

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Monday, 12th January, 2026

MINUTES

Present:

Councillor Matthew Dormer (Chair), Councillor Craig Warhurst (Vice-Chair) and Councillors William Boyd, Claire Davies, Rita Rogers and Paul Wren

Also Present:

Councillor Sharon Harvey – Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Regeneration and Environmental Services
Councillor Bill Hartnett – Portfolio Holder for Housing (on Microsoft Teams)

Officers:

Guy Revans, Matthew Bough, Ben Clawson-Chan and Matthew Eccles

Democratic Services Officers:

Sarah Woodfield

57. APOLOGIES AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Sachin Mathur. The Portfolio Holder for Leisure and Recreation, Councillor Juliet Barker Smith, has also submitted apologies.

58. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND OF PARTY WHIP

There were no declarations of interest nor of party whip.

59. MINUTES

The minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 24th November 2025 were submitted for Members' consideration.

RESOLVED that

Chair

the minutes of the meeting of Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 24th November 2025 be approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chair.

60. PUBLIC SPEAKING

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

61. BIODIVERSITY DUTY FIRST CONSIDERATION REPORT - PRE-SCRUTINY

The Climate Change Manager presented the Council's Biodiversity Duty Report, required under the Environment Act 2021. The report covered activities up to 1st January 2026 and was due for publication by the 26th March 2026.

The Biodiversity Duty Report included ten sections which included policies, objectives and actions, how other strategies were considered, future actions, Biodiversity Net Gain information, Information about the Authority, Top Achievements, How Policies and Actions Have Helped, Awareness and Education, Monitoring and Evaluation and Highlights and Challenges. The report also outlined measures to enhance biodiversity, such as leaving areas of grass uncut, wildflower planting and public engagement in species monitoring.

Members noted that there was a legislative requirement for the next Biodiversity Duty Report to be produced in five years, regardless of Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) outcomes. It was further noted that some actions might require capital investment and that funding opportunities and grants would be explored. Biodiversity actions were linked to climate change resilience and carbon sequestration and monitoring would form part of the forthcoming Climate Change Strategy for the Council.

Following the presentation, comments and discussion by Members was as follows:

- It was queried if more specific data would be included in the Council's Climate Change Strategy. In response the Officers explained that following the Biodiversity First Consideration Report publication, efforts would be concentrated on the monitoring of Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) to demonstrate the location and species of trees planted and work would also be undertaken to improve greater ranges of species

within the Borough. BNG would also be monitored through Local Plan policies and development management.

- Concerns were raised about the lack of detail in the report, in particular as to citizen science public engagement, in relation to specific details of the species of trees which would be planted, and if the Council should be actively seeking to support the progression of the work. Members were advised that collaborative partnership working would help to improve future data recording. Details of Redditch Borough Council's (RBC) commitments to managing tree health and biodiversity resilience progression would be incorporated in the Council's Tree Management Policy, with it being noted that works would develop over the five-year period. Outcomes of Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) would also be a contributing factor affecting future proposals.
- Members queried the use of the word "pesticide" within the report and expressed that view that it might be misleading and suggested changing the wording to "herbicides". Officers agreed to review this and would also respond to the Members to confirm current practices in use by the Council.
- A Member highlighted the success of community-led biodiversity projects and suggested replicating this model across other parks which was agreed would be reviewed for future reporting.
- Members requested feedback on the criteria for achieving Green Flag status and suggested promoting community involvement to improve other parks within the Borough. It was agreed that this would be reviewed by the Parks Team and details would be reported back to the Committee.
- Members sought clarity on the tree replacement strategy following the ash dieback risk. In response the Executive Director explained that a 2:1 replacement ratio would be implemented to replace the trees. However, an update and further details from the Parks Team would also be requested for Members.

The recommendations of the report were endorsed by the Committee as printed.

RECOMMENDED that

- 1) The findings of the Biodiversity Duty First Consideration Report be noted.**
- 2) Members agree to publish the full Biodiversity Duty First Consideration Report to the Council's website.**

62. HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION GRANT FUNDING 2026/27 TO 2028/29 (INCLUDING ROUGH SLEEPER GRANT) AND DOMESTIC ABUSE GRANT - PRE-SCRUTINY

The Strategic Housing Services Manager reported on the allocation of the 2026/27 Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Grant funding. The Grant to the Council for 2026/27 was expected to total £736,335 with £35,697 ring-fenced for domestic abuse grant element. It was noted that temporary accommodation costs could no longer be funded from this grant funding and would need to be met from the Council's General Fund. It was also noted that grant funding was ring-fenced for specific prevention activities and the proposed allocations were outlined within the report.

