

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Wednesday, 19 March 2008

MINUTES

Present:

Councillor Colin MacMillan (Chair), Councillor Andrew Fry (Vice-Chair) and Councillors K Banks, J Cookson, B Passingham, D Taylor and D Thomas

Also Present:

P Mould

Officers:

A Rutt, J Smith and C Smith

Committee Services Officer:

J Bayley and H Saunders

137. APOLOGIES AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES

Apologies were received from Councillor Brunner.

138. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND OF PARTY WHIP

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

139. MINUTES

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on the 27th of February 2008 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

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Chair

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Wednesday, 19 March 2008

140. ACTIONS LIST

RESOLVED that

the Actions List be noted.

141. CALL-IN AND PRE-SCRUTINY

Members received the Decision Notice from the meeting of the Executive Committee held on Wednesday, the 12th of March 2008.

No call-ins were required.

142. TASK & FINISH REVIEWS - DRAFT SCOPING DOCUMENTS

There were no draft scoping documents for consideration.

143. 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 Two)
– Chair Councillor J. Brunner.

The Overview and Scrutiny Support Officer reported that the Group was in the process of making its final recommendations and would be ready to report these to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on Wednesday the 9th of April.

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

The Chair of the Group explained that the Group had held its final meeting to finalise the recommendations of the review. The Chair of the Group confirmed that the Group would be ready to present its final recommendations to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on Wednesday the 9th of April.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Wednesday, 19 March 2008

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

The Chair of the Fees and Charges Group explained that the Group had discussed with Planning Officers in a previous meeting, the possibility of introducing additional fees and charges for existing planning functions.

He explained that the Group had requested that Planning Officers produce proposals outlining the areas where the Council could introduce these fees and charges for the consideration of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Officers presented a report on this issue to the Committee. Officers explained that the report proposed to introduce fees and charges in three areas. These areas were: for permitted development enquiries; for pre-application advice; and for post-decision amendments. Members were informed that other local authorities within the County were also undertaking a similar review of their planning fees and charges. The Council had consulted with these authorities to establish at what levels they were considering setting fees and charges in the three stated areas.

Members discussed the proposals in the report. Members agreed with the proposal that the fees and charges should be introduced in the three areas as set out in the report. Members were unable to comment on the fee bands likely to be set as the appendix which contained the information had been omitted from the paperwork. Officers offered to email these figures to Members.

The Chair explained that the Group had been debating and developing a charging policy and charging principles for the Borough Council. He explained that the Group was due to meet the following day to finalise a draft version of the charging policy and would be ready to present this to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on Wednesday the 9th of April.

RESOLVED that

- 1) the charging policy be considered at the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on Wednesday the 9th of April;**

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Wednesday, 19 March 2008

- 2) **the Executive Committee be asked to consider the recommendations made by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on behalf of the Fees and Charges Task and Finish Group; and**
- 3) **the Committee note the report and agree the proposed action, all as detailed in the preamble above.**

144. JOINT SCRUTINY EXERCISE ON FLOODING

Officers provided Members with a list of expert witnesses who had been invited to future meetings for the Worcestershire exercise on flooding. The Chair explained that Officers at Worcestershire had requested that the Committee consider this list and inform them of any questions Members wished to be asked during the course of the scrutiny exercise.

Members discussed a series of questions that they wished to be directed to the expert witnesses on the list. Members were particular keen to find out more information about the responsibilities of local authorities and land-owners for dredging ditches. Members were concerned that blocked ditches had contributed to some of the problems experienced in the recent flooding events. Officers offered to provide more information on the roles and responsibilities of the Council and landowners with regards to dredging ditches.

RESOLVED that

- 1) **the questions provided by the Committee be forwarded to relevant Officers at Worcestershire County Council and to the Council's representative for the flooding scrutiny exercise, Councillor Chalk; and**
- 2) **relevant Officers to provide a one page summary document outlining the roles and responsibilities of the Council and landowners with regards to dredging ditches.**

145. PORTFOLIO HOLDER ANNUAL REPORT – COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP AND PARTNERSHIP (CLLR PHIL MOULD)

Councillor Mould gave his Portfolio Holder presentation to the Committee.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Wednesday, 19 March 2008

Councillor Mould began by explaining to Members the different Partnerships that he was involved with as part of his role. He explained that the most important partnership he was involved with was the Worcestershire Partnership. He informed Members that this Partnership comprised a complex structure that offered some limited opportunities for the Council to input. In addition to the Partnership meetings which Councillor Mould attended on behalf of the Council, there was also a Management Group overseeing the work of the Partnership that was attended by Chief Executives and Directors from other local authorities and other key stakeholders. Councillor Mould informed Members that Redditch was not represented on this Board. However, various theme groups were affiliated with the Partnership which relevant officers from the Council did attend.

