

Executive Committee

Wed 12th January
2011
7.00 pm

Committee Room 2
Town Hall
Redditch



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- In addition, the public now has a right to be present when the Council determines “Key Decisions” unless the business would disclose confidential or “exempt” information.
- Unless otherwise stated, all items of business before the Executive Committee are Key Decisions.
- (Copies of Agenda Lists are published in advance of the meetings on the Council’s Website:
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**If you have any queries on this Agenda or any of the decisions taken or wish to exercise any of the above rights of access to information, please contact
Ivor Westmore
Committee Support Services**

**Town Hall, Walter Stranz Square, Redditch, B98 8AH
Tel: 01527 64252 (Extn. 3269) Fax: (01527) 65216
e.mail: ivor.westmore@redditchbc.gov.uk Minicom: 595528**

Welcome to today's meeting.

Guidance for the Public

Agenda Papers

The **Agenda List** at the front of the Agenda summarises the issues to be discussed and is followed by the Officers' full supporting **Reports**.

Chair

The Chair is responsible for the proper conduct of the meeting. Generally to one side of the Chair is the Committee Support Officer who gives advice on the proper conduct of the meeting and ensures that the debate and the decisions are properly recorded. On the Chair's other side are the relevant Council Officers. The Councillors ("Members") of the Committee occupy the remaining seats around the table.

Running Order

Items will normally be taken in the order printed but, in particular circumstances, the Chair may agree to vary the order.

Refreshments : tea, coffee and water are normally available at meetings - please serve yourself.

Decisions

Decisions at the meeting will be taken by the **Councillors** who are the democratically elected representatives. They are advised by **Officers** who are paid professionals and do not have a vote.

Members of the Public

Members of the public may, by prior arrangement, speak at meetings of the Council or its Committees. Specific procedures exist for Appeals Hearings or for meetings involving Licence or Planning Applications. For further information on this point, please speak to the Committee Support Officer.

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If you discover a fire, inform a member of staff or operate the nearest alarm call point (wall mounted red rectangular box). In the event of the fire alarm sounding, leave the building immediately following the fire exit signs. Officers have been appointed with responsibility to ensure that all visitors are escorted from the building.

Do Not stop to collect personal belongings.

Do Not use lifts.

Do Not re-enter the building until told to do so.

The emergency Assembly Area is on Walter Stranz Square.

Declaration of Interests: Guidance for Councillors

DO I HAVE A "PERSONAL INTEREST" ?

- Where the item relates or is likely to affect your **registered interests** (what you have declared on the formal Register of Interests)

OR

- Where a decision in relation to the item might reasonably be regarded as affecting **your own** well-being or financial position, or that of your **family**, or your **close associates** more than most other people affected by the issue,

you have a personal interest.

WHAT MUST I DO? **Declare the existence, and nature, of your interest and stay**

- The declaration must relate to specific business being decided - a general scattergun approach is not needed
- **Exception** - where interest arises only because of your membership of another **public body**, there is no need to declare unless you **speak** on the matter.
- You **can vote** on the matter.

IS IT A "PREJUDICIAL INTEREST" ?

In general only if:-

- It is a personal interest **and**
- The item affects your **financial position** (or conveys other benefits), or the position of your **family, close associates** or bodies through which you have a **registered interest** (or relates to the exercise of **regulatory functions** in relation to these groups)

and

- A member of public, with knowledge of the relevant facts, would reasonably believe the interest was likely to **prejudice** your judgement of the public interest.

WHAT MUST I DO? **Declare and Withdraw**

BUT you may make representations to the meeting before withdrawing, **if** the public have similar rights (such as the right to speak at Planning Committee).



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12th January 2011

7.00 pm

Committee

Committee Room 2 Town Hall

Agenda

Membership:

Cllrs: Carole Gandy (Chair) Malcolm Hall
Michael Braley (Vice-Chair) Gay Hopkins
Juliet Brunner Jinny Pearce
Greg Chance Debbie Taylor
Brandon Clayton

1. Declarations of Interest	To invite Councillors to declare any interests they may have in items on the agenda.
2. Apologies	To receive the apologies of any Member who is unable to attend this meeting.
3. Leader's Announcements	<ol style="list-style-type: none">To give notice of any items for future meetings or for the Forward Plan, including any scheduled for this meeting, but now carried forward or deleted; andany other relevant announcements. <p>(Oral report)</p>
4. Minutes (Pages 1 - 6) Chief Executive	To confirm as a correct record the minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee held on 2nd December 2010 (Decision Notice attached - Minutes to follow)
5. External Refurbishment of Housing Stock Short Sharp Review - Final Report (Pages 7 - 30)	To consider the final report and recommendations of the External Refurbishment of Housing Stock Short Sharp Review Group. (Report attached) (Various Wards)

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<p>6. Joint Worcestershire Hub Task and Finish Group - Final Report (Pages 31 - 114)</p>	<p>To consider the final report and recommendations of the Joint Worcestershire Hub Task and Finish Group.</p> <p>(Report attached – Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting on 8th December refer and contain recommendations – later on this agenda)</p> <p>(No Specific Ward Relevance)</p>
<p>7. Budget 2011/12 - Update Pickering - Exec Director (Finance and Corporate Resources)</p>	<p>To consider an update on the draft budget for 2011/12.</p> <p>(Report to follow)</p> <p>(No Specific Ward Relevance)</p>
<p>8. Council Tax Base (Pages 115 - 122) Head of Finance and Resources</p>	<p>To set the Council Tax Base for 2011/12/</p> <p>(Report attached)</p> <p>(No Specific Ward Relevance)</p>
<p>9. Customer Experience Strategy 2011 - 2014 (Pages 123 - 150) Head of Customer Services</p>	<p>To seek approval of the Customer Experience Strategy.</p> <p>(Report attached)</p> <p>(No Specific Ward Relevance)</p>
<p>10. Learndirect - Relocation Update (Pages 151 - 156) J Godwin, Head of Leisure and Cultural Services</p>	<p>To update Members on the relocation of the Learndirect Service and provide information on the new operation.</p> <p>(Report attached)</p> <p>(All Wards)</p>
<p>11. Council Response to "Local Decisions - A Fairer Future for Social Housing" (Pages 157 - 172) Head of Housing</p>	<p>To consider the Council's response to the consultation document "Local Decisions: A Fairer Future for Social Housing".</p> <p>In view of the timescales and subject to the agreement of the Mayor, this item may not be available for call-in (the consultation response is required less than five days following the meeting).</p> <p>(Report attached)</p> <p>(All Wards)</p>

