

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Wed 28 Nov
2007
7.00 pm

Committee Room Two
Town Hall
Redditch



www.redditchbc.gov.uk

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- Automatic right to inspect agenda and public reports at least five days before the date of the meeting.
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- Access to a summary of the rights of the public to attend meetings of the Council and its Committees etc. and to inspect and copy documents.
- In addition, the public now has a right to be present when the Council determines “Key Decisions” unless the business would disclose confidential or “exempt” information.
- Unless otherwise stated, all items of business before the Executive Committee are Key Decisions.
- (Copies of Agenda Lists are published in advance of the meetings on the Council’s Website:
www.redditchbc.gov.uk

**If you have any queries on this Agenda or any of the decisions taken or wish to exercise any of the above rights of access to information, please contact
Jess Bayley and Helen Saunders
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Welcome to today's meeting.

Guidance for the Public

Agenda Papers

The **Agenda List** at the front of the Agenda summarises the issues to be discussed and is followed by the Officers' full supporting **Reports**.

Chair

The Chair is responsible for the proper conduct of the meeting. Generally to one side of the Chair is the Committee Support Officer who gives advice on the proper conduct of the meeting and ensures that the debate and the decisions are properly recorded. On the Chair's other side are the relevant Council Officers. The Councillors ("Members") of the Committee occupy the remaining seats around the table.

Running Order

Items will normally be taken in the order printed but, in particular circumstances, the Chair may agree to vary the order.

Refreshments : tea, coffee and water are normally available at meetings - please serve yourself.

Decisions

Decisions at the meeting will be taken by the **Councillors** who are the democratically elected representatives. They are advised by **Officers** who are paid professionals and do not have a vote.

Members of the Public

Members of the public may, by prior arrangement, speak at meetings of the Council or its Committees. Specific procedures exist for Appeals Hearings or for meetings involving Licence or Planning Applications. For further information on this point, please speak to the Committee Support Officer.

Special Arrangements

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If the alarm is sounded, please leave the building by the nearest available exit – these are clearly indicated within all the Committee Rooms.

If you discover a fire, inform a member of staff or operate the nearest alarm call point (wall mounted red rectangular box). In the event of the fire alarm sounding, leave the building immediately following the fire exit signs. Officers have been appointed with responsibility to ensure that all visitors are escorted from the building.

Do Not stop to collect personal belongings.

Do Not use lifts.

Do Not re-enter the building until told to do so.

The emergency Assembly Area is on the Ringway Car Park.

Declaration of Interests: Guidance for Councillors

DO I HAVE A "PERSONAL INTEREST" ?

- Where the item relates or is likely to affect your **registered interests** (what you have declared on the formal Register of Interests)

OR

- Where a decision in relation to the item might reasonably be regarded as affecting **your own** well-being or financial position, or that of your **family**, or your **close associates** more than most other people affected by the issue,

you have a personal interest.

WHAT MUST I DO? **Declare the existence, and nature, of your interest and stay**

- The declaration must relate to specific business being decided - a general scattergun approach is not needed
- **Exception** - where interest arises only because of your membership of another **public body**, there is no need to declare unless you **speak** on the matter.
- You **can vote** on the matter.

IS IT A "PREJUDICIAL INTEREST" ?

In general only if:-

- It is a personal interest **and**
 - The item affects your **financial position** (or conveys other benefits), or the position of your **family, close associates** or bodies through which you have a **registered interest** (or relates to the exercise of **regulatory functions** in relation to these groups)
- and**
- A member of public, with knowledge of the relevant facts, would reasonably believe the interest was likely to **prejudice** your judgement of the public interest.

WHAT MUST I DO? **Declare and Withdraw**

BUT you may make representations to the meeting before withdrawing, **if** the public have similar rights (such as the right to speak at Planning Committee).



Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Wednesday, 28 November 2007
7.00 pm
Committee Room 2 Town Hall

Agenda

Membership:

Cllrs: C MacMillan (Chair) J Cookson
A Fry (Vice-Chair) B Passingham
K Banks D Taylor
J Brunner D Thomas

<p>1. Apologies and named substitutes</p>	<p>To receive apologies for absence and details of any Councillor (or co-optee substitute) nominated to attend this meeting in place of a member of this Committee.</p> <p>(No Direct Ward Relevance)</p>
<p>2. Confirmation of Co-opted Members</p>	<p>To confirm the Borough Tenants Panel representatives present as co-opted members and substitute co-opted members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.</p> <p>(No separate report)</p> <p>(No Direct Ward Relevance)</p>
<p>3. Declarations of interest and of Party Whip</p>	<p>To invite Councillors to declare any interest they may have in items on the Agenda and any Party Whip.</p> <p>(No Direct Ward Relevance)</p>
<p>4. Minutes (Pages 1 - 26)</p>	<p>To confirm the minutes of the most recent meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on the 7 November as a correct record.</p> <p>(Minutes attached)</p> <p>(No Specific Ward Relevance)</p>
<p>5. Call-in and Pre-Scrutiny</p>	<p>To consider whether any Key Decisions of the Executive Committee's most recent meeting(s) should be subject to call-in and also to consider whether any items on the Forward Plan require pre-scrutiny.</p> <p>(No separate report).</p> <p>(No Direct Ward Relevance)</p>

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<p>6. Task & Finish Reviews - Draft Scoping Documents</p>	<p>To consider any scoping documents provided for possible Overview and Scrutiny review.</p> <p>(No reports attached)</p> <p>(No Direct Ward Relevance)</p>
<p>7. Task and Finish Groups - Progress Reports</p>	<p>To consider progress to date on current scrutiny reviews against the terms set by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee.</p> <p>The current reviews in progress are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Communications Task and Finish Group (Stage One), Chair - Councillor J. Brunner.2. District Centres Task and Finish Group, Chair - Councillor A. Fry.3. Fees and Charges Task and Finish Group, Chair - Councillor C. MacMillan.4. Housing Priority Task and Finish Group, Chair - Councillor B. Passingham5. Gypsy and Travellers Task and Finish Group, Chair - Councillor P. Hill6. Joint scrutiny on flooding – Representative – Councillor A. Fry <p>(Oral reports and / or reports attached)</p> <p>(No Direct Ward Relevance)</p>
<p>8. Preventing Homelessness Report: Officer Update</p> <p>(Pages 27 - 44)</p>	<p>To consider the Council's response to recommendations contained in the Preventing Homelessness Report produced by the Social Overview and Scrutiny Committee in 2006.</p> <p>(Report attached)</p> <p>(No Direct Ward Relevance)</p>

