

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

25th August 2010

MINUTES

Present:

Councillor Diane Thomas (Chair), Councillor Anita Clayton (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Peter Anderson, Bill Hartnett, Robin King, William Norton, Brenda Quinney, Mark Shurmer and Graham Vickery

Also Present:

Councillors Andrew Brazier and Derek Taylor.

Officers:

H Bennett, C John, J Pickering, S Skinner, J Staniland and C Wilson

Committee Services Officer:

J Bayley and J Smyth

65. APOLOGIES AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES

An apology for absence was received on behalf of Councillor Kath Banks.

66. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND OF PARTY WHIP

There were no declarations of interest nor of any party whip.

67. MINUTES

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meetings of the Committee held on 22nd July and 4th August 2010 be confirmed as correct records and signed by the Chair.

68. ACTIONS LIST

The Committee considered the latest version of the Action List and specific mention was made about the following items:

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Chair

a) Portfolio Holder Annual Reports – Action 6

Members were informed that all of the Portfolio Holders had been contacted and advised about the new procedures for the delivery of their Annual Reports before the Committee. It was also noted that dates had already been agreed for four of the six Portfolio Holders' attendances at future meetings.

b) Work Programme – Work experience opportunities for young people in Redditch Task and Finish Exercise – Action 8.3)

Members were informed that Councillor Gandy would be producing the required scoping document for consideration at the 21st September meeting of the Committee.

c) Future of Overview and Scrutiny Conference on 5th October 2010 – Action 9

Members noted that, owing to work commitments, Councillor R King would not be available to attend the conference as first planned. Instead, Councillor Quinney had agreed to attend and report back to the Committee.

RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

69. SCRUTINY OF THE FORWARD PLAN

Members considered whether any items on the Forward Plan, 1st September to 31st December 2010, were suitable for further scrutiny.

The Committee considered that the item on Contractual Arrangements for the Arrow Valley Countryside Centre would be of interest although, it was noted, the contract procurement process had already commenced and bids were being sought. Members were, however, still interested in receiving a report outlining the audit trail, consultation responses and progress to date prior to consideration by the Executive Committee in order to assess whether the contractual arrangements proposed met with the original specifications set by the Executive Committee.

RESOLVED that

the Arrow Valley Countryside Centre – Contractual Arrangements report be subject to further scrutiny.

70. TASK & FINISH REVIEWS - DRAFT SCOPING DOCUMENTS

The Committee considered a draft scoping document in relation to the external refurbishment of housing stock in Woodrow. The proposer of the item, Councillor Graham Vickery, reiterated the points as detailed in the scoping document. In particular he expressed concerns that the appearance of the properties in Woodrow might impact on the wellbeing and quality of life of local residents.

Whilst acknowledging that the external décor of some housing stock in Woodrow was not good, Members questioned its choice as an area for external refurbishment as there were a number of residential areas across the town that would benefit from such work.

Councillor Vickery advised that he had chosen Woodrow as he was familiar with the condition of the properties in that location. However, he had no objection if any approved refurbishment scheme was expanded to cover other areas.

RESOLVED that

- 1) a Task and Finish Group be established to review the External Refurbishment of Housing Stock;**
- 2) Councillor Graham Vickery be appointed to Chair the Task and Finish Group;**
- 3) Officers liaise with Members over the appointment of the membership of the Task and Finish Group and the launch of the review.**

71. TASK AND FINISH GROUPS - PROGRESS REPORTS

The Committee was informed that, subsequent to Councillor Hopkins' appointment to the Executive Committee, Councillor Roger Hill had been nominated to replace her as the Council's representative on the Joint Worcestershire Hub Scrutiny Task and Finish Group.

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Officers advised that the Task and Finish Group had reached a stage where they could draft their initial recommendations at the following meeting on 29th September. In view of this, and to ensure input from Redditch Borough Council Members, it was agreed that the Committee would discuss the content of a written submission at their following meeting on 15th September with a view to making recommendations for the Group's consideration on the 29th September,

RESOLVED that

- 1) Councillor Roger Hill be appointed as the Council's co-opted representative on the Joint Worcestershire Hub Task and Finish Group;**
- 2) the Committee discuss the matter in further detail at the following meeting on 15th September 2010 to produce a written submission for the consideration of the Joint Worcestershire Scrutiny Group on 29th September 2010; and**
- 3) the Committee's Work Programme be amended accordingly.**

72. CLIMATE CHANGE STRATEGY

(Mr Simon Oliver, a consultant on the Strategy, was in attendance and spoke to the Committee at the discretion of the Chair.)