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<p>12. Garden Waste Collection Service - Outcomes of Trial</p> <p>(Pages 173 - 182)</p> <p>Head of Environmental Services</p>	<p>To provide the Committee with an update on the additional consultation exercise in the west area to determine likely levels of take up and make recommendations for the future of the service.</p> <p>(Report attached)</p> <p>(All Wards)</p>
<p>13. Redditch Borough Council Establishment - Quarters 1 and 2 - April to September 2010/11</p> <p>(Pages 183 - 188)</p> <p>T Kristunas, Head of Resources</p>	<p>To advise Members of the position at the end of the period with regards to vacancies.</p> <p>(Report attached)</p> <p>(No Specific Ward Relevance)</p>
<p>14. Overview and Scrutiny Committee</p> <p>(Pages 189 - 214)</p> <p>Chief Executive</p>	<p>To receive the minutes of the meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 17th November and 8th December 2010.</p> <p>(Minutes attached)</p>
<p>15. Shared Services Board</p> <p>(Pages 215 - 254)</p>	<p>To consider the minutes and referrals from the meeting of the Shared Services Board on 9th December 2010.</p> <p>(Part of the minutes of this meeting and a report and appendix mentioned below are NOT FOR PUBLICATION as they relate to contemplated consultations or negotiations in connection with labour relation matters arising between the authority and employees of the authority. In view of this it is anticipated that discussion of these matters will take place after the exclusion of the public.)</p> <p>(Minutes attached – Confidential report in respect of the business case for a shared PPP Service between Bromsgrove DC and Redditch BC and an accompanying confidential Appendix attached in view of a subsequent amendment to the structure charts.)</p>
<p>16. Minutes / Referrals - Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Executive Panels etc.</p> <p>Chief Executive</p>	<p>To receive and consider any outstanding minutes or referrals from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Executive Panels etc. since the last meeting of the Executive Committee, other than as detailed in the items above.</p>

17. Urgent Business - Record of Decisions

Head of Legal, Equalities
and Democratic Services

To note the following decision taken in accordance with SO36 since the last ordinary meeting of the Executive Committee:

HMRS – Licence for use of Town Hall Premises
(Executive Director of Finance and Resources)(Decision Reference 488)

All necessary approvals were sought to permit a licence to be granted to Her Majesty's Revenue Service (HMRS – the 'Tax Office') for use of a small amount of back office space (for three desks), plus access to the RBC Customer Service Centre (OSS) on a number of days per week (three currently proposed). Revenue of £18,000 p.a. will be generated. The need for Member authority was only latterly noted and, for practical purposes, taking into account the Christmas and New Year holidays, a decision was sought before the next available meeting of the Executive Committee in 2011.

It was therefore RESOLVED that

- 1) **authority be delegated to the Head of Resources and Head of Customer Services and Director of Policy, Performance and Partnerships to take all necessary steps to achieve the aims indicated above; this to include authority to sign all necessary agreements with HMRS; and**
- 2) **the Council be asked to note the financial implications and adjust budgets accordingly.**

(Abbey Ward)

18. Advisory Panels - update report

(Pages 255 - 258)

Chief Executive

To consider, for monitoring / management purposes, an update on the work of the Executive Committee's Advisory Panels and similar bodies, which report via the Executive Committee.

(Report attached)

19. Action Monitoring

(Pages 259 - 260)

Chief Executive

To consider an update on the actions arising from previous meetings of the Committee.

(Report attached)

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20. Exclusion of the Public	<p>Should it be necessary, in the opinion of the Chief Executive, to consider excluding the public from the meeting in relation to any items of business on the grounds that exempt information is likely to be divulged, it may be necessary to move the following resolution:</p> <p>“that, under S.100 I 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 matter(s) on the grounds that it/they involve(s) the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in the relevant paragraphs (<i>to be specified</i>) of Part 1 of Schedule 12 (A) of the said Act, as amended.”</p>
21. Confidential Minutes / Referrals (if any)	To consider confidential matters not dealt with earlier in the evening and not separately listed below (if any).



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2nd December 2010

Notice of Decisions

Present:

Councillor Carole Gandy (Chair), Councillor Michael Braley (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Juliet Brunner, Greg Chance, Brandon Clayton, Malcolm Hall, Gay Hopkins, Jinny Pearce and Debbie Taylor

Also Present

Councillors Kath Banks and Derek Taylor

Officers:

R Bamford, H Bennett, J Bough, M Bough, K Dicks, C Felton, S Hanley, T Kristunas, A Marklew, J Pickering, G Revans, D Taylor and D Hancox

Committee Services Officer:

S Skinner

118. APOLOGIES

There were no apologies for absence.

119. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

120. LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair advised the Committee that the following items of business, scheduled on the Forward Plan to be dealt with at this evening's meeting, had been re-scheduled to a later meeting of the Committee:

- Draft Core Strategy
- Bromsgrove and Redditch Joint Core Strategies – Consultation Responses
- Local Development Scheme Update
- Fees and Charges 2011.

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2nd December 2010

The Chair advised that she had accepted late circulation of the following papers:

- Item 4 – Minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee on 10th November 2010.

Finally, the Chair also advised that she had accepted the following additional item as Urgent Business:

- Local Enterprise Partnerships.