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<p>9. Portfolio Holder Annual Reports – Councillor Shurmer Portfolio Holder for Housing and Health (Pages 45 - 48)</p>	<p>To receive a presentation from the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Health providing a brief overview of the Portfolio followed by a wider question and answer session.</p> <p>(Oral report)</p> <p>(No Direct Ward Relevance)</p>
<p>10. Referrals</p>	<p>To consider any referrals to the Overview & Scrutiny Committee direct, or arising from:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Executive Committee or full Council• Other sources. <p>(No separate report).</p> <p>(No Direct Ward Relevance)</p>
<p>11. Work Programme (Pages 49 - 54)</p>	<p>To consider the Committee's current Work Programme, and potential items for addition to the list arising from:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Forward Plan / Committee agendas• External publications• Other sources. <p>(Report attached)</p> <p>(No Direct Ward Relevance)</p>
<p>12. Exclusion of the Press and Public</p>	<p>Should it be necessary, in the opinion of the Borough Director, during the course of the meeting to consider excluding the public from the meeting on the grounds that exempt information is likely to be divulged, it may be necessary to move the following resolution:</p> <p>“That, under S.100 (A) (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting for the following matter(s) on the grounds that it/they involve(s) the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in the relevant paragraphs (to be specified) of Part 1 of Schedule 12 (A) of the said Act”.</p>

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Overview and Scrutiny Committee

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2007

MINUTES

Present:

Councillor Colin MacMillan (Chair), Councillor Andrew Fry (Vice-Chair) and Councillors K Banks, J Brunner and D Taylor

Also Present:

Councillor M Braley

Officers:

S Hanley, T Kristunas and J Smith

Committee Services Officers:

J Bayley and H Saunders

68. APOLOGIES AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors Cookson, Passingham and Thomas.

69. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND OF PARTY WHIP

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

70. MINUTES

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on the 17th of October 2007 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

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Chair

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71. CALL-IN AND PRE-SCRUTINY

Members received the Decision Notice from the meeting of the Executive Committee held on Wednesday, the 19th of September 2007, with a view to considering the need for any Call-ins.

RESOLVED that

no action be taken to initiate call-in procedures on any of the Key Decisions contained in the Executive Committee Decision Notice.

72. TASK & FINISH REVIEWS - DRAFT SCOPING DOCUMENTS

There were no draft scoping reports for consideration.

73. TASK AND FINISH GROUPS - PROGRESS REPORTS

The Committee considered update reports in relation to current and pending reviews.

The following oral reports were given:

- a) Communications Task and Finish Group (Stage One)
– Chair Councillor J. Brunner.

Members were informed that the Group was scheduled to visit Stevenage Borough Council the following day to discuss best practice for corporate communications in a similar local authority.

The Chair explained that the Group was due to interview their final expert witness the following week and that the majority of information gathered during the interviewing process had been collated.

- b) District Centres Task and Finish Group
– Chair Councillor A. Fry

The Chair of the District Centres Task and Finish Group explained that the Group was due to meet on Thursday the 22nd November to receive updates from Officers. The Chair of the Committee requested that the Chair of the Group consider a potential end date for this exercise.

- c) Fees and Charges Task and Finish Group
– Chair Councillor C. MacMillan

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The Chair of the Fees and Charges Task and Finish Group reported that the Group had reviewed two service areas: Planning and Land Charges. The Group had found that there was very little scope for adjustment. The Chair explained that the Head of Financial, Revenues and Benefit Services had been invited to the next meeting to discuss how the Council allocated overheads.

The Chair also informed the Group that the issue of local authority powers to trade had arisen at the previous meeting. Further information about this had been requested by Officers for consideration at a future meeting of the Group.

d) Housing Priority Task and Finish Group
– Chair Councillor B. Passingham

Members were informed of the continuing postponement of this Task and Finish Group due to Member illness. The Committee discussed the possibility of electing a Vice-Chair to help progress the work of this Group. Officers reminded Members of the recent visioning event that had taken place which could impact on the work of this Task and Finish Group. Members were advised that depending on the outcome, the visioning exercise could initiate changes to the content of the Directorate Service Plans that was due to be analysed by this Task and Finish Group.

e) Gypsies and Travellers Task and Finish Group
– Chair Councillor P. Hill

Officers explained that due to personal circumstances, the Chair of this Task and Finish Group had asked to postpone the first meeting of this group until further notice.

f) Joint Scrutiny on Flooding

Officers reported to Members that the first meeting for this Review was due to take place on Monday the 26th of November at 6pm at County Hall.

RESOLVED that

the Committee note the reports and agree the proposed action; all as detailed in the preamble above.

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74. FORMAT OF TASK AND FINISH GROUP PRESENTATIONS, REPORTS AND INTERIM REPORTING

The Chair explained that he had initiated this item out of concern that Task and Finish Groups had yet to produce any output for the consideration of the Executive Committee, other Members and Officers.

The Chair suggested that Task and Finish Groups could begin to produce recommendations in a simple one page format on a phased basis, rather than on completion of the Task and Finish Group's work. Members discussed this proposal and agreed that it was not important that a glossy report be produced on completion of Task and Finish work. However, Members recognised that whilst reporting recommendations as they became available might be appropriate for some Group exercises the submission of a final report would remain suitable for other Task and Finish Groups.

RESOLVED that

the proposed course of action be supported.

