

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Wednesday, 23rd
September, 2009

MINUTES

Present:

Councillor Phil Mould (Chair), Councillor David Smith (Vice-Chair) and Councillors K Banks, G Chance, R King, W Norton, J Pearce and D Taylor

Also Present:

Councillors P Anderson and B Clayton

Officers:

J Staniland, A Heighway, T Kristunas and S Mullins

Committee Services Officer:

J Bayley and H Saunders

65. APOLOGIES AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES

Apologies were received on behalf of Councillor Thomas.

66. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND OF PARTY WHIP

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

67. MINUTES

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting held on 2nd September 2009 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

68. ACTIONS LIST

There were no updates on actions contained within the Actions List.

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Chair

69. CALL-IN AND PRE-SCRUTINY

The Committee considered the current Forward Plan. The Chair explained that he had identified a number of items on the Forward Plan that the Committee could pre-scrutinise. He referred to the Feasibility Study for Garden Waste Collection report which was due to be considered by the Executive Committee on 28 October. He explained that this issue might be discussed at the all Member briefing regarding the Revised Waste Strategy on 1st October. However, if the Committee felt that more time should be dedicated to pre-scrutinising the issue, the Committee could do so at its meeting scheduled on 14th October.

The Chair noted that a report was due to be considered by the Executive Committee regarding the budget bids process. He suggested that the Committee should discuss this report at the meeting on 14th October. In addition, at the same meeting, the Chair also requested that pre-scrutiny be undertaken of the Corporate Plan Phase One report. Officers explained that this report contained a large amount of baseline information about Redditch which supported the evidence base for the Council's priorities. The report was a large document and paper copies would be costly to distribute to Members. Officers agreed to investigate alternative methods of distributing this report to Members.

Finally, the Chair suggested that the Street Naming Policy report also be pre-scrutinised before the report was considered by the Executive Committee on 18th August 2010.

There were no call-ins.

RESOLVED that

- 1) **the Feasibility Study for Garden Waste Collection report be pre-scrutinised at a meeting of the Committee on 14 October;**
- 2) **the Budget Bids and Preparation Guidelines report be pre-scrutinised at the same meeting;**
- 3) **the Corporate Plan Phase One report be pre-scrutinised at the same meeting; and**
- 4) **the Street Naming Policy be pre-scrutinised prior to consideration by the Executive Committee on 18th August 2010.**

70. TASK & FINISH REVIEWS - DRAFT SCOPING DOCUMENTS

The Committee considered the draft scoping documents for the proposed reviews of the Local Area Agreement and the Local Strategic Partnership. The Chair informed the Committee that both reviews had the potential to be lengthy. He felt that the Local Strategic Partnership review would be the most straightforward and therefore should be undertaken first.

Members noted that, subject to the approval of the Conservative Group Leader, it would be appropriate to appoint Councillor Norton as the Chair for the review of the Local Strategic Partnership.

RESOLVED that

- 1) **the Local Strategic Partnership be scrutinised by a Task and Finish Group; and**
- 2) **subject to the approval of the Conservative Group Leader, Councillor Norton be designated the Chair of this review.**

71. TASK AND FINISH GROUPS - PROGRESS REPORTS

The Committee received reports in relation to current reviews.

a) Dial-A-Ride – Chair, Councillor R King

Councillor King informed the Committee that the Group was behind schedule owing to a delay in obtaining information they had requested. However, they had received some of the requested information regarding usage of the Dial-a-Ride service at their previous meeting. A meeting was scheduled for the following evening where more information would be provided.

The Group had kept track of progress of the current bid for £20,000 funding for the service but as yet there had been no indication of whether the Council had been successful.

b) Neighbourhood Groups – Chair, Councillor Banks

The Chair informed the Committee that the Group had finalised their initial proposals and were planning to consult

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with residents at the forthcoming Neighbourhood Group meetings over these proposals. Officers confirmed that both a representative from the Task and Finish Group and one of the Overview and Scrutiny Support Officers would be attending all Neighbourhood Group meetings to undertake this consultation.

RESOLVED that

the Task and Finish update reports be noted.

72. PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR HOUSING, LOCAL ENVIRONMENT AND HEALTH - ANNUAL REPORT

The Chair welcomed Councillor Brandon Clayton, the Portfolio Holder for Housing, Local Environment and Health, to the meeting. Councillor Clayton presented his report in accordance with the questions set by the Committee.