121. MINUTES

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee held on 10th November 2010 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

122. BUDGET UPDATE 2011/12 - PRESENTATION

RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

(Oral report / No decisions or recommendations.)

Members noted that the financial announcements anticipated on 2nd December had not yet been made and that further reports to Members would be provided as soon as more was known.)

123. NEW CEMETERY - SITE AND FUNDING

RECOMMENDED that

- 1) **a sum of up to £35,000 be allocated in the Capital Programme 2011/12 for the pre-planning permission survey works and any preliminary civil works on the chosen site so that a report can be brought to a future meeting of the Executive Committee regarding future capital funding requirements; and**

RESOLVED that

- 2) **site investigation be carried out at the Brooklands Lane site to establish its suitability as a cemetery site, prior to Members taking a final decision on the location of a new Borough Council cemetery; and**
- 3) **expenditure of up to the sum agreed by the Council at 1) above be approved in accordance with Standing Order 41, for the purposes defined in the report.**

(Members requested the insertion of 'up to' the sums indicated above, in order to confirm their interest in minimising expenditure if early investigations revealed that the site was not going to prove suitable.)

124. TENANT INVOLVEMENT AGREEMENT

RECOMMENDED that

subject to Members' comments*, the new Tenant Involvement Agreement, attached to the report at Appendix 1, be adopted.

(*Members' comments included:

- Fixing the quorum figure for BTP meetings at 4;
- Auditing of accounts in an appropriate and proportionate ('light touch') way only;
- Some minor rephrasing and textual amendment to improve the wording, such as using '*to be apolitical*' rather than ('*not to be party political*').")

125. VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SECTOR GRANTS POLICY

RECOMMENDED that

- 1) **the updated Voluntary Sector Grants Policy attached to the report at Appendix 1 be approved;**
- 2) **the following themes and percentages of funding be allocated for the 2011/12 voluntary and community sector grants process:**

- **Enterprising Communities - 55% = £130,000**
- **Safe/ Clean & Green - 8% = £ 20,000**
- **LSP theme - Health and Wellbeing - 8% = £ 20,000**

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- LSP theme - Education - 25% = £ 60,000
 - LSP theme – Stronger Communities - 4% = £ 9,000;
- 3) £2,000 be re-allocated from the existing Grants budget for the use by the Grants Team to deliver:
- workshops, networking and promotional events;
 - advertising and communication support;
 - newsletters; and
 - support packages;

and

RESOLVED that, subject to the Council's approval of the above recommendations 1) & 2),

- 4) authority be delegated to the Head of Community Services, in consultation with the Grants Panel, to agree the allocation of community grants under the Local Strategic Partnership 'Stronger Communities' theme.

(Members noted that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had pre-scrutinised, and recommended approval of, these proposals.)

126. QUARTERLY BUDGET MONITORING - QUARTER 2 - JULY TO SEPTEMBER 2010

RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

(Members noted a number of variations and improvements to the reported position.)

127. QUARTERLY PERFORMANCE MONITORING - QUARTER 2 - JULY TO SEPTEMBER 2010

RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

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**128. QUARTERLY MONITORING OF THE BENEFITS SERVICE
IMPROVEMENT PLAN - QUARTER 2 - JULY TO SEPTEMBER
2010**

RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

**129. QUARTERLY MONITORING OF FORMAL COMPLAINTS AND
COMPLIMENTS - QUARTER 2 - JUNE TO SEPTEMBER 2010**

RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

**130. DISPOSAL OF LAND – “TEAR DROP” ADJ. A441
ALVECHURCH HIGHWAY**

RESOLVED that

- 1) the land known as the “Tear Drop” be disposed of for the purposes detailed in the report; and**
- 2) Officers be instructed to proceed with the offer from Party E as detailed in the confidential Appendix 2 to the report.**

(Members re-affirmed their intention to direct the income towards the Abbey Stadium Redevelopment project. There was no discussion in confidential Session.)

131. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 27th October 2010 be received and noted.

(There were no additional decisions for the Executive Committee or full Council to make.)

**132. WORCESTERSHIRE ENHANCED TWO TIER SHARED SERVICE
JOINT COMMITTEE**

There were no minutes or recommendations to consider.

133. LOCAL ENTERPRISE PARTNERSHIPS

RECOMMENDED that

in order to ensure that the business and economic interests of the businesses and residents within the Borough of Redditch can be properly and adequately represented, the Council approve that Redditch Borough forms part of both the Worcestershire Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) if successful, and the Birmingham and Solihull LEP.

(This item was accepted by the Chair for consideration by the Committee as Urgent Business, in view of the need to obtain a full Council decision before the Christmas break 2010.)

An explanatory briefing note was tabled at the meeting which will be provided to all Council members in relation to the 13th December Council meeting.)

134. MINUTES / REFERRALS - OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE, EXECUTIVE PANELS ETC.

There were no minutes or referrals under this item.

135. ADVISORY PANELS - UPDATE REPORT

RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

(Members noted that a schedule of meetings had been drawn up for the Constitutional Review Working Party and Member Development Steering Group for the period up to the next Council Annual Meeting.)

136. ACTION MONITORING

RESOLVED that

subject to Members' comments*, the report be noted.

(* Members requested reinstatement of more regular reports in relation to sickness monitoring and vacancies.)