75. PORTFOLIO HOLDER ANNUAL REPORTS – COUNCILLOR BRALEY PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR CORPORATE MANAGEMENT

The Portfolio Holder for Corporate Management, Councillor Braley, attended the meeting to provide the second Annual Report to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The Chair explained that as this was only the second time a Portfolio Holder had attended the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to provide their annual report, the most effective method of producing these reports was yet to be established. The Chair apologised for the changes in format to the process.

a) Roles and Responsibilities

Councillor Braley began his presentation by explaining to Members his role and responsibilities as a Portfolio Holder. He explained that his Portfolio area did not relate to political policy but rather to supporting a well managed organisation. Members were informed that integral to working towards a well managed organisation was the theme of good governance.

The Portfolio Holder informed Members that he had relatively few decision making powers. He explained that the decisions he was

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able to influence included; when to fly the flag on the Town Hall; when to grant concessionary use of the Civic Suite; and (in consultation with the Mayor and Group Leaders) when to suspend Standing Orders on contracts.

Councillor Braley explained to Members that his role was to ensure that decisions were made and implemented following the correct Council procedures. Members were informed that Councillor Braley was not opposed to many of the decisions made by the Council but that in the past he had been concerned about how decisions had been reached.

Councillor Braley stated that he agreed with the list of roles and responsibilities set out in the Portfolio Holder's Terms of Reference. However, he informed Members that he encountered difficulties due to his binary role as a Member of the Opposition and spokesperson for the Council, particularly when the Council's decisions were subject to criticism.

Councillor Braley further explained that his priority as a Portfolio Holder was to work towards a better managed organisation. He informed Members that some of the key actions that had been achieved included: budget savings as a result of improved procurement processes; improved Member Development; use of performance management systems and improved monitoring of Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPs).

Members referred to the Portfolio Holder's Terms of Reference and queried the difference between "may" and "can" in relation to the duties of a Portfolio Holder. The Chair requested that Officers provide a brief explanation of what these categories meant for future Portfolio Holder presentations.

b) Key Issues for the Portfolio Holder

Members questioned why issues relating to IT at the Council were rarely discussed and were seemingly not at the top of the Council's agenda. In response to this, Officers explained that IT was given due consideration internally and at senior management level. One of the elements identified recently by the Corporate Management Team was that the Council needed to identify leaders in this area and to learn from good practice. Officers stated that the Council was committed to bringing in expertise in this area to help address some of the issues that had arisen in the past.

Members queried the lack of IT support when utilising their own personal computers for Council business. Councillor Braley

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explained that Members had formed negative perceptions about the Council's IT based on their own personal IT experiences. Councillor Braley noted that there was a lack of IT skills amongst Councillors. Members agreed that a Member training event in relation to the use of IT systems would be useful.

Members commented on overspends and discussed the need to identify ways of minimising the risks associated with IT projects. Members agreed that examining good practice elsewhere and instigating systems through joint ventures would help to tackle these issues.

Councillor Braley commented on risk management procedures at the Council and explained that assessing risk was a difficult science. Councillor Braley explained that both Members and Officers required more training on managing risks and suggested that Officers needed to be reminded to address risks more thoroughly in reports and other forms of communication to Members. Councillor Braley informed Members that he felt Council reports should be robust and should demonstrate consideration of alternative forms of action.

Members discussed the recent restructuring of the organisation and the consequences for the Council. Councillor Braley noted that the capacity for Officers to complete reports for the Executive Committee within stipulated timeframes was of concern to him. Councillor Braley acknowledged that Officers had suggested that a more realistic timeframe would be six-eight weeks. Councillor Braley pointed out to Members that in his opinion setting realistic timeframes for the production of quality reports was imperative to good decision making.

Councillor Braley explained that staffing issues such as recruitment of Officers and sickness absences were also of concern to him. Members requested that Officers provide further information relating to sickness absence figures, including a break down of figures relating to short term and long term sickness; figures according to service area; and information detailing reasons for sickness absence.

Councillor Braley briefly discussed Member training. He explained to the Committee that he felt that Members needed more regular training sessions; to be trained in specific skills, and that there should be independent assessments to monitor the progress of individuals. Members approved this suggestion.

c) Improvements to the Portfolio Holder Role

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In conclusion to his presentation, Councillor Braley summarised some key improvements he felt could be made to the role of Portfolio Holder and to his Portfolio. Councillor Braley explained that he felt that Portfolio Holders should meet on a regular basis to discuss issues affecting them in their role as Portfolio Holders. Councillor Braley also suggested that the Portfolio Annual Reports to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee should take place every six months instead of once a year.

Members queried whether Portfolio Holders should deliver more presentations to ensure that all non-executive Members might be fully briefed on decisions made by the Executive Committee. Councillor Braley agreed that additional feedback mechanisms should be put in place to enable Executive Councillors to report back to Members but further consideration was needed on how to achieve this. Members noted that all Members could attend the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to observe the Portfolio Holders' Annual Reports.

In terms of improving his Portfolio, Councillor Braley expressed his opinion that the remit of his Portfolio was too large. Councillor Braley suggested that there might be scope to revise it, with the possibility of removing the IT function from his jurisdiction.

Councillor Braley was thanked for attending the meeting and was asked to provide a copy of his written slides for reference purposes (Appendix A). Members requested that the content of Councillor Braley's presentation should be considered at the following Executive Committee meeting.

RECOMMENDED that

the Executive Committee be asked to consider and comment on the content of Councillor Braley's presentation.

76. QUARTERLY BUDGET REPORT – JULY-SEPTEMBER 2007

The Committee received the quarterly budget report for July to September 2007 for consideration.

The Chair noted that the report mentioned "savings due to vacant post" on a number of occasions. Officers explained that some posts had been frozen during restructuring and so had been vacant for longer than usual. Members requested further information regarding vacant posts including; details of the number of days lost; the financial savings made; and the capacity implications for the

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Council.