Following the presentation of the report, Members commented and discussed the report as follows:

- Clarity on the support from St Pauls Housing Led/Housing First Support Service was requested. It was advised that this initiative for rough sleepers began during the covid pandemic. The service provided immediate refuge and additional support to assist with rough sleepers remaining off the streets.
- Following a question, Members were advised that the number of rough sleepers in the Borough was currently estimated at eight to ten. Following the response the Chair expressed the view that the grant funding which had been allocated for rough sleepers was substantial and requested clarity on the specific requirements. In response Officers explained that the rough sleeping allowance was only one element of the grant funding made available. Grant funding also included prevention initiatives and support programmes, which required regular monitoring. Other initiatives included support such as guide pathways, crash pads, severe weather support and housing of ex-offenders where necessary.
- The performance of the Council-funded organisation initiatives was discussed further. It was agreed by the Committee that an annual performance report should be recommended which would enable both scrutiny and the executive to review performance in this area. A current performance report for 2025/26 was also requested and agreed to be presented to the June meeting of Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- Members also requested data on food bank usage to understand the local need. Members were advised to note

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that some food bank organisations were independent and not Council run, however, Officers would gather the necessary data and share with Members of the Board.

- Clarification was requested to explain why the Homelessness Prevention Grant funding detailed within the report increased each year, compared to the Domestic Abuse Grant funding which remained static. Officers advised that generally domestic abuse grant funding would be allocated through the new burdens process, however, the Homelessness Prevention Grant also covered elements of domestic abuse.
- Concerns were raised about the potential duplication of community grants and the need for visibility of all Council funding during grant panel meetings. In response Officers advised that the funding was managed for specific services and the applications submitted to receive Council's grant funding required a detailed cost summary, which were assessed for any available funding. The Portfolio Holder addressed the Committee and explained the benefits of the some of the grant funded services for the Council, expressing the view that bed and breakfast funding requirements had substantially decreased due to the availability of the Homeless Prevention Grant funding.
- The Committee also discussed and requested further clarity on the underspending on grants, as identified in the report recommendation 3. Officers explained that due to the late changes in the funding from Government, there had been some underspending. However, this would be reviewed at the end of the financial year to identify requirements for priority service needs, particularly for the rough sleeper strategy. Additionally any extra resources would be reviewed in terms of utilisation within the year in support of existing or new schemes.
- Questions were raised about risks associated with funding changes for temporary accommodation and how these would be mitigated. Members were advised that there were inherent risks associated with temporary accommodation, particularly with the extra costs for bed and breakfast requirements. However, the funding available to the Council for Housing would be utilised to manage the Council's housing stock in order to reduce the reliance on temporary accommodation.

During consideration of this item, a recommendation was proposed by Councillor Warhurst. This recommendation was as follows:

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“Officers provide an annual update in respect of the Homelessness Prevention Grant initiatives that receive Council funding”.

On being seconded and put to the vote, this recommendation was carried as an additional recommendation to the Executive. The other recommendations as printed in the report were endorsed by the Committee.

RECOMMENDED that

- 1) Temporary Accommodation Services currently met by Homelessness Prevention Grant are now met from the Temporary Accommodation element of the Revenue Support Grant 2026/27, 2027/28 and 2028/29.
- 2) Subject to approval of recommendation 1 above by Council, the initiatives detailed at 4.4 (of the report) be approved to receive the Council’s Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Grant and Domestic Abuse Grant allocations of funding for 2026/27, 2027/28 and 2028/29, subject to satisfactory performance; and should additional funding be announced at a later date by the Government for subsequent years then this would need to be the subject of a further report.
- 3) Subject to the agreement of recommendations 1 and 2 above, delegated authority be granted to the Assistant Director of Community and Housing Services, following consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Housing, to use any unallocated Grants, or Homelessness Prevention Grant mid-year top up, during each year or make further adjustments and uplifts as necessary to ensure full utilisation of the Grants for 2026/27, 2027/28 and 2028/29 in support of existing or new schemes.
- 4) Officers provide an annual update in respect of the Homelessness Prevention Grant initiatives that receive Council funding.

63. EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME - SELECTING ITEMS FOR SCRUTINY

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

RESOLVED that

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**64. the Executive Committee's Work Programme be noted.
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME**

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

Members were provided with an update that the items relating to the Auxerre House Refurbishment and Regeneration and the Construction of Redditch Innovation Centre had been moved to the 16th March 2026 Overview and Scrutiny meeting instead of the 5th February 2026 meeting, due to Executive dates for these reports having moved.

RESOLVED that

the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme be noted.

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

Updates were provided on the meetings of Task Groups and Working Groups as follows:

a) Budget Scrutiny Working Group – Chair, Councillor Warhurst

Councillor Warhurst reported that the last meeting which took place on 7th January 2026 had reviewed the standard finance reports including Housing Revenue Account (HRA) rent setting and Council Tax Reduction Scheme. The Group had not made any recommendations to Executive Committee meeting on 13th January 2026 and endorsed all the recommendations as printed in the reports.

b) Performance Scrutiny Working Group – Chair, Councillor Warhurst

Councillor Warhurst reported that at the last meeting, which took place on 4th December 2025, the Group discussed the ash dieback and tree planting strategies. Members had requested confirmation of planting dates and species.

c) Post-16 Education Task Group – Chair, Councillor Warhurst

There were no updates provided as the group had completed its work and were awaiting a final meeting to be arranged.

