

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Wednesday, 27th October,
2010

MINUTES

Present:

Councillor Diane Thomas (Chair), and Councillors Peter Anderson, Bill Hartnett, Robin King, William Norton, Brenda Quinney and Mark Shurmer

Also Present:

Councillor Derek Taylor and Trish Buckley, (Co-opted representative for UNISON).

Officers:

J Pickering, T Kristunas, S Hanley, J Bough and A Heighway

Committee Services Officer:

J Bayley and M Craggs

115. APOLOGIES AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors Anita Clayton and Graham Vickery.

116. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND OF PARTY WHIP

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

117. MINUTES

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 6th October 2010 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

118. ACTIONS LIST

Members considered the latest version of the Committee's Actions List. Officers advised, in relation to item eight on the Actions List,

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Chair

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that the membership of the Promoting Redditch Task and Finish Group had been confirmed since the previous meeting of the Committee. This membership would consist of Councillors Graham Vickery (Chair), Andy Fry, Brenda Quinney and Derek Taylor.

RESOLVED that

the Actions List be noted.

119. CALL-IN AND SCRUTINY OF THE FORWARD PLAN

There were no call-ins and no items were identified on the Council's Forward Plan as suitable for further scrutiny.

120. TASK & FINISH REVIEWS - DRAFT SCOPING DOCUMENTS

There were no draft scoping documents for consideration.

121. TASK AND FINISH GROUPS - PROGRESS REPORTS

The Committee received the following reports in relation to current reviews:

a) External Refurbishment of Housing Stock

Officers reported that a further meeting of the External Refurbishment of Housing Stock Short Sharp Review Group would take place on Monday 1st November.

b) Joint Worcestershire Hub

Members were advised that there had been no further updates on the progress of this review since the previous meeting of the Committee.

c) Work Experience Opportunities

The Chair of the review, Councillor Peter Anderson, advised that the Group had convened a meeting where Members had discussed their approach to the review and had identified potential expert witnesses. The Group had also interviewed a student who had been participating in work experience at the Town Hall.

RESOLVED that

the update reports be noted.

122. PETITION TO KEEP A FAMILY RESIDENT IN A COUNCIL PROPERTY ON PROSPECT ROAD

Officers advised that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had a specific role in relation to consideration of certain types of petitions. The prayer for the petition received by Members requested that a family be allowed to remain in a Council property located in the Lodge Park ward. The role of the Committee was to monitor the procedure that was in place for Council housing tenancies, particularly in relation to succession arrangements.

Members were informed that Section 87 of the Housing Act 1985 outlined the rules in relation to secure tenancies. This legislation stipulated that there could only be one statutory succession to a property. These rules also applied to assured tenancies for social landlords. Officers used their discretion when considering housing allocations. Assessments were made on a case by case basis and the particular circumstances of tenants were considered as part of this process. The case which formed the basis for the petition had been noted by relevant Officers in this manner.

Residents were able to appeal any decisions made regarding tenancy of a Council house property. Under these circumstances the tenant could appeal to the Council's Housing Appeals Committee.

The Council also encouraged tenants to consider the various housing options available to them and to move to suitable accommodation when their personal circumstances changed. This included encouraging residents to consider downsizing to a smaller property when the number of residents in a household had been reduced. A number of support services and processes, such as housing mutual exchange, were available to support residents in this situation.

RESOLVED that

the petition be noted.

123. REVIEW OF THE DIAL-A-RIDE SERVICE

Officers explained that the report and recommendations had been produced in accordance with the suggestions that had been outlined in a report produced by JMP Consulting. Officers had also taken into account feedback which had been provided by customers in a customer survey and the work of the Dial-A-Ride Task and Finish Group that had been undertaken in 2009.

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Members were informed that the funding available to support community transport and concessionary fares would be affected by the transfer of responsibility for concessionary fares from District to County Councils. The Bus Service Operator Grant (BSOG), which was distributed to fund community transport and concessionary fares, was likely to be affected as part of this process. Officers were anticipating that the BSOG grant to the Dial-A-Ride Service of £11,000 would be cut. Reductions in funding would also impact on private bus companies which currently operated concessionary fares.