RESOLVED that

- 1) **Officers be requested to provide further information at a future meeting about vacant posts as detailed in the preamble above; and**
- 2) **the report be noted and approved.**

77. REFERRALS

There were no referrals.

78. WORK PROGRAMME

The programme of future work was received and accepted.

Officers informed Members that the current co-opted membership had changed and that two new Borough Tenants' Panel representatives and two new reserve representatives would be registered at the Committee's next meeting.

RESOLVED that

- 1) **the Committee Work Programme be noted; and**
- 2) **the Chair write on behalf of the Committee thanking the Borough Tenants' Panel Representative for all her work on the Committee.**

The Meeting commenced at 7.00 pm
and closed at 9.00 pm

Corporate Management Portfolio

Working towards
A Well Managed Organisation

Scope of Portfolio

- Directorate comprises 8 distinct teams
 - Benefits & Revenues Service
 - Corporate Strategy
 - Democratic Services
 - Financial Services
 - Internal Audit Services
 - Legal Services
 - Human Resources
 - Information Technology

Services Covered (1)

- Benefits & Benefit Investigations
- Revenues
- Corporate Policy
- Communications
- Member & Committee Support Services
- Registration Services
- Accountancy
- Payments

Services Covered (2)

- Cashiers
- Internal Audit
- Legal
- Human Resources
- Information Technology

A well managed Organisation

- Works towards Continuous Improvement

Working through partnerships

Effective financial management

Effective asset management

Effective human resource management

Equality issues

Effective risk management

Consultation / Communication

Electronic government

Community leadership

The Borough Directorate & Community Strategy

- Most services are essentially support services
Thus there may be no (political) policy input
But there are a few where an input is
appropriate e.g. Procurement

It would be problematic and undemocratic if
opposition group members exercised political
decision making powers or attempted to
implement policy

Roles & Responsibilities

- To monitor
 - To consult
 - To listen
 - To represent
 - To encourage
 - To report
-
- To act as Spokesperson?
 - But not to manage

What have I done?

- I have had discussions both formal and informal with
- Chris Smith
- Sue Mullins
- Teresa Kristunas
- Steve Skinner
- Jane Smith
- Rob Seager
- Elaine Storer
- And before he left Mike Francis

Improvement to Portfolio Role

- Consider creating a new role for say IT Champion and remove from Portfolio
- Carrying out an audit of members skills.
- Based on this provide **assessed** training where needed and then using those skills as above.
- Tri - annual meetings of portfolio holders
- Biannual reports to O&S but at a separate open ended meeting.

Additional Help Needed (1)

- **Effective Financial Management**
- **Officers & Members ignoring regulations**
- **A concern especially with low balances/reserves**
- **Help needed in insisting that all regulations and procedures are adhered to.**
- **That Council reports are robust, comprehensive, complete consider alternatives of use & funding sources**

Additional Help Needed (2)

- What do I mean Recent examples

- Extreme Sports

May yet again have broken RBC own procedures.

- CCTV

Contract changed to give about 50% of value but attempt made to push through

All members have a duty to support and enforce our own rules !

So yes I need your support

Training & Investigation for Portfolio

- **Research carried out.**
- Attempting to understand the Byzantine world of Local Government finance.
- Risk management
- Consequences of the closure of OSS (superficial)
- Attendance various courses

Key Challenges for **Council** within Portfolio (1)

- Quality & Completeness of Reports
 - Depending on
 - Capacity (Staff & time)
 - Raises questions of
 - Timeliness, Robustness of information, Alternatives considered
 - And lead to
 - Good decision making
 - These come from good reports and unrushed decisions

Key Challenges for Council within Portfolio (2)

- Example

- Reports for Exec 31/10/07

- Draft 4/10/07
 - Final Version 16/10/07
 - Final report to CS 18/10/07
 - Committee 31/10/07
 - Typically 3.5 to 4 weeks
 - Officers really need 6 to 8 weeks
 - Both Finance & Legal often do not have sufficient time

Other Issues (1)

- Recruitment of staff
- Retention of staff
- Staff satisfaction
- Sickness absences
- Training
 - IT, Risk Management
- Training Budgets

Other Issues (2)

- Office Services are stretched – service currently being reviewed
- District Centres
- Property Services has a potential capacity issue
- Member training
- What it means to be trained

Other Issues (3)

- Information Technology
 - Recent Systems include – M3, IBS, Cedar, Anite and CAPS
 - Older system – Saffron

Due to capacity IT Department is “Reactive rather than proactive”

Member Services – Intranet

Training issues for rolling out to public (members & staff)

Summary

- Consider revising Portfolio
 - Separate IT
- Demand and make possible better reports including demanding alternatives from Officers
- Under take more training with objective assessment & Skills Audit
- Review Principle of Governance
- Review staffing after restructure

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All Wards

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8. SOCIAL OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE PREVENTING HOMELESSNESS – OFFICER COMMENTS TENANCY SUSTAINMENT

This report is an update on the recommendations from the Social Overview and Scrutiny Committee carried out by Members on Preventing Homelessness between May 2004 - May 2006.

Each recommendation has been broken down into its component parts, as detailed within the Committee's report; these components are detailed below the main recommendations; with the corresponding Officer comments detailed alongside.