The Committee considered a report which provided detailed information on a proposed Joint Climate Change Strategy for Bromsgrove District Council and Redditch Borough Council and the key issues facing both Councils in relation to reducing its own carbon emissions through best practice and encourage reductions in residents' homes, local businesses and transport. Officers' briefly reported on the aims of the strategy and advised that, whilst the Council had more work to do, it had done demonstrably well with the initiatives put in place to date, particularly in respect of energy consumption which had seen a reduction in carbon emissions of 8% in general terms, with the exception of mileage claims, which had increased by 5%, due in some part, to shared working arrangements with Bromsgrove.

Members made a number of suggestions for the Council to improve its own carbon emissions by reducing mileage claims by:

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- a) utilising public transport whenever possible and practical;
- b) encouraging car sharing, cycling and walking to work;
- c) providing bus passes for Officers travelling on Council business; and
- d) providing pool cars to restrict vehicle use.

Members also discussed actions that could be taken to encourage the wider population of the Borough to address climate change:

- a) promoting loft insulation;
- b) encouraging less wastage of water;
- c) encouraging cycling and walking to work;
- d) working with Bus Companies to provide better public transport systems;
- e) providing more green spaces;
- f) increasing town centre pedestrian areas;
- g) improving waste schemes such as the anaerobic design – an onsite waste treatment process that reduces the amount of waste to be removed and reduces the regularity of collections. This would be a relatively inexpensive system that could be incorporated into Local Plan policies for new developments; and
- h) supporting more renewable energy generation.

Members all agreed that the Council should do everything it could to adopt ambitious targets for the Climate Change Strategy by aiming high and leading by example.

Mr Simon Oliver, one of the Council's consultants on the strategy, advised Members on other initiatives and developments in relation to electric vehicles and their potential for reducing emissions in the future.

Members suggested that the strategy should incorporate an Executive Summary with an introduction preceding the Action Plan and further suggested that Officers might wish to consider producing a Powerpoint presentation to present the strategy on future occasions for ease of reference,

RESOLVED that

the report be noted; and

RECOMMENDED that

- 1) **subject to noting Members' comments as detailed in the preamble above, the Joint Climate Change Strategy be adopted by the Council; and**
- 2) **the Council adopt highly ambitious targets for the Joint Climate Change Strategy, including a commitment for the installation of anaerobic digesters to be a condition for new build developments in the Redditch Local Plan.**

73. NEIGHBOURHOOD GROUPS TASK AND FINISH GROUP - MONITORING REPORT

The Committee received and noted, without comment, an implementation monitoring report on actions that had been taken and completed to date to implement the Neighbourhood Group Task and Finish Group's recommendations which had been approved in December 2009.

RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

74. DRAINAGE - UPDATE REPORT

The Committee received a report on progress in relation to the monitoring of ditches and other associated land drainage strategies, including an update on recent changes in legislation, some of which were still to be clarified. Members were informed that the Council had obligations to both comply with and enforce legislation and that close working relationships with other land drainage partners had resulted in a number of high profile enforcement actions. A detailed PowerPoint presentation, which illustrated the various points that required consideration, was provided for information with additional oral updates in response to Members' queries.

The potential for residential gardens to expand into open land that might previously have been the locations for drainage ditches was identified as a concern. Officers advised that any such occurrences were liable to be identified as part of the Planning Application consultation processes. Members also discussed potential problems that might arise with regards to ditches that were not in the control of drainage authorities such as those on land under the control of farmers. Members questioned what approach was

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adopted to deal with agencies and other landowners who built over drainage ditches. Officers reported that legislation was in place to deal with such matters with historical issues being more of a problem to resolve than issues resulting from new development.

Members expressed support for improved channel flows and reviewing existing balancing areas to maintain and improve capacity storage. The large number of ponds to be found in Redditch and their associated drainage issues was also highlighted, particularly those in Oakenshaw Woods and Southcrest, to which Officers advised that, while work had been done to alleviate some drainage issues, the outlets were outdated and in poor condition.