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**EXTERNAL REFURBISHMENT OF HOUSING STOCK SHORT, SHARP
REVIEW – FINAL REPORT**

Relevant Portfolio Holder	Councillor Brandon Clayton, Portfolio Holder for Housing, Local Environment and Health.
Relevant Head of Service	Liz Tompkin, Head of Housing
Non-Key Decisions	

1. SUMMARY OF PROPOSALS

The External Refurbishment of Housing Stock Short, Sharp Review Group is proposing that a number of actions be taken to improve the appearance of properties in the Council's housing stock and the surrounding environment. Whilst the Group focussed on conditions in Woodrow many of the actions they have recommended could be implemented in other parts of the Borough and at a relatively low financial cost to the Council.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee **RECOMMENDS** that

- 1) light colour paints be utilised to decorate garage doors to improve their visual appearance (as detailed in paragraphs 4.2 – 4.2.3 to the report);
- 2) the lintels featured on Council properties be decorated to improve the visual appearance of those properties (as detailed in paragraphs 4.3 – 4.3.2);
- 3) the retaining wall to the rear of 1-12 Martley Close be redecorated as part of a Council arts project (as detailed in paragraphs 4.4 – 4.4.4);
- 4) the Council assume responsibility for the maintenance of small strips of land located close to private properties and public spaces (as detailed in paragraphs 4.5 – 4.5.3);
- 5) the Council ensure that, when replacing diseased and dead plants, different types of plants are introduced to ensure there is a variety of leaf colours and foliage in any given area (as detailed in paragraphs 4.6 – 4.6.3);

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- 6) the remaining Section 106 money available for use on capital landscaping work in the Greenlands Open Spaces be allocated to soft landscaping work in the courtyard area located in Wishaw Close (as detailed in paragraphs 4.7 – 4.7.6);
- 7) in order to minimise the level of disruption experienced by local residents, a holistic approach to the delivery of frontline services be adopted (as detailed in paragraphs 4.8 – 4.8.2);
- 8) representatives of local schools be invited to participate in estate walkabouts (as detailed in paragraphs 4.9 – 4.9.6); and
- 9) representatives of the local GP's Consortium be invited to participate in the estate walkabouts once the consortia have been introduced in 2012/13 (as detailed in paragraphs 4.10 – 4.10.4);
- 10) consultation be undertaken with Council tenants and owner occupiers to find out whether they would support repainting of the pebbledash properties on Ombersley Close and Rushock Close using lighter colours and, if so, which colours they would prefer to use (it being made clear to owner occupiers that this service would only be made available to them at a cost) (as detailed in paragraphs 4.11 – 4.11.5);
- 11) Worcestershire County Council Highways Officers be contacted to require them to repair the road surface entrance to Rushock Close (as detailed in paragraphs 4.12 – 4.12.4);
- 12) the Portfolio Holder for Housing, the Local Environment and Health be urged to consider the abolition of the garages in Wishaw Close as a priority case due to their bad state of repair (as detailed in paragraphs 4.13 – 4.13.3); and
- 13) the report be noted.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The review of the external refurbishment of the Council's housing stock was launched in September 2010. Initially, it had been intended that this review would be considered by a Task and Finish Group over a period of six months. However, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee requested on 15th September that the exercise be completed as a short, sharp review. The Committee requested that Councillor Vickery, who was appointed to

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lead the review, report back to the Committee by 17th November.
Councillor Norton was also invited to participate in the exercise.

- 3.2 The review was launched to address concerns about the aesthetic appeal of some of the Council's housing stock. Members recognised that many of the Council's properties in the Borough were maintained to a high standard both in terms of internal facilities and external appearance. However, concerns were expressed about the urban design of many of the Council's properties, particularly on the estates in Woodrow. The design of these buildings was generally not considered to be aesthetically appealing. Moreover, it was suggested that the outward appearance of a property was important as this could impact on: the morale of local residents; the extent to which they felt that they were valued as members of a local neighbourhood or community; and also on the perceptions of other residents and visitors towards the area.
- 3.3 The review was completed in two parts. In the first place, Councillors Vickery and Norton attended a walkabout in Woodrow on 6th October 2010 and were accompanied by relevant expert Officers. During the course of this walkabout Members visited Marley Close, Ombersley Close, Rushock Close and Wishaw Close and observed the condition of Council properties and the surrounding environment in those areas.
- 3.4 A number of issues were identified during the course of the walkabout which Members agreed required further consideration. In particular, issues were identified which had implications for: repairs and maintenance; housing; landscaping; and highways services. These were discussed in further detail during a meeting on 1st November, which formed the second part of the review. Based on these discussions Members proposed a number of recommendations.

4. KEY ISSUES/RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 Further information about each of the External Refurbishment of Housing Stock Short, Sharp Review recommendations is provided below:
- 4.2 **Recommendation One: We recommend that light colour paints be utilised to decorate garage doors to improve their visual appearance.**
- 4.2.1 During the course of the walkabout Members observed a number of garage doors for Council properties which had been painted brown. Members were concerned that this might not be the most suitable

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colour to apply to those garage blocks as the impact was to create an unappealing visual image, particularly for residents living in properties overlooking garage blocks. By contrast, Members agreed that where lighter colours could be used the appearance of such buildings was improved. Moreover, this served to improve the aesthetic appearance of local neighbourhoods, which it is contended could have a beneficial impact on local residents' quality of life.

4.2.2 Brown paint has been applied to numerous Council garages across the Borough. The supply of the paint and reapplication of paint to the garage doors is currently funded as part of the Council's standard repairs and maintenance process. Officers have advised that the introduction of lighter coloured paints into the Council's paint supply could be achieved relatively easily using existing budgets.

4.2.3 The Group were made aware, during the course of the walkabout, that a fresh coat of paint would recently have been applied by the Council to some garage doors. To ensure that the Council secures value for money, Members are suggesting that recently painted surfaces should not be reassessed immediately. Instead the lighter colour paint would only need to be applied as and when required.

4.3 **Recommendation Two: We recommend that the lintels featured on Council properties be decorated to improve the visual appearance of those properties.**

4.3.1 Lintels feature on the exterior façade of a number of properties in the Council's housing stock. Currently, these lintels are often plain features on similarly plain brick or concrete walls. However, the Group noted that the lintels could alternatively be painted in a bright colour to improve the visual appearance of these properties.

4.3.2 Officers have advised that this action could be completed at a relatively limited financial cost to the Council. The supply of paints used to decorate the garage doors could be utilised for this purpose.

