AND CHARGES TASK AND FINISH GROUP -  
MONITORING REPORT**

The Committee received updates from Officers and Members in relation to one of the recommendations from the Fees and Charges Task and Finish Group.

Officers explained that the Fees and Charges Task and Finish Group, a Group convened to review the Council's fees and charges during 2007/08, had recommended that the Council adopt a Charging Policy which would inform the Council's fees and charges setting process. The Charging Policy formulated by the Group had been approved at a meeting of full Council in June 2008. Members were informed that this item provided Members with an opportunity to monitor what impact, if at all, the Charging Policy had had on the Council's fees and charges setting process as well as to identify whether any alterations to the policy might be needed. Councillor MacMillan, former Chair of the Task and Finish Group and Chair of its successor body, the Fees and Charges Sub-Committee, was invited to report on the impact the Charging Policy had had on the fees and charges setting process.

Councillor MacMillan reported that both Members and Officers had learned a lot during the first year involved in applying the Charging Policy. The Executive Sub-Committee had commenced the year by attempting to review fees and charges in detail. During the course of the year, however, it had become apparent to members of the Sub-Committee that it was more appropriate for Members to make more strategic decisions about fees and charges. They had concluded that Officers should have the discretion to set individual fees and charges in accordance with the strategic directions laid down by Members.

Officers explained that this strategic planning contrasted with the previous approach of incremental changes to the fees and charges setting process. Strategic planning encouraged both Members and Officers to focus on meeting the Council's corporate objectives when setting fees and charges.

Members were also informed that a situation had arisen whereby the Medium Term Financial Strategy and the fees and charges setting processes had been running concurrently. Members had concluded that the two processes should be interlinked within the

Council's business, as this enabled Members to consider costs and income together. Members had therefore addressed fees and charges in the wider context of work on the Medium Term Financial Strategy in 2008/09. Owing, to the timescales involved in local government financial matters it was likely that the two processes would be managed concurrently in following years.

Councillor MacMillan suggested that the Charging Policy still had an important role to play in the fees and charges setting process. He noted that, as required by the policy, the Executive Sub-Committee had considered concessionary charging arrangements where applicable, though they had not considered individual charges. They had also, where applicable, considered subsidies and the implications of those subsidies for service charges. Councillor MacMillan noted that the Charging Policy allowed for flexibility in the fees and charges setting process. Therefore, where necessary, Members and/or Officers could suggest in-year changes to fees and charges.

The Chair thanked Councillor MacMillan for attending the meeting. He suggested that at that stage it was difficult to assess the impact which the Charging Policy had had on the fees and charges setting process. He suggested therefore that the item should be submitted for further consideration by the Committee at a later date.

#### **RESOLVED that**

- 1) the Overview and Scrutiny Committee monitor the impact of the Charging Policy on the fees and charges setting process in twelve months' time; and**
- 2) subject to the comments recorded in the preamble above, the report be noted.**

#### **194. CAPITAL MONITORING REPORT**

Officers presented information about the Capital Programme for Members' consideration. This report contained a position statement and data relating to specific capital schemes.

Members noted that, in previous years, they had been invited on coach tours of the Borough to observe the capital projects. However, Members were informed that, as part of the new Comprehensive Area Assessment process, Members would need to scrutinise the outcomes of these schemes. No guidance had been provided as to how to assess these. Members were therefore

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asked to provide some direction about the type of information and presentational style that they would prefer to receive when considering these outcomes.

Officers explained that the Council had managed 200 capital schemes in the previous year and advised that it would be difficult to present information in relation to each of these schemes when reporting to the Committee. Members suggested that it might be appropriate to receive quarterly reports, focusing on exceptional capital spending. However, Officers responded that, based on this criterion, Members might not receive any information at all as such exceptions were not common. Moreover, many capital projects could be launched and completed in a month, and so would not be suitable for tracking on a quarterly basis.

Members noted, however, that the 'comments' section of the document would form an important component of the Capital Monitoring report. They agreed that, under these circumstances, a quarterly monitoring process would be appropriate. They requested that in pursuing this approach, Officers clearly indicate where a capital scheme had been completed as a way to report outcomes.

## **RESOLVED that**

**subject to the comments above, the report be noted.**

## **195. REFERRALS**

Officers reported a referral from the Audit Committee.

Members of the Audit Committee had proposed that an Overview and Scrutiny review of the Dial-a-Ride service should be undertaken. Councillor R King confirmed that, as Chair of the Audit Committee, he had met with Officers to complete a scoping document for this proposed review. The scoping document would be considered at the following meeting of the Committee on 8 April.

## **RESOLVED that**

**the report be noted.**

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## **196. WORK PROGRAMME**

**RESOLVED that**

**the Committee's Work Programme, as amended by decisions detailed in Minute 187 above, be noted.**

The Meeting commenced at 7.00 pm  
and closed at 9.45 pm