Overview and Scrutiny Committee

MINUTES

Present:

Councillor Sid Khan (Chair), Councillor Sharon Harvey (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Imran Altaf, Joanna Kane, Emma Marshall, Jane Spilsbury and Monica Stringfellow

Also Present:

Councillor Matthew Dormer – Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Planning, Economic Development, Commercialism and Partnerships

Officers:

Sue Hanley, Peter Carpenter (on Microsoft Teams), Claire Felton (on Microsoft Teams), and Deb Poole (on Microsoft Teams).

Democratic Services Officers:

Mat Sliwinski

1. **APOLOGIES AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES**

   Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Ashley and Holz.

2. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND OF PARTY WHIP**

   Councillor Marshall declared that she was a member of the Executive Committee at the time Section 24 Notice was issued to Redditch Borough Council. It was noted that the nature of the interest declared did not preclude Councillor Marshall from full participation in the discussion, and voting on, any of the items on the meeting's agenda.

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

3. **MINUTES**

                                                                    Chair

The minutes of the meetings held on 23rd February and 16th March 2023 were submitted for Members' consideration.

RESOLVED that

the Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meetings held on 23rd February and 16th March 2023 be approved as a true record and signed by the Chair.

4.   **PUBLIC SPEAKING**

There were no registered public speakers on this occasion.

5.   **CORPORATE PEER CHALLENGE - ACTION PLAN - PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY**

The Deputy Chief Executive Officer provided an overview of the report on Corporate Peer Challenge – Action Plan and in doing so explained what happened during the Peer Review Challenge visit that took place at the Council between 7th and 10th March 2023 and presented the feedback report from the Local Government Association (LGA) Peer Review team on the Peer Review visit. This feedback included six key recommendations for the Council, which were as follows:

1. The council needs to review its strategic priorities and realign resources accordingly.
2. The organisation should consider a governance review to improve decision-making.
3. Embed the 2022-2026 Workforce Strategy and develop an action plan which needs to be implemented at pace.
4. Agile working principles and policies need to be implemented consistently.
5. Ensure the Section 24 Notice and Interim Annual Audit Report recommendations are fully implemented.
6. Use engagement, shared values, and improved processes to create a positive democratic culture.

It was explained that Appendix B to the main report provided the Council's response and action plan against each of the six key recommendations. These responses had been submitted for the Executive Committee to consider alongside supporting action plans included at Appendices C to G.

It was reiterated that Members views were particularly sought as to what, if anything, else the Council should do to address Recommendations 2 and 6

(Appendix D).

Following the main presentation, Members had the opportunity to make comments and question the Officers in attendance. The following comments and suggestions were made by Members, and responses provided by Officers:

- It was reiterated that residents, elected members, local partners from public and private sectors, and members of staff all had the opportunity to take part in the peer review. There were resident, elected member, and staff focus groups to facilitate participation from these groups. In total, the peer team gathered information and views from around 55 meetings and spoke to over 130 people over the course of the peer review for Redditch and Bromsgrove Councils.
- It was raised by some Members that consideration should be given to altering the dates of Overview and Scrutiny meetings so that they aligned better with dates of Executive Committee meetings, thereby enabling Members of Overview and Scrutiny to have maximum possible time period to access Executive Committee papers that had been chosen for pre-scrutiny.
- It was explained that for the purposes of the Council agile working was defined as the ability of staff to work from different locations, and that as part of the strategy indicators to monitor customer/resident experience were being developed. Progress on this would be reported to Council on a quarterly basis.
- With regards to procuring external support to implement the six key recommendations, it was explained that support from LGA was available, and the Council already paid a subscription so there would be no additional cost implication. A support could also be sought, if required, from the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS), and based on anecdotal evidence from other authorities, the cost implication would be up to, but no more than, £10,000.

It was proposed by Councillor Spilsbury, and agreed by the Committee, that each key recommendation would be discussed and voted on in turn.

With regards to recommendation 1, Councillor Kane proposed, seconded by Councillor Spilsbury, that the additional action be inserted as an addendum to the action plan (at Appendix B) for recommendation 1 as follows:

"to produce a new engagement plan so that residents have the opportunity to shape new Council policies at the development stage. The plan should be co-produced with residents ensuring a broad selection of people with no political bias are involved in producing the plan."