The Committee noted that, whilst the legislative changes had been instigated, Commencement Orders, instructions on when and how the new legislation was to be implemented by April 2011, was still awaited which had led to delays. Members were also informed that, whilst new legislation suggests that certain roles could be undertaken at a more local level, the County Council would have overall responsibility and powers to intervene if considered necessary. Officers were looking at a common approach with other Local Drainage Authorities, through the proposed Joint North Worcestershire Land Drainage Partnership, to collaborate on reviewing existing and future drainage implications to keep costs down.

RESOLVED that

the report be noted, and

RECOMMENDED that

- 1) the Council's policies on ditches be initially applied to Arterial Ditches only;**
- 2) the Council consider its position with regard to the implications of the Flood Risk Regulations 2009 and the Flood and Water Management Act 2010; and**
- 3) a report be prepared by Officers, as previously instructed by Members, setting out proposals for a Joint North-Worcestershire Land Drainage Partnership, in accordance with the guidance provided in the documents referred to in recommendation 2 above.**

75. BUDGET SCRUTINY - FEEDBACK FROM MEETING

The Committee was informed that, the Chair and Vice Chair had recently met with relevant Officers to discuss improving the Committee's budget scrutiny processes and in particular, the possibility of implementing the "Scrutiny Café" idea that had won Hertfordshire County Council the top award at the recent annual Scrutiny Awards Ceremony in London. As a result of these discussions, however, it had been agreed that the Hertfordshire model was more of an aspiration that the Committee could look at in more depth in the future.

Officers acknowledged that Members had had limited opportunity in the past to undertake budget scrutiny and were therefore proposing convening two budget scrutiny workshops in October and November (suitable dates to be organised) to which relevant Officers, Portfolio Holders and Scrutiny Members would be invited.

RESOLVED that

- 1) **the proposed budget scrutiny workshops, to be held in October and November and to be attended by relevant Officers and Portfolio Holders, be endorsed; and**
- 2) **the report be noted.**

76. REFERRALS

There were no referrals.

77. WORK PROGRAMME

Members considered the Committee's current Work Programme and noted the following updates:

a) Stratford District Council Visit

Stratford District Council had recently introduced a commissioning body model of Overview and Scrutiny. The Council was aware that Redditch Borough Council operated a similar model of scrutiny and had recently been commended for scrutiny work in the Centre for Public Scrutiny's (CfPS) Good Scrutiny Awards. Representatives from Stratford district had therefore approached Redditch with a request to attend and observe a meeting of the Redditch Overview and Scrutiny Committee in action. They had also asked to interview

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representatives of Redditch Borough about the council's Task and Finish Group process to learn about best practice. It was agreed that Stratford District Council's requests be granted and also that they be asked to provide questions to assist with preparing responses in advance of the meeting.

b) Scrutiny Skills Workshop – Worcestershire County Hall

Members were informed about a training opportunity at County Hall, where a Scrutiny Skills Workshop had been organised for the 5th October from 5.00 to 9.00pm. Officers advised that six places were available for Redditch Councillors interested in attending. It was noted that the newly appointed Overview and Scrutiny Officer, who was due to join Committee Services in September, was hoping to take up the one Scrutiny Officer places.

c) Town Centre Landscape Improvements Report

Members were advised that the Town Centre Landscape Improvements report, scheduled for the Committee's consideration on 21st September 2010, had been postponed until December 2010 / January 2011.

d) Redditch Health Action Plan

Members were advised that the Redditch Health Action Plan, scheduled for consideration on 15th September 2010, had been postponed with a new date to be agreed.

RESOLVED that

- 1) **the Chair, Councillor Thomas, and Councillors Banks and R King meet with the delegates from Stratford District Council to discuss Task and Finish Group processes;**
- 2) **Stratford District Council be asked to provide a list of questions in advance of the meeting to assist with preparation and responses; and**
- 3) **subject to any updates previously agreed during the course of the meeting, the Committee's Work Programme be noted.**

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The Meeting commenced at 7.05 pm
and closed at 9.10 pm

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CHAIR