

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Monday, 16 February 2009

MINUTES

Present:

Councillor David Smith (Chair), and Councillors M Chalk, W Hartnett, R King, D Taylor and D Thomas

Co-opted Members

T Buckley and R Colebrook

Also Present:

Councillors M Braley, J Cookson, D Hunt and M Shurmer, Mr M Collins and Councillor R Lunn (Worcestershire County Council).

Officers:

K Dicks, S Hanley, T Kristunas, J Smith and J Staniland

Committee Services Officer:

J Bayley

158. APOLOGIES AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors Banks and Mould.

159. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND OF PARTY WHIP

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

160. MINUTES

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on Wednesday 4 February be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

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Chair

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161. ACTIONS LIST

RESOLVED that

the contents of the Actions List be noted.

162. CALL-IN AND PRE-SCRUTINY

There were no call-ins or suggestions for pre-scrutiny.

163. TASK & FINISH REVIEWS - DRAFT SCOPING DOCUMENTS

There were no draft scoping documents for pre-scrutiny.

164. TASK AND FINISH GROUPS - PROGRESS REPORTS

The Committee received reports in relation to current reviews.

a) Council Flat Communal Cleaning – Chair, Councillor P Mould

Councillor Taylor provided an update on behalf of the Council Flat Communal Cleaning Task and Finish Group. She explained that the Group had been due to host a Consultation Event to provide local leaseholders with an opportunity to convey their views about appropriate cleaning arrangements in communal areas. Unfortunately, this consultation event had had to be cancelled due to hazardous weather conditions. The Group would liaise with relevant Officers with a view to reconvening the event in March.

b) Housing Mutual Exchange – Chair, Councillor D Smith

Councillor Smith explained that he had suggested a number of dates for the first meeting of the Housing Mutual Exchange Task and Finish Group. The scope of the review and the number of meetings that Members could expect to attend for this review would be discussed and agreed at the first meeting of the Task and Finish Group.

c) Role of the Mayor – Chair, Councillor M Chalk

Councillor Chalk explained that the Role of the Mayor Task and Finish Group's final recommendations were due to be considered at a meeting of the Executive Committee on Wednesday 18 February.

RESOLVED that

the reports be noted.

165. INITIAL ESTIMATES 2009/10

The Committee received an Executive Committee report relating to the Initial Estimates for 2009/10 for pre-scrutiny. The Chair explained that this item represented the Committee's opportunity to influence the setting of the General Fund Revenue Budgets and Capital Bids 2009/10 – 2011/12.

The report contained details about the Council's projected Medium Term Financial Strategy for 2009/10 – 2011/12; information about potential revenue bids and the Capital Programme; proposed savings; and potential subjects for further work. Officers explained that it was expected that the Council would need to make revised budget savings of just over £307,000 in 2009/10.

Members considered that they should have been provided with more time to reflect on the contents of this report prior to its consideration at the Executive Committee and at full Council. Some Members were concerned that it would be difficult, within the timescales provided, for Members to comment appropriately on the contents of the report or to launch any form of consultation to review the subject further if the Committee considered this appropriate. However, it was pointed out that all Council Members had had an opportunity to attend a full briefing on the subject of the Medium Term Financial Strategy for 2009/10 on the previous Monday, 9 February.

Officers explained that, during the full Council meeting Members would only be required to set the level of Council Tax for the forthcoming year and to determine whether the Council should commit to making £307,000 in total savings for 2009/10. They confirmed that the exact measures for achieving the savings would not be agreed until a later date.