Councillor Mould informed Members that he also represented the Council on the Redditch Strategic Partnership. He explained that this partnership was established in 1995 and its membership included representatives from Worcestershire PCT, the Fire Authority, the Voluntary Sector, and local education providers such as the New College.

Members queried the remit of the Redditch Partnership. Councillor Mould explained the remit was to provide a forum for the key partners working in Redditch to agree a joined up approach for addressing key issues in the town. Members were informed that a further key responsibility of the partnership was to deliver the Community Strategy for the town.

Councillor Mould explained to Members that he felt the Redditch Partnership lacked “teeth” as many partner organisations were unable to bring additional resources to the Partnership. The resulting impact of this was that many organisations could not see the value in the partnership and were less likely to send senior representatives to attend meetings.

Members discussed their views on this issue. The Chair explained that he felt one of the main disadvantages of working in a partnership model was that it dissuades organisations from being critical of each other and can weaken their ability to hold each other to account. Members agreed that it was important, when agreeing to work in partnership, that the Council be clear about the aims and objectives of the partnership and be clear about what they want to achieve.

Members expressed concern about the apparent lack of representation of community and voluntary groups on partnerships. Some Members felt that the Council should be more proactive in engaging with voluntary sector organisations. Officers pointed out that efforts had been made by the Council to try to address this issue in the past including the introduction of the Community Commonwealth and the Redditch Council for Voluntary Services (RVCS). Members were reminded that the issue of Council funding for voluntary organisations was due to be examined in a forthcoming scrutiny review. However, it was noted that the way in which the Council provides support and advice, and not necessarily financial assistance, needed to be examined in the future.

Councillor Mould finished his presentation by highlighting his role in representing the Council at the regional level and in providing civic leadership in the town on non-council related issues.

The Chair thanked Councillor Mould for his presentation.

RESOLVED that

the Committee note the contents of this report, all as detailed in the preamble above.

146. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PLANNING DAY

The Chair explained that Officers had prepared some options for the delivery of an Overview and Scrutiny Planning Day. The Chair requested that Members make a decision about the location, the date, and attendees for the Planning Day.

The majority of Members were in favour of inviting all Members, all Directors, the Overview and Scrutiny Support Officers, the Member and Committee Support Services Manager, and the Democratic Services Manager. Some Members felt that invitations could be offered to other Officers and Members involved in scrutiny in other local authorities. This issue was debated, however, the majority of Members felt that the Planning Day should primarily focus on issues and work load planning for Redditch Borough Council. It was suggested that a further day could be held later in the year, which would provide an opportunity for Members involved in the scrutiny process to meet with Members from other authorities to share best practice.

Members discussed the location and the date for the Planning

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Wednesday, 19 March 2008

Day. Members agreed that Friday the 23rd of May would be the most appropriate date for the Planning Day and that it should take place in the Civic Suite.

RESOLVED that

- 1) **all Members of the Council, all Directors, the Overview and Scrutiny Support Officers, the Member and Committee Support Services Manager, and the Democratic Services Manager to be invited to the event;**
- 2) **the event be held on Friday the 23rd of May; and**
- 3) **the event be held in Civic Suite in the Town Hall.**

147. QUARTERLY PERFORMANCE REPORT – APRIL -DECEMBER 2007

Officers presented the third quarter performance report to Members. Officers explained that the report represented performance within the nine month period from April to the end of December 2007. Members and Officers commented that overall the performance figures were good and there appeared to be few areas of concern for the Council. Officers noted that the key area for consideration with regards to performance monitoring was how these reports could be presented in a more user friendly way to Members.

Members discussed the figures for the percentage of household waste recycled and commented that while the figure of nearly 32% was positive, there was the danger that this would plateau. Members felt that by finding ways of recycling other materials not currently recycled by the Council such as category five and six plastics, the Council should be able to improve this performance. Officers offered to inform relevant Officers of Members' concerns about this issue and request that Officers provide a response to Member comments.

RESOLVED that

- 1) **Officers provide a response to Members regarding the possible improvements of recycling rates by introducing the facility to recycle category five and six plastics; and**
- 2) **the Committee note the report and agree the proposed action,**

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Wednesday, 19 March 2008

all as detailed in the preamble above.

148. REFERRALS

There were no referrals.

149. WORK PROGRAMME

Officers reminded Members that there was an additional meeting of the Committee due to take place on Thursday the 27th of March.

RESOLVED that

the Committee's Work Programme be noted.

The Meeting commenced at 7.04 pm
and closed at 7.05 pm