Many customers were aware that the economic climate and cuts to funding for local authorities could impact on the delivery of services like Dial-A-Ride. A number of customers had indicated in their customer survey responses that they would be happy to pay a larger sum for the use of the service. The fee was £1.05 per journey, a sum which had been inconvenient for some customers in the past as it required vulnerable elderly travellers to identify small change to pay for the service. Officers were suggesting that £1.60 would be a more convenient charge for the customers, though a number had suggested that they would be willing to pay as much as £2.00.

Members noted that the Council had a spare bus and that the possibility of removing this spare bus had originally been discussed as one solution to reduce the costs involved in operating the service. However, this option had not been feasible. The spare bus provided service cover when any of the other vehicles were out of circulation, thereby helping to minimise the impact on service delivery. Moreover, the introduction of the spare bus had helped the Council to ensure that maintenance work was undertaken on the Dial-A-Ride fleet during the week. Prior to the introduction of the spare bus this work had been carried out on the vehicles during the weekend at a greater financial cost to the Council.

The Committee also questioned why there had been a reduction in the use of the Dial-A-Ride service. In part, changes in usage of the service occurred over time due to client morbidity and social mobility. Furthermore, recent closures of a number of social venues had impacted on a number of customers who had regularly utilised the service to visit these locations.

Members noted that Dial-a-Ride had been the subject of a Task and Finish review which had been placed on hold earlier in the year. As these Members had developed expertise on the subject it was agreed that they should have an opportunity to review the report

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prior to consideration of the matter by the Executive Committee on 10th November.

RESOLVED that

- 1) **the Dial-A-Ride Task and Finish Group scrutinise the report in further detail and, subject to the approval of the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, report its findings for the consideration of the Executive Committee; and**
- 2) **the report be noted.**

124. PERFORMANCE REPORT - PORTFOLIO FOR HOUSING, LOCAL ENVIRONMENT AND HEALTH

The Committee received a written report which detailed the performance of services within the remit of the Portfolio Holder for Housing, Local Environment and Health, Councillor Brandon Clayton. On the basis of the information contained within the report Members requested that the following questions be addressed by the Portfolio Holder in his Annual Report to the Committee, which was scheduled to be delivered on 17th November 2010.

- 1) How are Government policy changes to housing benefit expected to impact on Redditch residents?
- 2) What impact is expected of the Government White Paper *Equity and excellence: liberating the NHS* on local health provision?
- 3) What progress has been made on the 10:10 Climate Change agreement?
- 4) What have been the outcomes following the implementation of the Introductory Tenancies Service?
- 5) What has been the affect of the switch of the Care and Repair service from a local service to the Worcestershire Care and Repair Agency?
- 6) What recent action has been undertaken to tackle health inequalities?
- 7) What is your position regarding transition towns?

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- 8) What costs does the Council accrue by ridding the roads of detritus?
- 9) What plans are there to work with partners to provide social housing during the next twelve months?
- 10) Will the Council consider selling off any of the existing housing stock?

RESOLVED that

- 1) **the Portfolio Holder for Housing, Local Environment and Health be invited to answer the questions detailed in the preamble above when delivering his Annual Report before the Committee; and**
- 2) **the report be noted.**

125. BUDGET SCRUTINY

Members received a presentation on the Council's financial position following the Comprehensive Spending Review. The presentation included indicative year on year grant reduction figures until 2014/15. It was currently predicted that the total grant reduction up to and including 2014/15 would be £1.4m excluding inflation, although it was stressed that the figures were indicative. The Grant settlement announcement would be made on 2nd December 2010.

The presentation informed Members of Officers current financial assumptions for 2011/12, including a pay freeze for all salaries over £21k. It was thought that Job Evaluation would lead to a three per cent increase in the annual pay bill. Officers across departments would be consulted to consider how fees and charges might be raised to compensate for an expected three per cent rise in inflation. The Council had begun work with Deloitte to review fees and charges levied by local authorities across Worcestershire. This would offer an idea of where fees and charges could be raised in line with neighbouring local authorities to increase revenue.