During the discussion, it was highlighted that residents had the opportunity to engage with the Council through the Community Panel, with around 800 residents signed up. These residents were volunteers who agreed to be contacted by the Council at any time for taking part in surveys and similar engagement activity. It was also highlighted that most Council surveys were open to all residents but those signed up received direct notifications.

For surveys undertaken by the Council, it was reported that these were usually advertised for residents to take part online. Hard copies were nevertheless provided at Town Hall reception and, residents could request that a paper copy of a survey questionnaire be sent to them through the post. Social media channels were also utilised in order to engage younger demographic.

Whilst some Members opined that 800 residents engaged in Community Panel represented a significant part of the community that was directly engaged with Council activity, other Members noted that the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge feedback report clearly highlighted a room for improvement in the Council's engagement with the public and that the Council should be ambitious in terms of its public engagement aims. It was also highlighted that engaging with residents through surveys was often not the most effective way of understanding the real concerns of residents and that the Council should consider more focus group and discussion type activities with residents.

Following the discussion, the proposed addition to recommendation 1 was put to the vote, and it was <u>agreed</u> that the Executive Committee be asked to add this addendum outlined above to the action plan for recommendation 1.

With regards to recommendation 2, a proposal was put forward by Councillor Marshall that the Council might consider creating a member advisory group or cabinet/executive advisor posts on the model of Worcestershire County Council (WCC) in order to strengthen governance arrangements. This would necessitate updating Council's constitutional governance arrangements. Members were advised that any elected member could put such proposal to the Constitutional Review Working Party who were the most appropriate forum for Members to raise constitution-related

proposals. Following this clarification, Councillor Marshall agreed to withdraw the above proposal and instead proposed that any proposals on governance be referred to the Constitutional Review Working Party for consideration. The resolution was worded as follows:

"That it be reaffirmed, in relation to Recommendation 2 of the Corporate Peer Challenge, that elected member proposals relating to governance arrangements be referred to the Constitutional Review Working Party as the forum that facilitates engagement of all elected members in improving the Council's decision-making processes."

On being put to the vote, the above resolution was <u>agreed</u>, and it was agreed that the action plan to recommendation 2 should be <u>endorsed</u> by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee without changes.

With regards to recommendation 3, Members sought clarification with regards to the Workforce Strategy Action Plan as it was observed that some of the actions contained in this Strategy should exist as business-as-usual for an organisation, not as something to be developed. Officers clarified that the Workforce Strategy Action Plan presented was alongside an operational action plan that contained significant amount of detail on business-as-usual matters. This resulted in a great number of actions being highlighted in the main Workforce Strategy. Members requested that a briefing note be prepared that highlights which actions in the Workforce Strategy were already in place and which were in the development stage.

In response to queries about the planned new council chamber and arrangements for live webcasting of council meetings, Officers reported that proposals for new chamber in terms of webcasting technology, frequency and type of council meetings that would be streamed would be brought before Members. In terms of layout of the new council chamber, it was commented that it was planned at this point that in 'blind spots' screens would be installed so that elected members would still be able to observe the dais and the centre of the chamber from these places. Architects' drawings would be shared with all Members.

On being put to the vote, it was agreed that the action plan for recommendation 3 should be <u>endorsed</u> by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee without changes.

With regards to recommendation 4, a proposal was put forward by Councillor Harvey, seconded by Councillor Kane, that an additional

action be inserted to the Corporate Peer Challenge Action Plan (at Appendix B) for recommendation 4 as follows:

"that the Implementation Plan for Agile working (included at Appendix F) includes the assessment of the needs of residents in accordance with the Council's Agile Working Policy. This should include undertaking an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)."

During the discussion, it was highlighted that evaluating the impact that agile working had on residents' ability to resolve enquiries with the Council and access to Council services should be a priority, however, no reference to the effect of agile on customers of the Council, the residents, was made in the Agile working action plan (Appendix F). It was with this in mind that the above addition to the action plan was proposed. Members also raised consideration of technological solutions such as 'communication pods' put in locations across the Borough that would enable residents to speak directly with Officers via a remote connection should continue to be considered.