4.4 **Recommendation Three: We recommend that the retaining wall to the rear of 1-12 Martley Close be redecorated as part of a Council arts project.**

4.4.1 Members observed a concrete wall to the rear of 1-12 Martley Close during the walkabout. As this was a retaining wall Members accepted that this feature could not be demolished. However, because the wall

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had been constructed using concrete Members expressed concerns that this feature was not aesthetically appealing to view. This added to the generally unattractive view to the rear of Martley Close, where a series of brown garage doors and a visibly large wall stain could be observed. In particular, the view was considered potentially oppressive for residents living in properties located along Woodrow Walk which overlooks the area. Members therefore agreed that particular action needed to be taken to improve the appearance of this local feature.

- 4.4.2 A number of community arts projects have been delivered in recent years which have involved both Redditch Borough Council, local partner organisations and local residents. These art projects have been delivered in a range of locations including pedestrian subways, bus shelters and the shutters utilised for shop units. Frequently, local young people have been involved in producing the artwork and this involvement has helped to encourage a feeling of community ownership and pride in the feature.
- 4.4.3 It is difficult to provide an exact estimate for how much this project would cost to deliver. Financial costs will vary according to a variety of factors including: the ambition of the project; the charges levied by the professional artists; and the materials that are used. However, Officers have estimated that the minimal costs for the project that has been recommended would be approximately £400. (Further information about the financial costs involved in delivering this type of arts project are provided in Appendix 2)
- 4.4.4 Members believe that the wall to the rear of 1-12 Martley Close could usefully form the focus for another community art project. Indeed, Members are keen to encourage community pride in the local area as this could help to secure greater community cohesion.
- 4.5 **Recommendation Four: We recommend that the Council assume responsibility for the maintenance of small strips of land located close to private properties and public spaces.**
- 4.5.1 During the course of the walkabout Members observed a case of fly tipping in Rushock Close, which was subsequently reported through the Council's standard reporting channels. The particular case involved the disposal of a certain amount of debris in both the garden of a property and on a narrow strip of public land bordering a public footpath.

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- 4.5.2 Officers have advised that similar small or narrow strips of land are located at various locations across the Borough, and often border both private properties and public spaces. These small strips of land can become overgrown and are unfortunately sometimes used for the disposal of litter.
- 4.5.3 Ownership of these areas of land is sometimes open to interpretation. However, the Group noted that inappropriate use of such areas could have a detrimental impact on the local environment and on the quality of life for local residents. Therefore, they are recommending that the Council should assume responsibility for the maintenance of these spaces.
- 4.6 **Recommendation Five: We recommend that the Council ensure that, when replacing diseased and dead plants, different types of plants are introduced to ensure there is a variety of leaf colours and foliage in any given area.**
- 4.6.1 Members agreed that the numerous plants, particularly the trees, located in Redditch overall created an appealing visual image for the town. However, Members expressed concerns that in some neighbourhoods there was a lack of variety amongst the plant life. As a consequence, Members are suggesting that sometimes the view created by this plant life could be considered potentially dull and uninspiring.
- 4.6.2 Members have been advised that the Council does not have a programme for planting work in the Borough. In the early years of the Development Corporation numerous trees and other plants were grown in local neighbourhoods. However, over time this had created difficulties. Many plants had unfortunately attracted vandalism or had not been properly cared for, which had created long-term maintenance problems. Consequently, to avoid extending this problem it was not considered appropriate to introduce additional plants into neighbourhoods in order to create greater diversity in the local foliage.
- 4.6.3 Due to the limited availability of resources planting often now only occurs when there is a need to replace diseased or dead plants. The Group are suggesting that when replacing these plants consideration should be given to introducing different plants to a Neighbourhood in order to encourage greater diversity.

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- 4.7 **Recommendation Six: We recommend that the remaining Section 106 money available for use on capital landscaping work in the Greenlands Open Spaces be allocated to soft landscaping work in the courtyard area located in Wishaw Close.**
- 4.7.1 Members visited a courtyard area close to 88 and 94 Wishaw Close during the course of the walkabout in Woodrow. This courtyard area bordered a number of residential properties as well as a small area of grassland. The ground surface lacked consistency and there was evidence that sections were overgrown with weeds whilst separate patches of tarmac had been added to fill the spaces that had been left when former children's play features had been removed.
- 4.7.2 Originally a couple of drains had been located on the ground surface of this courtyard. However, over time these drains had become overgrown with weeds and filled with debris. A number of residents encountered during the course of the walkabout explained that the problem had been consistently reported and, whilst the Council's landscaping and cleaning teams did clean these drains when they received reports, it remained a recurring problem. The residents also explained that the drainage problem was compounded by the increasing introduction of driveways throughout the area which was replacing formerly green spaces. This had reduced the surface area for natural drainage so that flooding was increasingly experienced in the neighbourhood following periods of heavy rainfall.
- 4.7.3 Attempts had been made in the past to improve the visual appearance and practical use of the space for the benefit of local residents. The children's play features and a bench had been installed at the location some years previously. However, residents reported that these features had attracted anti-social behaviour and had eventually been removed.
- 4.7.4 The Group was keen to resolve the continuing problems associated with the courtyard area to the benefit of local residents. They believe that an appropriate solution to the problem would be to extend the soft landscaping, or grassy area, to cover the whole of the outside space. This would help to resolve the existing problems with the ground surface and would extend the area of natural drainage that might help to reduce the impact of flooding in the neighbourhood.
- 4.7.5 Members have been advised that a proportion of section 106 money was secured in recent years for investment in capital projects that

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could be delivered in areas defined as the Greenlands Open Spaces. A portion of this funding remains available and the Group have been advised that it this could legitimately be spent on the project proposed by the Group and within budget. However, Officers have also noted that this project could legitimately be funded using other landscaping budgets without necessarily needing to use Section 106 funds. Further information about the estimated costs involved in delivering the project and the funds available are provided in Appendix 3.