Officers explained how the Council's gross £31m spend for 2010/11 had been allocated out to departments. Members would receive more comprehensive information on the figures at the budget scrutiny workshop on 22nd November 2010.

A current financial summary for 2011/12 was provided. This included a current budget gap of £1.155m. Officers had undertaken

a review of current expenditure to help uncover what cuts could be made which would not have a detrimental impact on staffing and the local community.

A number of potential savings to the Council budget had been identified. These included savings made through shared services with Bromsgrove District Council. Officers were considering where the implementation of shared services changes could be accelerated to accrue faster savings, although this did not necessarily involve staffing changes. Senior Management Team was to undertake a thorough budget review to see where further savings could be made.

Officers would also work with their counterparts at the County Council to ensure that they notified in advance of planned cuts to County services. Mitigating action would then be developed to minimise the effect on the Redditch community.

Officers requested that Members submit any questions regarding the budget or requests for further information ahead of the Budget Scrutiny Workshop on 22nd November 2010 to enable Officers to collate and provide the necessary information in advance.

RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

126. CHARGING POLICY - MONITORING REPORT

Members received a monitoring report outlining the impact of the Charging Policy and Procedure, produced by the Fees and Charges Task and Finish Group in 2008, on the Council's fees and charges setting process.

Following the introduction of the Charging Policy and Procedure the fees and charges levied by the Council for particular services had been reviewed by the Executive Fees and Charges Sub-Committee. The Sub-Committee had produced a Fees and Charges report for 2009/10 proposing significant changes to charging arrangements, particularly for Leisure Services. Furthermore, charges had been introduced for a number of services, which had either previously been free at the point of delivery or were new services. The Council had also recently started to work with Deloitte to compare the fees and charges levied by the Council with the fees charged for similar services delivered by other local authorities.

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The fees and charges that were levied for the use of the fitness suite were discussed in further detail. Members noted that the fitness suites appeared to be making a loss and suggested that the Council needed to ensure that there was competitive pricing for services and value for money in management of the equipment provided in the gyms.

Members questioned whether it was possible to accurately assess the operating costs for the fitness suites. Officers advised that this would be difficult to assess. The Council did not have access to the level of detail and sophisticated equipment that would be required to accurately determine whether the fitness suites were operating at a financial loss to the Council.

RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

127. TRAINING UPDATES

Members provided feedback on the outcome of two training events that had taken place in October 2010.

a) The Future of Overview and Scrutiny Conference – Councillor Brenda Quinney

Councillor Quinney reported that she had attended the Future of Overview and Scrutiny Conference, organised by the Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS), on 5th October. As requested, she had produced a written report about the conference, a copy of which had been provided for the consideration of the Chair of the Committee.

A number of speakers had attended the conference and had been invited to outline the potential impact of the various changes that had been proposed by the coalition government on Overview and Scrutiny and local accountability. However, many of these speakers had been unable to comment on the issues they had been invited to discuss because the implications had yet to be properly assessed and clarified.

b) Scrutiny Skills Workshop – Councillors Anderson, Thomas and Shurmer

Members reported that the Scrutiny Skills workshop, which was hosted by Worcestershire county Council, had taken place on 5th October. The training had been delivered by an

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external organisation which had used interactive acting techniques. The training had covered standard aspects of scrutiny.

The Committee agreed that they needed to be selective in relation to scrutiny related Member development activities. Training was often delivered at the Town Hall and Members remarked that this often represented greater value for money than attendance at external training venues. Members suggested that training could continue to be delivered by external consultants, where appropriate, at the Town Hall, though training could also be delivered relatively cheaply by the Overview and Scrutiny Support staff where required.

RESOLVED that

the reports be noted.

128. REFERRALS

There were no referrals.

129. WORK PROGRAMME

RESOLVED that

the Committee's Work Programme be noted.

The Meeting commenced at 6.40 pm
and closed at 8.20 pm