Following the discussion, the proposed addition to recommendation 4 was put to the vote, and it was agreed that the Executive Committee be asked to add this addendum outlined above to the Corporate Peer Challenge Action Plan for recommendation 4.

With regards to recommendation 5, it was agreed that the action plan in response to recommendation 5 should be <u>endorsed</u> by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee without changes.

With regards to recommendation 6, it was agreed that the action plan in response to recommendation 6 should be <u>endorsed</u> by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee without changes.

RECOMMENDED to the Executive Committee

1) **That the following additions be inserted to the Council's Corporate Peer Challenge Action Plan (response to Peer Challenge recommendations) included at Appendix B to the report:**

   Recommendation 1*: "to produce a new engagement plan so that residents have the opportunity to shape new Council policies at the development stage. The plan should be co-produced with residents ensuring a broad selection of people with no political bias are involved in producing the plan."*

Recommendation 4: "*that the Implementation Plan for Agile working (included at Appendix F) includes the assessment of the needs of residents in accordance with the Council's Agile Working Policy. This should include undertaking an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA).*"

RESOLVED

2) **That it be reaffirmed, in relation to Recommendation 2 of the Corporate Peer Challenge, that elected member proposals relating to governance arrangements be referred to the Constitutional Review Working Party as the forum that facilitates engagement of all elected members in improving the Council's decision-making processes.**

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

The Committee requested that the following items from the Executive Committee's Work Programme be added as pre-scrutiny items to the Committee's Work Programme:

- Playing Pitch and Built Facilities Strategies
- Parking Enforcement Service Level Agreement
- Matchborough and Winyates Regeneration Proposals
- Decarbonisation of the Council Fleet
- Carbon Reduction Strategy – Annual Review
- Review of Governance Arrangements for Rubicon Leisure Limited
- Future Plans for Auxerre House.

In addition, it was requested that the following items from the Executive Work Programme be referred to the Budget Scrutiny Working Group for its consideration:

- Treasury Outturn Report 22/23
- Draft Council Tax Support Scheme 2024/25
- HRA Rent Setting 2024/25.

RESOLVED that

the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme be updated with items from the Executive Committee's Work Programme as per the pre-amble above.

---

7. **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME**

The Democratic Services Officer explained that there had been a number of items identified by Members for inclusion in the Committee's work programme during the overview and scrutiny training event held on 5th June 2023. The suggestions made by Members at the training event would be considered as an agenda item at the next meeting of Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 20th July 2023.

RESOLVED that

the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme be noted.

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

Updates on Task Groups and Working Groups were provided as follows:

a) Budget Scrutiny Working Group – Chair, Councillor Kane

Councillor Kane reported that a number of meetings of the Working Group had now been scheduled.

b) Performance Scrutiny Working Group – Chair, Councillor Holz

As Councillor Holz had submitted his apologies, he could not provide an update. It was reported, however, that meeting dates for this Working Group had now been arranged.

c) Consideration of any outstanding Task Groups – All Councillors

Members present agreed that the Bulky Waste and Fly Tipping Task Group should be launched and undertaken in the first instance.

RESOLVED that

the Task Groups, Short Sharp Reviews and Working Groups Update Reports be noted.

9. **EXTERNAL SCRUTINY BODIES - UPDATE REPORTS**

Councillor Marshall provided an update in respect of External Scrutiny Bodies and in doing so that no meetings of the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) Overview and Scrutiny or the Worcestershire County Council Health Overview and Scrutiny (HOSC) had yet taken place in this municipal year.

Councillor Marshall thanked the previous long-time representative on external scrutiny bodies, former Councillor Michael Chalk, for his regular written reports that were considered at meetings of this Committee. She undertook to similarly provide written updates in advance of the Committee meetings.

RESOLVED that

the External Scrutiny Bodies updates be noted.

The Meeting commenced at 6.30 pm
and closed at 8.22 pm