	<u>Social Overview & Scrutiny Committee Recommendations</u>	<u>Officer Comments</u>	<u>Work completed to date</u>
1.	<p>It was recommended by the Social Overview & Scrutiny Committee that there be a significant change in the focus of the Council's homelessness service towards prevention as detailed in the report and, where appropriate, partnerships with outside agencies be sought and service level agreements be negotiated.</p> <p><i>(Component parts of the recommendation are detailed below)</i></p>	Officers agree with this recommendation and provide comments below.	
1.1	<p>Stop using the term "Homelessness", instead use "in Housing Need".</p>	In order to meet this requirement, the One Stop Shop form would be changed from being titled the "Initial Homelessness Assessment Form" to the "Initial Assessment	<p>Completed</p> <p>Assessment Form renamed.</p>

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		Form". References to "Homelessness" would also be removed from the service name and job titles of staff.	Team now renamed Housing Options Team and re-launched Housing Advice Service.
1.2	Offer early advice and referrals.	With the introduction of Choice Based Lettings and the Housing Options Team, all customers will receive an in-depth interview about their housing options and be advised on the most appropriate form of housing for their circumstances.	Completed Introduced Housing Options Team on 29 January 2007. Choice Based lettings went live on 6 September 2007.
1.3	Undertake full homelessness interviews at the very start of the process; clarifying the different housing options available to the applicant.	Officers currently undertake a full homelessness interview including providing the applicant with details of the different housing options available following the completion of an initial assessment form. Officers use this form to determine whether the Council has a duty to conduct S.184 inquiries into an applicants request for assistance under homelessness legislation. A full housing options interview will be conducted by the Housing Options Team. (as per response to 1.2).	Completed Housing Advice Officers now carry out initial assessment of homeless cases.
1.4	Ensure that mediation is available; mediation should be voluntarily accessed on both sides.	The Council has access to a mediation service which is voluntary. This service is a Countywide service part funded by the six	On going Looking at new County Mediation Service with funding from

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		local authorities and the Department of Communities and Local Government. Six referrals have so far been made for mediation.	Communities and Local Government. Funding required. Completed. Night Stop are now providing a mediation service for young people aged 16 - 25, in Redditch. Officers have now negotiated a contract with Night Stop to provide a mediation service on behalf of RBC. A contract is currently being agreed.
1.5	Introduce compulsory home visits for all parental exclusion cases to filter out false claims.	Officers agree with this proposal; compulsory home visits for all parental exclusion cases could be implemented immediately.	Currently being worked on Risk assessments required for Officers. This work will also link into 1.4 the mediation service with Night Stop.
1.6	Ensure that there is a shift towards prevention with more Officers doing solely preventative work. The number of Officers working on prevention should outweigh the number of Officers processing the homelessness applications (Invert the	Officers agree and accept that over time, the balance and focus of the Council's homelessness provision needs to be on prevention. The current structure of the Homelessness Service has 3 full time equivalent (FTE) staff predominately	<u>4th Quarter 2006/07</u> 39 Accepted homeless cases. 29 Prevention Cases. Due to lack of current floor space available

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<p>staffing structure triangle as detailed in the Social Overview & Scrutiny Committee's Preventing Homelessness report).</p>	<p>investigating applications and 1 FTE working solely on prevention. Investigation Officers spend 10 - 15% of their time on preventing homelessness. During 2005/06, 75 cases were prevented from becoming homeless. The Housing Options Team will also be working to prevent homelessness. Due to the number of applicants approaching the Council for assistance under homelessness legislation, Officers consider it impractical to reduce the number of Officers investigating applications at this time but propose reviewing the structure after the Housing Options team has been in place for twelve months.</p>	<p>on the ground floor in the Town Hall, we have not been able to accommodate all the Housing Options Team together as we had previously hoped to do.</p> <p>Therefore it is proposed from December 2007 to locate all the Housing Options and Advice Officers on the first floor in the current office and locate the Housing Options Assistants on the ground floor behind the current interview desks in Housing Advice Team.</p> <p>All the Housing Options & Housing Advice Officers will cover the interviews and continue with those cases that require further investigation, rather than the current practise of a Housing Advice Officer referring the case over to a Housing Options Officer.</p> <p>The Housing</p>
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			<p>Options Team are working with the local College to develop an education programme designed to show awareness of homelessness issues and housing options.</p> <p>Therefore this will meet the requirements to 'invert the staffing structure triangle'.</p>
1.7	Offer more homelessness prevention schemes.	<p>The Council currently has initiatives to prevent homelessness and will continue to produce other appropriate schemes. The Council has access to a mediation service and assists with Rent Deposits. In partnership with the local authorities within Worcestershire and the Supporting People Team, work is being carried out to implement a homelessness prevention service which will provide support to people who are threatened with homelessness and work to reduce repeat homelessness.</p>	<p>Ongoing looking at new initiatives.</p> <p>Redditch Borough Council working with Night Stop to develop the mediation service in Redditch which Night Stop have commenced.</p> <p>Rent deposits available.</p> <p>Talks taking place with the Prison Service.</p>
1.8	Tackle the wider causes and symptoms of homelessness.	<p>The Council is currently reviewing its Homelessness Strategy with Local Authorities and partners in Worcestershire and is</p>	<p>County Draft completed.</p> <p>Redditch Borough Council Officers are currently</p>

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		in the process of developing a Countywide Strategy.	working to update the Council's action plan in the County homelessness strategy which will then be presented to Members for sign off.
1.9	Build up partnerships and working relationships with other responsible bodies, the voluntary sector and private sector landlords making sure that each organisation has a clear understanding of its role, utilising service level agreements where necessary.	<p>Through the Private Sector Renewal strategy the Council is working to establish a Private Sector Landlords Forum and an accreditation scheme with a view to improving access and standards in the private sector.</p> <p>The Council currently works with other agencies and the voluntary sector through the Homelessness Strategy Group to ensure all organisations have a shared goal in dealing with homelessness and will continue to develop its working relationships. The Council is an active participant within the County and Regional groups on homelessness. Officers will explore the use of service level agreements/partnership agreements with its partners to ensure goals are achieved.</p>	<p>Meetings have been held with 8 Private Landlords who are in agreement with the Landlords Accreditation Scheme. This is currently being progressed by the Policy Manager and Prevention Officer.</p> <p>Discussions are taking place with Supporting People to introduce a Tenancy Sustainment role for Council and private tenants.</p> <p>Joint protocols being produced between hospital and Local Authorities across the County. *Currently working on protocol with Probation.</p>
2.	It was recommended that existing finances be refocused towards	Officers agree in principle with the recommendation but	

