



Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Monday, 19th February,
2024

MINUTES

Present:

Councillor Sid Khan (Chair), Councillor Sharon Harvey (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Imran Altaf, Karen Ashley, Chris Holz, Joanna Kane, Emma Marshall and Monica Stringfellow

Also Present:

Councillor Matthew Dormer – Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Planning, Economic Development, Commercialism and Partnerships (on Microsoft Teams)

Officers:

Sue Hanley, Judith Willis, Matthew Bough and Della McCarthy

Democratic Services Officers:

M Sliwinski

78. APOLOGIES AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Spilsbury.

79. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND OF PARTY WHIP

Councillor Marshall declared an Other Disclosable Interest in minute number 81, Redditch Partnership – Annual Report Update – in the she sat in meetings of the Redditch Partnership in the capacity of an observer. It was deemed agreeable that the nature of the interest declared did not preclude Councillor Marshall from participating in the debate on the aforementioned item.

80. PUBLIC SPEAKING

There were no public speakers registered to speak at this meeting.

81. REDDITCH PARTNERSHIP - ANNUAL REPORT UPDATE

Chair

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The Redditch Partnership Manager introduced the report and in doing so noted that Redditch Partnership was the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) and aimed to bring together representatives from a wide variety of agencies across the public, private and voluntary and community sectors to enable partnership working for the benefit of local residents.

It was reported that when the current Partnership Manager had first started in the post, the main groups were the Redditch Business Leaders and the Redditch Community Wellbeing Trust – this group having recently been restarted.

It was noted that the Cost of Living Partnership Group was a group operating across Redditch and Bromsgrove that was chaired by the Council's Head of Community and Housing Services. Asset based community development was covered and it was noted that this was linked to the District Collaborative.

It was highlighted that the biggest change in recent years had been the formation of a Redditch District Collaborative, which was a first district collaborative in Worcestershire to be set up, was formed due to changes nationally with the development of Integrated Care Systems (ICS). A District Collaborative brought together organisations from across the health and community sectors.

It was explained that the Wellbeing in Partnership E-Bulletin was received by all Councillors and provided local information on voluntary and community developments that could be used to pass on to local residents. The Knowledge Bank, which was a Redditch and Bromsgrove directory of community services, had recently been updated with content and made more user friendly. A fully searchable directory was available on the Council's website and publicly available to use.

Following the presentation, the Leader of the Council and Members of the Committee thanked the officers for their hard work in facilitating the work of the Partnership and thanked for the update report.

The following matters were discussed following the presentation:

- Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) – Members were encouraged to attend the in-person ABCD workshops, the training being available to all elected members. It was noted that the post of a community builder for under-represented communities on ABCD was currently vacant

(BME ABCD position). Officers responded that there had been conversations with other community builders and partner agencies including BARN about the exact requirements and needs (including being place-based) that this post would address.

- Youth Leaders Group within Redditch Business Leaders – It was explained that the Leader of the Council initiated this group, which was set up by inviting all high schools in Redditch area to send a small group of representatives to the Youth Leaders Business Board meetings. It was reported that the local college was also now represented on the Youth Leaders Group Board. The meetings of the Group had been hosted at different businesses as well as schools to provide young people to engage with local businesses. The Leader commented that it was hoped the next step for this initiative would be to organise a ‘travelling jobs fair’ type engagement, where business leaders would attend job events at the schools.
- Redditch Partnership support for the work of Redditch Collaborative – Community Wellbeing Trust tried to bring together different community organisations. The Redditch Partnership facilitated and enabled agencies and organisations to come together more quickly and easily and share information and contacts. One of the aims of the Partnership was to enable community outreach workers from different voluntary and charitable organisations to engage and make connections with an array of organisations operating across Redditch and Bromsgrove.
- Terms of reference for the Cost of Living Partnership Group – It was asked by Members that the updated terms of reference for this group be shared with Members.
- Local community directory – It was requested that the local community directory, the Knowledge Bank, be provided in the Member Induction Pack for new Members in 2024.
- It was highlighted that it was important that the partnership groups did not overlap in their aims and are created or stepped down as required depending on the issues most pertinent at given time.

RESOLVED that

the annual update report be noted.

82. DISABLED FACILITIES GRANT (DFG) - OVERVIEW

The Strategic Housing Services Manager provided an overview of the Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG). It was noted that these were

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mandatory grants to support the provision of adaptations to promote independent living within the home, subject to the provisions of the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996.