- 4.7.6 Sections of the courtyard area are adopted land. Negotiations would therefore need to be undertaken with Worcestershire County Council over this project. Precedents have been established for negotiations over such works on approved lands and Officers anticipate that the proposed project would be welcomed by relevant departments at both Councils.
- 4.8 **Recommendation Seven: We recommend that in order to minimise the level of disruption experienced by local residents, a holistic approach to the delivery of frontline services be adopted.**
- 4.8.1 During the course of the walkabout Members discussed the arrangements in place for the delivery of frontline services. The Council delivered a variety of services which could impact on local tenants and residents, including repair and maintenance work to Council properties and landscaping work on local greenery.
- 4.8.2 However, delivery of these services was not co-ordinated but tended to be undertaken as and when required throughout the year. Members expressed concerns that this could potentially lead to a greater degree of disruption to residents' lives than might be necessary. The Group are contending, therefore, that there should be corporate planning over the timetables for delivering these services. As part of this process Officers from different departments would be required to liaise over forthcoming works and to attempt to co-ordinate service delivery so that such frontline services were delivered at the same time. Officers would potentially need to spend an extended period of time planning service delivery. However, the Group contends that this would minimise the level of disruption then experienced by local residents.
- 4.9 **Recommendation Eight: We recommend that representatives of local schools be invited to participate in estate walkabouts.**

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- 4.9.1 Estate Walkabouts are increasingly taking place in all wards across the Borough. The walkabouts provide an opportunity for representatives from a variety of services and organisations to work together to address residents', including Council tenants', needs at the local neighbourhood level. This could include reviewing many of the issues assessed by the Short Sharp Review Group and identifying suitable solutions to any problems that are observed.
- 4.9.2 The Council's Housing Team co-ordinates an annual schedule of Estate Walkabouts around the Council's housing estates. Frequently, representatives from the local Landscaping; Community Safety; Tenancy; and Anti-Social Behaviour teams are invited to participate in these walkabouts alongside local Police Officers and ward Councillors.
- 4.9.3 The value of these walkabouts has been recognised by Councillors in previous years and was promoted as an example of best practice for community engagement by the Neighbourhood Groups Task and Finish Group in 2009. However, the Group are suggesting that the value of these walkabouts could be further extended to help address some of the differences in quality of life affecting Redditch which were identified in the Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) for Worcestershire in 2009.
- 4.9.4 The CAA identified low educational attainment amongst young people in Redditch as a cause for concern. Members recognise that the CAA has now been disbanded. However, they are also aware that this does not mean that the problems with educational attainment in Redditch have been resolved.
- 4.9.5 The Group are suggesting that the conditions in which young people live, socialise and study indirectly impact on their achievements in education. As such, local schools should be familiar with these conditions so as to address the many factors impacting on the educational experiences of their pupils. The Group contends that participation in estate walkabouts would help representatives of local schools to develop this familiarity.
- 4.9.6 The Redditch Partnership has taken a strategic lead in addressing the low educational attainment levels that were identified in the CAA. The Group are therefore suggesting that it would be appropriate for the partnership to be advised about this recommendation.

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- 4.10 **Recommendation Nine: We recommend that representatives of the local GP's Consortium be invited to participate in the estate walkabouts once the consortia have been introduced in 2012/13.**
- 4.10.1 Health inequalities were also identified as a cause for concern in the CAA. Within Worcestershire Redditch was discovered to have the highest smoking levels and the least healthy lifestyles.
- 4.10.2 The Group is suggesting that the conditions in which a resident lives, works and socialises may impact on the health of local residents. Some residents may also have received limited education about healthy lifestyles. Under these circumstances the Group are contending that it would be appropriate to invite an expert medical practitioner to participate in the estate walkabouts as this could lead to improvements in public health. The participation of these medical practitioners would provide them with an opportunity to share ideas with local partner organisations as well with the chance to educate any local residents encountered during the course of the walkabouts about healthy lifestyles.
- 4.10.3 The Group are aware that the GP's Consortia are not scheduled to be launched until 2012/13. However, Members noted that these consortia would have a more localised focus than the current Primary Care Trusts (PCTs). Consequently, the Group contends that it would be appropriate to invite representatives of the consortia to participate in the estate walkabouts once these consortia have been established.
- 4.10.4 The Redditch Partnership has taken a strategic lead in addressing the health inequalities that were identified in the CAA. The Group are therefore suggesting that it would be appropriate for the partnership to be advised about this recommendation.
- 4.11 **Recommendation 10: We recommend that consultation be undertaken with Council tenants and owner occupiers to find out whether they would support repainting of the pebbledash properties on Ombersley Close and Rushock Close using lighter colours and, if so, which colours they would prefer to use (it being made clear to owner occupiers that this service would only be made available to them at a cost).**
- 4.11.1 During the course of the walkabout the Group observed a number of terraced houses with a pebbledash façade in Ombersley Close and Rushock Close. The pebbledash on these houses was arranged so

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that the top and bottom of the facing walls had been decorated in a different colour. For the majority of the blocks the top half of the buildings had been painted a light grey colour. The bottom half of these pebbledash walls had traditionally been painted black.