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	<p>homelessness prevention to engage private landlords, to instigate schemes such as a “Finder’s Fee” and to build up tailored prevention programmes. <i>(Component parts of the recommendation are detailed below)</i></p>	consider that it should be assessed as part of a review of the Housing Options Team as per response 1.6.	
2.1	Ensure that existing finances can be used for homelessness prevention.	The Council currently receives £50,000 per annum from the CLG to assist in homelessness prevention. The Council uses this money to support Redditch Nightstop to provide emergency accommodation for young people, Centrepoint to implement the Worcestershire Youth Homelessness Strategy, fund the Homelessness Prevention post and the Rent Deposit Scheme.	<p>Complete</p> <p>The money is awarded each year which will be looked at to see if there are other agencies or partners who require assistance.</p>
2.2	Recognise the potential for utilising Private Sector Landlords in preventing homelessness.	Both the Homelessness Strategy and Private Sector Renewal Strategy recognise the importance of the private sector in preventing homelessness and Officers are working to improve the relationship with this sector.	<p>Completed</p> <p>Forum set up Meetings being held.</p>
2.3	Liaise with Private Sector Landlords to address the barriers preventing them from accepting tenants on Housing Benefits.	The Council is currently engaging with private landlords to set up a forum in order to improve working relationships with this	<p>Completed</p> <p>Meet and Greet Forum taken place with private landlords and</p>

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		sector (as per response 1.9). The Housing Benefit Department will be members of this forum.	<p>Officers in the Housing Options Team.</p> <p>Visits to Landlords accommodation taking place, Landlords also being invited into the Housing Options Office to meet with Officers. Further Landlords have joined the Forum.</p> <p>Draft Service Level Agreement with Housing Benefit prepared.</p>
2.4	Develop a wide range of schemes to encourage Private Sector Landlords, for example, the "Finders Fee" scheme, rent deposit schemes and deposit guarantee schemes (this list is not exhaustive).	Officers do not believe a 'Finders Fee' as operated by the London Borough of Harrow is the best use of the Council's resources. The Council currently assists applicants to whom the Council has a legal duty to assist with accommodation by providing rent deposits or deposit guarantees. Due to the level of funding available, this assistance is limited to those where the Council has a duty to assist under homelessness legislation. Eighteen applicants have been assisted with rent deposits or guarantees with the average cost of £600.	<p>Procedure and Policy drafted, waiting to be signed off.</p> <p>Rent deposits also being provided to other groups of people who do not meet the priority need level under homelessness, however are vulnerable due to being homeless.</p>

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2.5	Build up a portfolio of Private Sector Landlords.	A primary role for the Homelessness Prevention Officer is to build relationships with landlords and liaise with them to accept applicants who are homeless. The work through the Private Sector Renewal Strategy in building a landlord's forum and accreditation scheme will also assist in this.	Completed Forum meeting regularly.
3.	It was recommended that a fast track link between the Council's housing benefits and homelessness services be implemented. <i>(Component parts of the recommendation are detailed below)</i>	In theory this recommendation could be implemented relatively easily, for example an administrative code could be created for homelessness cases so that they are, in effect, skimmed off the top and dealt with before any of the other cases. The speed of processing new claims for April and May 2006 is on average 28 days. <i>However, we would first ask Members to consider whether they want homelessness cases to be given priority over all other cases.</i>	Completed Fast Track System to Housing Benefits working well. Regular meetings with Officers and Housing Benefit. Cases processed within days of all Supporting evidence and completed form being submitted.
3.1	Increase communication between the services.	This recommendation could be implemented within 2 months. Housing Strategy & Homelessness Department and	Completed Meeting taken place with Prevention Officer and Housing Benefits.

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		<p>Housing Benefit Department would enter into a Service Level Agreement (SLA) to formalise and improve current working relationships.</p> <p>The Benefit Supervisor would be a named liaison Officer in Housing Benefits and would be the first point of contact for all Homelessness cases; it would then be clear where the Homelessness Prevention Officers would have to go with their cases.</p> <p>A weekly referral sheet would be completed by the Housing Strategy and Homelessness Department for updating on respective cases by Housing Benefit staff. A bi-monthly meeting would take place to monitor the effectiveness of the SLA.</p> <p>The SLA would promote a mutual understanding between the two teams so that Housing Benefits Officers are clear of the Housing Options Team's priorities for preventing homelessness and the Housing Options Officers are aware of the other demands and</p>	<p>Agreement made.</p> <p>Officers working to this agreement.</p>
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		priorities of the Housing Benefit Team.	
3.2	Use this link as another incentive for Private Sector Landlords.	Officers will use this working relationship as an incentive to private landlords to accept referrals from Redditch Borough Council and as part of the planned accreditation scheme.	Completed Referred to in meetings with Private Landlords on 14 May 2007.
3.3	Investigate offering a guarantee that benefits will be processed within a given time period.	<p>In theory it would be relatively easy to offer a guarantee to Private Sector Landlords. We would, however be wary of offering a "guarantee" as this could mean that the Benefits Section's other work was marginalised, particularly if there were any unforeseen staff absences.</p> <p>The Council is performing favourably against other Local Authorities nationally for the speed at which applications are processed, for example, Redditch Borough Council is in the Upper Quartile for processing applications which currently stands at 28 days.</p> <p>A guarantee that a claim would be processed <i>once all relevant information had been received</i> could be given, <i>should Members agree</i>. Benefits Officers feel that 7 days would be an appropriate timescale.</p>	Completed See 3.1.