RESOLVED that

the Task Groups and Working Groups Update Reports be noted.

66. EXTERNAL SCRUTINY BODIES - UPDATE REPORTS

Updates on the meetings of External Scrutiny Bodies were provided as follows:

- a) West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) Overview and Scrutiny Committee – Council Representative, Councillor Boyd

Councillor Boyd reported that he attended the most recent meeting of WMCA Overview and Scrutiny, which took place this morning (12th January 2026), noting that most items were strategic and not directly relevant to RBC.

- b) West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) Transport Delivery Overview and Scrutiny – Council Representative, Councillor Fardoe

There were no updates provided at this meeting.

- c) Worcestershire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC) – Council Representative, Councillor Fry

There were no updates provided at this meeting.

RESOLVED that

the External Scrutiny Bodies updates be noted.

67. EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC AND PRESS

RESOLVED that

Under S.100 (A) (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006, the public be excluded from the meeting for the following matters on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12 (A) of the said Act, as amended:

Minute Item No. 68 – Rubicon Leisure Priorities and Progress Update.

68. RUBICON LEISURE PRIORITIES AND PROGRESS UPDATE

The Managing Director of Rubicon Leisure provided a presentation on Rubicon's priorities and recent progress to Members. Key points discussed during the presentation included the five priorities and five themes for 2025/26 which were:

Priorities of: Grow our income and be financially sustainable; Invest in our staff, provide support, tools and opportunity to learn and develop; Inspire more people to improve health and well-being; Improve the quality of our offer, experiences and services; Provide opportunities for our communities.

Themes: Our Finances. Our People, Our Customers, Our Communities, Our Development.

During the presentation these priorities and themes were discussed in further detail. After the presentation, Members discussed the following aspects:

- Members were very encouraged by the progress and improvements to the business and wished to thank all the staff involved who had assisted Rubicon Leisure becoming a commercial success.
- Utilisation of financial support from the Council was discussed. It was noted that there were plans for Rubicon to invest in further commercial aspects, however, the key priority remained to ensure sustainability for the future. Whilst Rubicon continued to identify profitable areas, ensuring financial stability in essential functions such as repairs and maintenance was a priority.
- Members noted that some areas of Rubicon's operations had achieved considerable success recently such as ice cream sales during the summer period and the popularity of outdoor swimming at Arrow Valley Lake.
- Clarity on the Net Promotor Score (NPS) was requested, and it was explained to the Committee that this was a key customer satisfaction metrics system which was updated daily and was an effective way to assess future sustainability of the business.
- Progress in Rubicon's delivery of leisure services was discussed and Members queried the gym memberships rate. In response Members noted that income from gym memberships was good and that Rubicon's gym membership was competitively priced. Rubicon was looking to invest in its

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Health and Wellbeing activities in response to identified growing public interest.

- The Rubicon's health and wellbeing offer was discussed with reference to queries as to how many customers visited from priority health neighbourhood areas within the Borough. In response Members were advised that around eight percent of the population of those neighbourhoods used the Rubicon's health and wellbeing services on offer, including community activities. In terms of affordability, it was explained that Rubicon's food and beverage offer was also competitively priced, as compared to popular chain outlets.
- Data for the use of services outside of the Borough was requested. It was explained that data for the Palace Theatre demonstrated that there were significant sales from customers visiting from outside of the Borough. It was noted that Arrow Valley Lake had been shortlisted as Best Visitor Attraction with recent visitor numbers having tripled in size.
- Areas in which to improve the Rubicon's business were also discussed by the Committee. Key areas included food waste and electrical compliance, environmental policies, HR and Marketing. Incorporating climate change strategies into future plans was also discussed to align with the Council's objectives.
- The use of local farm produce for food and beverage was also discussed. In response it was felt that the company did offer a good range and balance when comparing to the other businesses within the Borough. However, plans corporately to have a wider range of impact for food and beverage would be reviewed in due course.
- Local employment was also discussed with Members being reassured that a good number of staff employed by Rubicon Leisure as well as volunteers resided in the Redditch area.

RESOLVED that

the Rubicon Leisure Priorities and Progress Presentation be noted.

(During consideration of this item, Members discussed matters that necessitated the disclosure of exempt information. It was therefore agreed to move to exclude the press and public prior to any debate on the grounds that information would be revealed that included information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information)).

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The Meeting commenced at 6.30 pm
and closed at 8.04 pm