- a) What are your plans for Redditch Borough Council's housing stock? Is it your intention to sell the stock?

Councillor Clayton explained that it was not his intention to sell the housing stock, rather, he intended to ensure that all Council owned housing would be brought up to the Decent Homes standards.

Members commented that they had encountered constituents who as part of the five year plan had been promised new kitchens and bathrooms but had experienced delays in these being installed. Councillor Clayton informed the Committee that initially, the figures in the five year plan had been incorrect and there was a £3.5 million shortfall from the plan. Some roads had also been missed from the Saffron system. As a consequence of this, some roads had experienced delays. However, this problem had been rectified. Members asked if they could be informed of what roads had been missed from the Saffron system.

Members questioned if Councillor Clayton had concerns regarding the long term financial viability of the housing stock. Councillor Clayton assured the Committee that the money was in place to deliver the plan up until its confirmed end in 2012.

- b) How do you rank the different elements of your portfolio?

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Councillor Clayton confirmed that his portfolio was large. However, he made certain that he dealt with all three elements that constituted his portfolio equally. No one portfolio area took precedence. However, from time to time, some areas needed to be prioritised and dealt with on a more urgent basis.

- c) What action are you taking to reduce the levels of teenage pregnancy in Redditch?

Councillor Clayton explained that he took this matter seriously. He was scheduled to meet with seven head teachers from schools in Redditch to discuss the issue. He was also meeting with relevant Primary Care Trust representatives based in the town at Arrow Vale Youth Centre, Kingsley Youth Centre and the NEW College. Councillor Clayton noted that the areas in Redditch which have the highest rate of teenage pregnancy were in the Central, Church Hill and Greenlands ward.

The Committee was pleased with the actions that were being taken by the Portfolio Holder on this issue. It was noted by Members that prevention was an important aspect of this work both with young people generally and with those who had already had their first child. The work that Sure Start had been undertaking with young mothers was highlighted as important in tackling this issue.

- d) What are your top three priority actions for reducing CO² emissions?

Councillor Clayton explained that one of the Council's targets was to reduce carbon emissions and work was currently being undertaken on a strategy to address this issue. In addition, a number of measures were being taken by the Council to help reduce carbon emissions. The Council had worked in partnership with Worcestershire County Council to deliver the Warmer Worcestershire project, which enabled residents to utilise a web based tool to establish the amount of heat that was lost from their house.

Councillor Clayton stated that he wanted to reduce the Town Hall's carbon footprint by 2% each year. He also wanted to work with Registered Social Landlords to increase the numbers of low carbon houses in the Borough. A project evaluating the impact of running electric cars for business use was also being undertaken by the Council.

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- e) What are you doing to increase the range of items covered by recycling? Can we have an update on the timescales involved in extending recycling coverage to a greater variety of plastics?

Councillor Clayton noted that the amount of waste collected for recycling had only increased by 2% during the last quarter which was less than expected. He informed Members that the Waste Strategy which contained further information regarding the disposal of waste and recycling for the County, would be provided at the extra Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting on 1st October.

A new Material Recovery Facility (MRF) system was being built which would enable all Worcestershire local authorities to recycle a wider variety of materials including margarine tubs and waxed cardboard. Officers informed the Committee that it was important that the Council continually reviewed the amount of waste being recycled and going to landfill. The amount of waste that was currently being taken to landfill needed to be reduced otherwise the County Council was liable to face large penalties.

Members commented that the Shredder Man service which was in operation a couple of years previously, was an effective scheme. Members felt that it would be more cost effective to reinstate this scheme and also encourage people to compost as an alternative to introducing a garden waste collection scheme.

RESOLVED that

- 1) **Officers provide further information about the roads omitted from the SAFFRON system; and**
- 2) **the report be noted.**

73. QUARTERLY BUDGET REPORT - FIRST QUARTER

The Committee considered the first quarter budget report for 2009/10. Officers informed the Committee that the report contained information regarding both the achievement of savings for the year and also the outturn forecast for 2009/10.

Appendix 1 detailed information of the savings that had been approved by Members earlier in the year. Some of these savings required ongoing adjustments as they were related to reductions in

vacant posts. It was also highlighted that a number of savings listed would require positive action from Officers in order for them to be achieved.