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		<p>Private Sector Landlords would be encouraged to go through the different Benefit forms with their tenants as this guarantee would only be effective once all information had been received from the applicant.</p>	
4.	<p>It was recommended that the management of Discretionary Housing Payments be transferred to Housing Strategy & Homelessness.</p> <p><i>(Component parts of the recommendation are detailed below)</i></p>	<p>Officers would recommend that there be no change to the current management of DHP.</p> <p><u><i>A note on Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) and the Government's distribution formula:</i></u></p> <p>The Department for Work & Pensions (DWP) has recently changed the method it uses to calculate each Council's contribution.</p> <p>The Government now allocates a sum based on the halfway point between the previous year's DHP allocation and the overall amount that has been spent. For example, if the Council was awarded £9,000 in 2005 but only spent £7,000, the following year's contribution would be £8,000; yet, if the Council received £9,000 and spent £11,000 (by increasing</p>	<p>No Action Required</p>

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		<p>its DHP budget with £2,000 of its own money), the following year's contribution from the Government would be £10,000. In addition to the above distribution formula, the DHP funds need to balance out nationally and so the figure alluded to above could be increased or decreased slightly depending on the national average.</p> <p><i>Therefore, Members should be aware that in order to increase the level of funding received from the Government, Redditch Borough Council must put some of its own money into the DHP fund.</i></p> <p>(N.B. Each Authority is limited to contributing no more than 2.5 times the contribution from the Government.)</p>	
4.1	<p>Use Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) as a tool for preventing homelessness.</p>	<p>The Council currently utilises DHP for a variety of reasons, with the majority to assist in applicants to remain in their current accommodation and therefore preventing homelessness. The Council received £9,030 from DWP for DHP in 2005/06 and spent £18,893 on DHP in total.</p>	

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		<p>Detailed below are some examples of where the DHP fund has been put to use under the management of Housing Benefits:-</p> <p>i) Mr and Mrs A's marriage has recently broken down. Mr A is waiting for a Court order for the custody of his four children. Mr A rents a three-bedroom house so that he is able to accommodate his children once the outcome of his case is decided; Mr A's rent has been restricted because as a single person he is over accommodated. Mr A has been awarded DHP to meet the shortfall between the contractual and restricted rent until custody has been granted and his Housing Benefit allowance reviewed.</p> <p>ii) Ms B is a private tenant whose rent has been put up by £2.50 per week. The increased rent cannot be referred back to the Rent Officer because 12</p>	
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		<p>months have not elapsed since the previous decision was made. DHP has been awarded to meet the shortfall in rent until the annual review can be done by the Rent Officer.</p> <p>iii) Ms C works full-time whilst her partner, Mr D is a full-time student. Because they are both out of the house all day they have childcare costs. Had Mr D been in full time employment an element of their child care costs would have been disregarded. The Housing Benefits team did not feel that this distinction was fair and so DHP has been awarded until Mr D has completed his course.</p> <p>iv) Mr E used to be in receipt of JSA (IB), that is, Job Seekers Allowance (Income Based). Mr E has since been moved onto Incapacity Benefit, where although he now receives a higher level of benefit, he is in a worse situation as</p>	
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		<p>he is no longer eligible for maximum Housing and Council Tax Benefit, nor is he exempt from paying for his NHS prescriptions. DHP has been awarded to Mr E to meet the difference in his rent and Council Tax until he moved to long term Incapacity Benefit and would again be entitled to maximum Housing and Council Tax Benefit.</p>	
4.2	Raise awareness of DHP.	<p>Leaflets have been produced and are available from the One Stop Shops and on the Council's website; in addition, Housing Benefit letters make reference to DHP. All Housing Benefit, Tenancy Team, Rent & Welfare, One Stop Shop and Homelessness Staff are aware of DHP and advise and assist applicants in applying for DHP. Redditch Borough Council is one of the few Councils nationally whose Benefits Team promotes the DHP fund on its website.</p>	
4.3	Encourage applications for DHP.	<p>Council Officers from the Benefits, Rent and Welfare, Homelessness, OSS Teams and external</p>	DHP money being spent in full.

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		organisations like the CAB all promote and encourage applications for the DHP where they feel it would be of benefit.	
4.4	Transfer the management of DHP to Housing Strategy and Homelessness so that the fund is more accessible for those at risk of homelessness.	Homelessness staff have a good working relationship with Housing Benefit staff, which will be enhanced by the SLA. DHP is currently used for the prevention of homelessness in the majority of cases. Officers do not see any added value in moving the management of DHP from the Housing Benefit Staff to Housing Strategy and Homelessness Staff.	DHP money being spent in full.
5.	It was recommended that the Council receive a peer assessment from a Regional Champion for Homelessness at the earliest opportunity.	Officers support this recommendation and would advise this should be completed as part of the review of the service when the Housing Options Team has been in place for twelve months.	Due February 2008.

Note:

Consultation with Officers has taken place.

Author of Report

The author of this report is Liz Tompkin (Head of Housing Services), who can be contacted on extension 3304 (e-mail: liz.tompkin@redditchbc.gov.uk) for more information.

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No Direct Ward Relevance

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PORTFOLIO HOLDER ANNUAL REPORTS: QUESTIONS AND SUBJECTS FOR DISCUSSION WITH COUNCILLOR SHURMER, PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR HOUSING AND HEALTH

The following themes have been suggested by Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Questions relating to these themes will be posed to Councillor Shurmer, Portfolio Holder for Housing and Health at the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting on Wednesday the 28th of November.

Responsibilities of the Portfolio Holder

Key Issues of Portfolio

Budget and Resource Allocation

Any other specific issues relating to the Housing and Health Portfolio

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NB Note draft revision /Update – Page 2. S

REDDITCH BOROUGH COUNCIL GUIDE TO / FOR PORTFOLIO HOLDERS

Portfolio Holders are appointed annually by the Council (separate sheet refers) and between them cover all areas of the Council's work and responsibility.

"Portfolio" indicates a specified area of responsibility allotted by formal resolution, for the purposes listed below.