It was explained that the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) provided each local authority in England with a DFG allocation contained within the Better Care Fund paid to the County Council and passported to Local Housing Authorities (including Redditch).

It was explained that the grant was means-tested and there was a robust process followed to arrive at grant allocation decisions, starting with a comprehensive assessment of the applicant's needs.

It was noted that it was considered good practice to offer a Home Improvement Agency (HIA) service to support a disabled person and their family through the complicated process of carrying out major building works. In Worcestershire a partnership of the 6 Local Housing Authorities and Worcestershire County Council commissioned a HIA referred as the Worcestershire Promoting Independent Living Service and this was provided by Millbrook Health Care under a contract until March 2025.

Performance data was provided on the use of DFG in 2022-23, including on the types of building jobs carried out to enable a home adaptation, expenditure on the home adaptations by type, breakdown of the types of recipients of DFG by tenure and breakdown by age. It was noted that over 50 per cent of DFGs were for bathroom and stairlift adaptations.

Following the presentation, Members asked questions regarding the DFG and the following responses were noted:

- Funds for home adaptations in Council stock (HRA) properties – It was stated that as part of the regulations housing authorities were required to set aside funds within their Housing Revenue Accounts (HRA) capital programme fund for adaptations – this was an equivalent funding to DFGs called Equipment and Adaptations, funded purely from social housing rents. This fund was separate to the general repairs fund in the HRA and could be reviewed internally by the Council as necessary.
- Signposting residents to DFG – It was explained that the funding was for an adaptation because of a disability, so it was not possible to signpost as a preventative measure. It was noted that the Home Improvement Agency (HIA) for Redditch, Millbrook Healthcare, did advertise their services.

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- Median waiting times for delivery of an adaptation – It was noted that the long waiting time for the DFG process from application and assessment stage to the delivery of an adaptation was due to the number of steps including the Occupational Therapist (OT) assessment, undertaking technical drawings on the works required and going out to tender for the works. The Council funded extra OT involvement to reduce the waiting times for OT assessments.
- It was highlighted that the application for an adaptation could only be approved once an OT assessment and checks with land registry on the property to have an adaptation had been completed. It was requested as an action that officers find out and report to Members on where there were delays in the DFG grant application process.
- The 6-month maximum period for the Council to assess a DFG grant application from the date valid application is received – Officers reported that this was a legislative timeframe set by the Government, and it was currently taking the Council on average 9 days to assess a DFG grant application.
- Tender process for a Home Improvement Agency (HIA) contract after March 2025 – Officers reported that the Council was currently at the early stage of undertaking a new tender process. Foundations, a national body of home improvement agencies, had been employed to assist the Council with compiling a new specification for the service. Permission would be sought from Members to go out to tender for a new service in summer 2024.
- It was clarified that waiting times listed in the report were from the date the Occupational Therapist (OT) examining the applicant opens the case to the date of installation of an adaptation. The Council did not have information on OT waiting times.
- DFG Capital Allocation – It was noted that the Government's DFG allocation to the Council was £710,000 and just over £545,521.60 was allocated to recipients in 2022-23. Any unspent amount was carried forward to the next financial year.
- Prioritisation of DFG Applications – The Officer reported that DFG applications were not prioritised unless the OT requests the Council to prioritise the application as urgent.
- It was requested by a Member that information be provided on why some cases for adaptation installation took in excess of one year to complete.
- Alternative funding options for people eligible for DFG grant requiring home adaptation – It was explained that there were various reasons why people would choose alternative ways

to fund adaptation works. It was noted that the charge for works from DFG was placed against a property meaning it would need to be paid back from property sale proceeds if the property is sold.

- Using Frameworks to undertake joint procurement for DFG items – The Strategic Housing Services Manager explained that frameworks had been used to order stocks of some adaptation items in bulk such as showers and stairlifts and the Council would look to further develop this approach.
- Possibility to use own builders to install home adaptations instead of the contractor assigned by Home Improvement Agency (HIA) – It was stated that there was no requirement for recipients of DFG grant for adaptation to use the HIA; where the valid applicant wishes to use own builder to carry out the works, the Council would provide the estimate for the value of the works, and the grant would only be provided up to the amount of the estimate.
- It was explained that when the landlord provides a permission for DFG adaptation works, the landlord must guarantee that the tenant would be allowed to remain in the property for five years.

RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

83. COUNCIL MOTION - PROPOSAL FOR A SHORT SHARP REVIEW OF POST-16 EDUCATION

The proposed Council motion with regard to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee commissioning a short sharp review of post-16 education was considered.

It was agreed that the short sharp review should be undertaken and it should commence after the local elections in May 2024.

It was recorded that Councillors Ashley, Harvey, Marshall, and Spilsbury (proposer of the Motion) had expressed provisional interest in joining the review group. This would be subject to agreement of Members in the new municipal year.

RESOLVED that

the Short, Sharp Review of Post-16 Education be undertaken, with the review to commence in the new municipal year (after May 2024).

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

The Executive Committee Work Programme was submitted for Members' consideration.

It was noted that the Executive report on Future Plans for Auxerre House would not be considered by Executive Committee and available for pre-scrutiny until the new municipal year.

RESOLVED that

the contents of the Executive Committee's Work Programme be noted.

85. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

The Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme was submitted for Members' consideration.

RESOLVED that

the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme be noted.

86. 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 the last meeting of the Working Group took place on Monday 5th February, at which reports on the pay policy, non-domestic discretionary rate relief policy were scrutinised in addition to the Tranche 2 report for Medium Term Financial Plan 2024-25 to 2026-27 and the Finance Recovery Plan Update.

Councillor Kane explained that the two pertinent challenges facing the Council at the moment were high levels of vacancies against establishment and the need to review the establishment to ensure employee and departmental budgets were at the right level. Clearing the backlog of the unaudited statements of accounts for the Council for years 2020-21, 2021-22, and 2022-23 was another

key challenge, which needed to be addressed in the context of delays to audits of local bodies accounts across the country.

It was noted that clarification would be sought from the Deputy Chief Executive and Section 151 Officer regarding which of the Council's outstanding statements of accounts had been provided to date to the external auditors and when this took place. A communication would be sent out to Members regarding this.

- b) Performance Scrutiny Working Group – Chair, Councillor Holz

Councillor Holz reported that the next two meetings of the Working Group were due to take place on 5th and 12th March respectively.

- c) Fly Tipping and Bulky Waste Task Group – Chair, Councillor Khan

Councillor Khan reported that the last meeting on 8th February, the Task Group received a presentation from Birmingham City Council's Portfolio Holder for Environment, Councillor Majid Mahmood, on Birmingham's Mobile Household Recycling scheme. The date for the next meeting was currently being arranged.

87. EXTERNAL SCRUTINY BODIES - UPDATE REPORTS

Councillor Marshall provided a verbal update on the meeting of Worcestershire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC) which took place earlier today (19th February 2024). Some of the matters highlighted as discussed at that meeting were:

- Patient access to GP appointments – It was reported at the HOSC meeting that across Hertfordshire and Worcestershire Integrated Care System area, there were 19 per cent more GP appointments offered than in the pre-pandemic period (this figure included telephone appointments). It was noted that the HOSC Members challenged officers on this point stating that it was still extremely difficult to receive face-to-face appointments.
- Support doctors at GP surgeries – It was noted that there were plans to provide availability of specialist doctors at GP surgeries to offset the need for directing people to Accident & Emergency.
- Section 106 developer contributions – It was reported that at the meeting, officers reported that developer contributions play a significant role in providing capital for the NHS to build new infrastructure and services as communities expand. It

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was during the planning application stage that Section 106 contributions from developments could be directed to health could be directed to health-related matters.

RESOLVED that

the External Scrutiny Bodies updates be noted.

88. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

The Committee agreed that exclusion of the press and public was not necessary for item 12 (Minute No. 89) – Minutes of the meeting of 1st February 2024 – as it was agreed that discussion would only concern the accuracy, not the content, of the public and restricted versions of the minutes. Subsequently, when item 12 was under consideration, no discussion took place on the content of the restricted minutes record of the meeting of 1st February 2024.

89. MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF 1ST FEBRUARY 2024

The minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 1st February 2024 were considered, including the exempt minutes record of the exempt session of that meeting (Minute Item No. 77 – Pre-Decision Scrutiny – Termination of Shared Service Arrangement – North Worcestershire Economic Development and Regeneration). No information regarding the exempt minutes was disclosed or discussed during consideration of this agenda item.

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on Thursday 1st February 2024 be approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chair.

The Meeting commenced at 6.31 pm
and closed at 7.46 pm