Officers informed the Committee that Appendices 2 and 3 contained further information regarding the projected outturn variances as at the end of the quarter. There had been a change in methodology in the way in which this information was presented. As a consequence, the projected variances to the year end were not included in the report. The Committee heard that the projected variances at the end of the first quarter were savings of £251,840 which also included the Housing Revenue Account.

RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

74. QUARTERLY PERFORMANCE REPORT - FIRST QUARTER

The Committee considered the first quarterly performance monitoring report.

Officers informed the Committee that recent national guidance had altered the way in which the Council's performance was to be reported. In the future, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee would receive performance monitoring information subsequently to it being considered by the Executive Committee. This was based on national best practice guidance from the audit Commission.

There were 198 National Indicators, of which, the Council reported on 60. With regards to the first quarter, Officers reported that there had been 35 indicators reported of which: 21 had demonstrated improvement; 9 had shown showed a decline; and 5 had stayed the same. When reporting on indicators, Officers were encouraged to include contextual information to provide some detail about the indicators.

Where performance had declined over a period of time, the newly formed Performance Management Group would ask relevant Officers to instigate a recovery plan to address areas of underperformance. The Policy Team also worked to identify areas of underperformance and raised these with relevant Officers.

Members enquired if it was possible for information to be gathered which would enable the Council's performance to be benchmarked against that of other local authorities. Officers confirmed that they were working closely with their counterparts in Worcestershire to

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develop a system that would enable comparisons to be made. It was noted that the introduction of the new performance monitoring framework would make this easier to achieve.

RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

75. POLICY FOR THE AWARD OF CONTRACTS TO VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SECTOR ORGANISATIONS - PRE-SCRUTINY

Officers informed the Committee that this item had been tabled to enable the Committee to discuss the proposed additional policy for awarding contracts to the voluntary and community sector. Officers explained that this policy had been proposed by Councillor Anderson to address the 'Shopping' element of the Shopping, Investing and Giving system for Council funding of the Voluntary and Community Sector. This system had been proposed by the Third Sector Task and Finish Group and approved by full Council earlier in the year.

It was suggested that many Voluntary and Community Sector organisations would not have the same level of skills as the private sector to effectively engage in tendering processes and many organisations might need to undergo training to acquire these skills. Furthermore, the type of services that could be offered by the sector differed from that of privately run companies and as such should be dealt with differently by the Council. A decision had therefore been taken to postpone implementation of the Shopping element of the funding framework until these areas had been addressed.

Officers believed that Councillor Anderson's additional policy was not required as the points he had made were already covered in the Council's procurement procedures. They also raised concerns that if implemented Councillor Anderson's policy could be anti-competitive. As such, Officers suggested that the Policy for the Funding of Voluntary and Community Sector Organisations, which had been produced in accordance with the recommendations made by the Third Sector Task and Finish Group, should remain unchanged.

Councillor Anderson explained that the Council historically was poor at monitoring grants they awarded to Voluntary and Community Sector organisations and therefore it had been difficult to be certain about how funding had been spent. He felt that the most effective method for overcoming this issue was to enter into contractual

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arrangements with these organisations when providing them with funding.

Officers reminded the Committee that there was a subtle difference between awarding a grant and the procurement of a service. Awarding grants enabled the Council to provide money to an organisation so that it could undertake work that would correspond with the aims of the Council. Procurement enabled the Council to contract organisations to provide a service or a product in return for payment.

Having considered the information provided by Officers and Councillor Anderson the Committee agreed that they did not wish to endorse Councillor Anderson's proposed policy.

RECOMMENDED that

- 1) **the proposed policy for the Award of Contracts to Voluntary and Community Sector Organisations not be approved; and**
- 2) **the Policy for the Funding of Voluntary and Community Sector Organisations, which was approved by full Council on 22nd June 2009, remain unchanged.**

RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

76. PORTFOLIO HOLDER ANNUAL REPORT - QUESTIONS

The arrangements for the Portfolio Holder for Corporate Management's Annual Report were considered by the Committee. Members agreed a number of questions for the Portfolio Holder to address during his Annual Report (Appendix A).

77. REFERRALS

There were no referrals.

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78. WORK PROGRAMME

Members discussed the Committee's Work Programme. They noted that an additional meeting of the Committee was scheduled to take place on Thursday 1st October at 7pm to pre-scrutinise the revised Joint Municipal Waste Management Strategy.

RESOLVED that

the Work Programme be noted.

The Meeting commenced at 7.00 pm
and closed at 9.10 pm