"Portfolio Holder" indicates a member of the Council's Executive Committee who, within the allotted area of responsibility,

CAN	1.	Monitor Council performance informed by documents such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Strategy • Corporate Plan • Service Plans • Budgets • E.Government statements • BVPI's / Local PI's (separate document available) • Forward Plan 	*
	2.	Monitor the implementation of Council policy and decisions informed, in addition to the above, by <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Council reports and Minutes • Personal contact with Officers 	*
	3.	Act as consultee for Members and Officers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formally, in accordance with approved delegations of authority to Officers • Informally for general reference. 	*
	4.	Act as "Spokesperson" for the Council in relation to Press / Media / outside the Council, but not exclusively (other Members may also	

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		have this shared role) (Council decision – 11th October ??)	
	5.	Act as “Rapporteur” a) to report annually to Overview & Scrutiny on the Services for which the Portfolio Holder has responsibility; and b) to act as a channel for feedback from representatives of outside bodies which fall within the remit of the Portfolio Holder. (Council Annual Meeting 22 nd May 2006)	
	6.	<i>the role of Portfolio Holders be expanded to include a higher level of involvement with the Local Strategic Partnership, and, more specifically, with relevant Sub-Groups of the Redditch Partnership, as and when formed.</i> (Exec January 2007 / Council ...)	
CANNOT		Act with delegated authority in any personal capacity (PFHs cannot therefore commit resources – financial / staffing, without further authority – Exec., Council, or Officer authority)	
			*
MAY	1.	Represent and “sponsor” their allotted Portfolio(s) at meetings of the Executive and the Council, and, <i>where appropriate</i> , at other Council meetings, e.g. O&S.	
	2.	Develop closer working relationship with relevant lead Directors and, via Directors, other relevant Officers.	
	3.	Attend relevant meetings, e.g. relevant O&S meetings, beyond those to which formally appointed by the Council <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As an approved duty where invited to the meeting • Also as an approved duty when present on own initiative. <p style="text-align: right;">in accordance with current approved constitutional requirements.</p>	
	4.	Seek to trigger reports to <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the Executive or Council, via normal report / agenda preparation processes • Regulatory Committees, via normal report / 	

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		<p>agenda preparation processes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overview and Scrutiny Committee <p>in accordance with current approved constitutional requirements.</p>	

G:M&C/Members/Portfolio Holder Guide
& Constitution / Const.documents/revised sms/8.7.6/16.7.7

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No Direct Ward Relevance

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11. WORK PROGRAMME

(Report of the Borough Director)

Date of Meeting	Subject Matter	Officer(s) Responsible for report
ALL MEETINGS	REGULAR ITEMS	(LEAD DIRECTOR - CHRIS SMITH)
	Minutes of previous meeting	Borough Director
	Consideration of the Forward Plan	Borough Director
	Consideration of Executive Committee key decisions	Borough Director
	Call-ins (if any)	Borough Director
	Referrals from Council or Executive Committee, etc. (if any)	Borough Director
	Task & Finish Groups - feedback	Relevant Lead Director
	Committee Work Programme	Borough Director
	REGULAR ITEMS	
	Quarterly Performance Report	Borough Director
	Quarterly Budget Monitoring Report	Borough Director
	Review of Service Plans 2007/10	Relevant Lead Director

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<p>7th November 2007</p>	<p>REGULAR ITEMS</p> <p>Oral updates on the progress of:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. the District Centres Task and Finish Group; 2. the Communications Task and Finish Group; 3. the Fees and Charges Task and Finish Group; and 4. the Housing Priority Task and Finish Group. 5. the Gypsies and Travellers Task and Finish Group 6. the Joint Scrutiny Exercise into Flooding 	<p>Relevant Lead Directors</p> <p>Relevant Lead Directors</p> <p>Relevant Lead Directors</p> <p>Relevant Lead Directors</p> <p>Relevant Lead Directors</p> <p>Relevant Lead Directors</p>
<p>28th November 2007</p>	<p>REGULAR ITEMS</p> <p>Portfolio Holder Annual Reports - Housing and Health (Cllr Mark Shurmer)</p>	<p>Relevant Lead Director</p>
<p>19th December 2007</p>	<p>REGULAR ITEMS</p> <p>Quarterly Performance Report July-September 2007</p>	<p>Relevant Lead Director</p>

REGULAR ITEMS

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<p>16th January 2008</p>	<p>Quarterly Budget Monitoring Report</p> <p>REGULAR ITEMS</p>	<p>Relevant Lead Directors</p>
<p>16th January 2008</p>	<p>Portfolio Holder Annual Report - Leisure and Tourism (Cllr Malcolm Hall)</p> <p>REGULAR ITEMS</p>	<p>Relevant Lead Director</p>
<p>6th February 2008</p>	<p>Quarterly Performance Report</p> <p>Quarterly Budget Monitoring Report</p> <p>REGULAR ITEMS</p>	<p>Relevant Lead Director</p> <p>Relevant Lead Director</p>
<p>27th February 2008</p>	<p>Portfolio Holder Annual Report - Local Environment, Planning and Transport (Cllr Greg Chance)</p> <p>REGULAR ITEMS</p>	<p>Relevant Lead Director</p>
<p>19th March 2008</p>	<p>Portfolio Holder for Community Leadership and Partnership (Cllr Phil Mould).</p> <p>REGULAR ITEMS</p>	<p>Relevant Lead Director</p>
<p>9th April 2008</p>	<p>Annual Overview and Scrutiny Report 2007/08</p> <p>REGULAR ITEMS</p>	<p>Borough Director</p>
<p>OTHER ITEMS - DATE FIXED</p>		
<p>28th November 2008</p>	<p>Update on actions undertaken in response to the Social Overview and Scrutiny Committee's Preventing Homelessness report.</p>	<p>Relevant Lead Director</p>
<p>28th November 2008</p>	<p>Confirmation of the new co-optee Borough Tenants Panel representatives</p>	<p>Relevant Lead Director</p>

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16th January 2008	Communications Task and Finish Group Stage One: Recommendations	Relevant Lead Director
6th February 2008	Fees and Charges Task and Finish Group - Recommendations	Relevant Lead Director
6th February 2008	Setting the Work Programme - Discussion	Relevant Lead Director
OTHER ITEMS - DATE NOT FIXED		
	Community Calls for Action - Discussion	Relevant Lead Director
	District Centres Task and Finish Group - Recommendations	Director of Housing and Asset Management
	Member Support – Proposed Baseline IT/Equipment Task and Finish Group	Relevant Lead Director