During discussion of this item, the following specific matters were considered in detail:

a) Play Areas Bid

Members discussed the projected figure of £60,000 for an 'unavoidable' revenue bid for play areas. Officers explained that the Council had an obligation to repair play areas where vandalism or general wear and tear impacted on the condition of play area

facilities. The £60,000 estimate had been based on an assessment of historical precedent in spending on play area facilities.

b) Pitcheroak Golf Course Closure

Members questioned the savings that could potentially be made through the closure of the Pitcheroak Golf Course. They noted that there were projected savings of £64,000 in 2009/10 and a further £85,000 in the following two years for the closure of this facility. However, they questioned what continuing maintenance costs would be required to manage Pitcheroak. Officers offered to provide further information in writing in relation to this matter.

c) Dial-a-Ride / Pest Control Savings

Members discussed the projected efficiency savings in relation to Dial-A-Ride and pest control. They questioned whether these efficiency savings might translate into a reduction in front line services. Officers explained that there could be a range of options for achieving efficiency savings with Dial-A-Ride, though a final option had not yet been decided. Members were informed that the projected efficiency savings for pest control had been identified as a possible outcome of reintroducing charges for delivering the pest control service.

d) Grants Officer Bid

Members noted that the Grants Officer post, a clerical support role that had been included within the package of recommendations proposed by the Third Sector Task and Finish Group in December 2008, had been recorded as a medium priority revenue bid. The former Chair of the Third Sector Task and Finish Group, Councillor Thomas, expressed concern that, if this post was not introduced, there could be a detrimental impact on the successful implementation of the new Shopping, Investing and Giving (SIG) grants process which was due to be introduced from 2010/11 onwards. Members agreed therefore to recommend that this revenue bid should be upgraded from a medium to a high priority for the Council.

e) Other areas for review

Members questioned why the following areas had been identified as potentially suitable for future work: the Arrow Valley Countryside Centre; Forge Mill Museum; Shopmobility; and Dial-A-Ride.

Officers explained that, for example, there was a need to review Shopmobility because the Kingfisher Shopping Centre would be reducing its funding for the service. However, they informed Members that no options for reviewing these areas had yet been agreed. Instead, Officers had felt that it would be appropriate to provide prior notice that there would be an intention to review these areas in due course.

f) Unison View

The Chair invited the Committee's co-opted UNISON representatives to speak on the item. The UNISON representatives appealed to all Members to consider the sensitive issues relating to the Initial Estimates, particularly in relation to the potential for redundancies. They noted that staff tended to feel vulnerable during reviews of the budget and potential savings, particularly Officers who worked in services that had been subject to previous service level reviews. The UNISON representatives urged Members to recognise the consistently excellent work delivered by staff.

The Chair thanked Officers for their presentation.

RESOLVED that

- 1) subject to Members' comments, as recorded in the preamble above, the report be noted; and**

RECOMMENDED that

- 2) the revenue bid for a Grants Officer be upgraded from a medium to a high priority revenue bid.**

166. CENTRE FOR PUBLIC SCRUTINY (CFPS) PARLIAMENTARY SEMINAR

Councillor R. King presented a report on the Centre for Public Scrutiny's Parliamentary Seminar Series training event which he had attended the previous week. He informed Members that he had unfortunately not been able to observe a Select Committee meeting in action whilst he was in London. However, he had learned some useful information about scrutiny processes during the course of the event. He explained that he intended to submit a scoping document which would contain proposals about ways to further enhance Overview and Scrutiny processes at Redditch Borough Council for the consideration of the Committee in due course.

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The Chair thanked Councillor King for attending the Parliamentary Seminar Series on behalf of the Committee and for presenting his report.

RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

167. CALL-IN: EXPLANATION

Further to decisions taken at the Committee's previous meeting, Officers provided explanations of the constitutional Call-in process, with reference to a brief report attached to the agenda.

Members noted that Call-in should only be used in exceptional circumstances. They also noted that, even when the Call-in process might not properly apply, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee could choose to review at any time any subject that it wished.

RESOLVED that

the report and further explanations of the Call-in and Scrutiny processes be noted.

168. REFERRALS

There were no referrals.

169. WORK PROGRAMME

RESOLVED that

the Committee's Work Programme be noted.

The Meeting commenced at 7.00 pm
and closed at 8.20 pm