- 4.11.2 Members expressed some concerns that the appearance of these pebbledash buildings, particularly the darker lower half of the façade, was not visually appealing. Instead, they suggested that the use of brighter colours to decorate the bottom half of these properties might be more aesthetically pleasing. In particular, the Group agreed that improvements to the visual appearance of the pebbledash buildings could potentially have a beneficial impact on community morale. It was observed during the course of the walkabout that a number of owner occupied properties had been redecorated so that brighter colours had been applied to the lower half of the buildings. This, the Group is suggesting, may indicate that many residents have already recognised the benefits in terms of visual appearance that could be accrued from such redecoration works.
- 4.11.4 Officers have advised Members that the use of lighter colours to decorate the top of the pebbledash buildings and black to decorate the bottom half formed part of the original design for these buildings. As such, numerous coats of paint would be required to alter the colour of the surface. This type of work has been undertaken on similar properties in the past. However, this has tended to form part of a complex process, as it involves spray work and is relatively expensive (For further information about the costs involved in delivering this work please refer to Appendix 1). Consequently, additional expenditure might be required on appropriate paints as well as on the labour required to deliver the service.
- 4.11.5 A number of the pebbledash properties located on Ombersley Close and Rushock Close retain the original light grey and black appearance. Officers have identified 83 such properties, of which 36 are in the Council's housing stock. The Group recognises that the Council could not require owner occupiers to make alterations to the appearance of their houses. However, Members have suggested that it might be possible for the Council to alter the appearance of the 36 Council properties.
- 4.11.5 The demand for redecoration of the property surfaces would need to be assessed prior to any changes being made to the appearance of the buildings. This would require Officers to consult with tenants. The

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financial costs involved in undertaking this work would also need to be considered as part of this process.

4.12 **Recommendation 11: We recommend that Worcestershire County Council Highways Officers be contacted to require them to repair the road surface entrance to Rushock Close.**

4.12.1 Members also observed, during the walkabout, that the road surface in the entrance to Rushock Close and in the car park beside the garage blocks on that location were in a bad state of repair. The road had been affected by general wear and tear, though had also been disrupted by works undertaken by the utilities companies and ground frost the previous year.

4.12.2 By contrast, during the walkabout Members had noted approvingly a recently paved area close to one of the garage blocks in Rushock Close on which several bollards had been situated. This had been installed as part of the Estate Enhancements Programme in the area.

4.12.3 The Group were in agreement that the road surface needed to be improved in this area. They concurred that the matter should be reported to the County Highways Department using existing reporting channels. As requested, Officers advised relevant Officers at the County Highways Department on 25th November of these concerns about the road surface in that location.

4.12.4 During the course of the review there had also been some question as to whether the road surface at the entrance to Rushock Close was the responsibility of Redditch Borough Council or the Highways Department at Worcestershire County Council, though it has subsequently been confirmed that the road surface is the responsibility of the County Highways Department. Based on this uncertainty the Group have suggested to Officers that it might be useful for a detailed map of the Borough to be developed to clarify areas of responsibility for all designated roadways and pathways. This could be made available to assist Officers and could be circulated for Members' consideration.

4.13 **Recommendation 12: We recommend that the Portfolio Holder for Housing, the Local Environment and Health be urged to consider the abolition of the garages in Wishaw Close as a priority case due to their bad state of repair.**

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- 4.13.1 A number of garage blocks were observed during the course of the walkabout. There are 39 garages located on Wishaw Close. 26 of these garages are currently rented by residents. A further 13 of the garages are currently empty.
- 4.13.2 Members expressed particular concerns about the condition of the garage blocks located in Wishaw Close. Many of the garages were in a bad state of repair and some, rather than retaining garage doors, had been boarded over. Officers advised the Group that use of these garage blocks by local residents was low. In part, many residents were dissuaded from using the garages because there was limited lighting in the area and there were concerns about anti-social behaviour. Furthermore, many residents were keen to park their vehicles close to their properties, rather than in a separate garage block.
- 4.13.3 The Council has already recognised that there are significant issues in relation to use of the garages. Officers are currently working with the Portfolio Holder for Housing, Local Environment and Health, Councillor Brandon Clayton, to review car parking arrangements as part of an ongoing car parking project. Councillor Clayton has confirmed that as part of this process the garages located on Wishaw Close have been included on the car parking project list to be considered for possible demolition.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The majority of the recommended actions could be implemented not just in Woodrow but also in other parts of the Borough at a relatively low financial cost to the Council.
- 5.2 Implementation of the actions requested in recommendation six would require a greater degree of expenditure. However, the Group has been assured that the funding required is available in the form of the section 106 funding secured on a previous occasion. This can be utilised to fund projects that would benefit the local community and should be spent in accordance with set rules and procedures. The Group has been advised that the project they are proposing would comply with these requirements.

6. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no legal implications.

7. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

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The Group are recommending a number of changes to working practices which could have policy implications for particular Council services.

8. COUNCIL OBJECTIVES

The Group's recommendations are designed to enable the Council to meet the objective to be a well managed organisation. In addition, the Group believes that many of the actions they are suggesting, particularly with regards to the visual appearance of Council properties, would help the Council to meet the corporate aim to be clean and green.

9. RISK MANAGEMENT INCLUDING HEALTH & SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS

There are no direct risk management including health and safety implications.

10. CUSTOMER IMPLICATIONS

The Short, Sharp Review Group are recommending actions which are designed to improve living conditions, particularly for the Council's tenants. Furthermore, the Group are suggesting that if the Council was to adopt a holistic approach to service delivery the level of disruption experienced by local residents, including Council tenants, would be minimised. Implementation of this recommendation would therefore have positive implications for local customers.

11. EQUALITIES AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

There are no direct equalities and diversity implications.

12. VALUE FOR MONEY IMPLICATIONS, PROCUREMENT AND ASSET MANAGEMENT

The Group recognises that any measures which are implemented in response to this report should be cost effective and represent value for money. In particular, the Group are requesting that if recommendation one is approved, any Council garage doors that were recently painted brown should only receive a fresh coat of lighter paint once redecoration is required. This would ensure that the Council obtains value for money from work that has already been completed.

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13. CLIMATE CHANGE, CARBON IMPLICATIONS AND BIODIVERSITY

The introduction of soft landscaping features in the courtyard area located in Wishaw Close would expand the surface area suitable for natural drainage. This would help to address some of the problems that residents have recently reported with flooding in the vicinity.

14. HUMAN RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS

There are no direct human resources implications.

15. GOVERNANCE/PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

There are no direct governance or performance management implications.

16. COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS INCLUDING SECTION 17 OF CRIME AND DISORDER ACT 1998

During the course of the walkabout on 6th October Members and Officers observed some evidence of anti-social behaviour. Evidence of anti-social behaviour is generally identified by Anti-Social Behaviour and Community Safety Officers when conducting regular site visits to locations across the Borough and is not strictly within the remit of the Group to review. The evidence that was observed has been referred to the Redditch Community Safety Partnership's Tasking Group for further consideration.

17. HEALTH INEQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

The proposal to involve representatives of the local GP's Consortium in estate walkabouts does have health inequalities implications. The inclusion of representatives from the health service in these walkabouts might help local partners to identify issues within the local environment which encourage unhealthy lifestyles. Moreover, medical practitioners could provide expert advice on healthy lifestyles to any residents encountered during the walkabouts.

18. LESSONS LEARNT

Short, sharp scrutiny reviews have rarely been undertaken in Redditch. However, this review has demonstrated that short sharp reviews can add value and can be completed relatively quickly. The Overview and Scrutiny

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Committee might therefore wish to consider expanding the use of short sharp review arrangements for scrutinising relevant subjects in future years.

19. COMMUNITY AND STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

19.1 During the course of the walkabout two residents engaged in conversation with the Members and raised a number of concerns about Wishaw Close. The views expressed by these residents were taken into consideration by the Councillors and helped to inform their final recommendations.

19.2 Wider community consultation has not been undertaken to date, in part due to the brief length of time available to complete a short, sharp review. Consultation with tenants would need to be considered as part of any additional recommendations that may be made on the subject of the appearance of the Council housing stock, including the pebbledash buildings.

20. OTHERS CONSULTED ON THE REPORT

Portfolio Holder	Not directly, though Councillor Brandon Clayton was present at the first meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee when the report was originally considered.
Chief Executive	No.
Executive Director (S151 Officer)	No.
Executive Director – Leisure, Cultural, Environmental and Community Services	No.
Executive Director – Planning & Regeneration, Regulatory and Housing Services	No.
Director of Policy, Performance and Partnerships	No.

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Head of Service	The Head of Community Services and the Head of Housing both participated in the walkabout in Woodrow and have been consulted over the Group's recommendations.
Head of Resources	No.
Head of Legal, Equalities & Democratic Services	No.
Corporate Procurement Team	No.

21. WARDS AFFECTED

Greenlands ward is directly affected by the recommendations detailed within this report. However, many of the Group's recommendations could also be implemented in other wards in the Borough.

22. APPENDICES

Appendix 1- Repair and Maintenance Costs.

Appendix 2 – Art Projects – Financial Costs.

Appendix 3 – Estimated Cost of Proposed Soft Landscaping Works in Wishaw Close.

23. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Comprehensive Area Assessment 2009, Audit Commission.

Neighbourhood Groups Task and Finish Group, Final Report, 2009.

Notes from the walkabout in Woodrow which took place on Wednesday 6th October 2010.

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Notes from the meeting of the External Refurbishment of Housing Stock Short, Sharp Review Group which took place on Monday 1st November 2010.

Photographic evidence taken during the walkabout on 6th October 2010.

24. KEY

CAA – Comprehensive Area Assessment.

25. EXPRESSIONS OF THANKS

The External Refurbishment of Housing Stock Short sharp Review Group would like to thank the following individuals for the help they provided during the course of the review. As this was a short sharp review the process had to be completed quickly and a number of people provided information when requested in a very short space of time.

The Group would particularly like to thank the residents from Wishaw Close who engaged with the Councillors during the walkabout.

Members also wish to thank the following Officers for the contributions they have made to this review:

Jayne Bough, Housing Services Manager
Angie Heighway, Head of Community Services
Peter Hill, Community Safety Project Officer
Amar Hussain, Assistant Solicitor
Ian Ranford, Capital Operations Manager
Liz Tompkin, Head of Housing
Carl Walker, Landscape and Countryside Manager
Mark White, Capital Projects Officer

AUTHOR OF REPORT

Name: Jess Bayley, Overview and Scrutiny Support Officer
E Mail: jess.bayley@redditchbc.gov.uk
Tel: (01527) 64252 Extn: 3268.

Appendix 1

Repair and Maintenance Costs

The External Refurbishment of Housing Stock Short Sharp Review Group have recommended that the garage doors and lintels featuring on Council properties should be painted in light colours.

Paint:

The estimated cost for any colour of paint that could be applied to garages, lintels and concrete uprights, is £87.50 per garage.

Rough Cast Works:

Repair and maintenance can also carry out rough cast works to houses. This was considered by the Group for the redecoration of the pebbledash houses in Ombersley Close and Rushock Close, 39 of which are in the Council's housing stock.

The estimated cost of applying paint to the pebbledash on the inner property section (including scaffolding) is £1,266.

The estimated cost of applying paint to the pebbledash lower section (including scaffolding) is £431.12.

The estimated cost of painting the pebbledash gable (including scaffolding) is £1,936.60.

It is anticipated that the costs would reduce when accurate site measurements and constructors' discounts are applied.

Appendix 2:

Arts Projects – Financial Costs

The financial costs involved in delivering an arts project vary according to the scale of the project. However, based on the costs levied for a recent arts project it is possible to estimate the minimal costs.

Recent Arts Project: Brick Bus Shelters

For this project two brick bus shelter were spray painted, (covering a space approximately equivalent to two to three times the space of the wall in Martley Close). Each bus shelter also received an anti-graffiti coating. Two professional artist were contracted to deliver the art project in co-operation with a small group (4-12) supervised young people. The designs were created by the young people. The total financial cost involved in delivering this project was £660.

Arts Project, Martley Close: Estimated Cost

The wall appears to cover a smaller surface area than the two bus shelters, and would be approximately the size of a width of a standard garage door (though no measurements have been taken). It has been estimated that for an area the size of one garage door space, and if the art work was completed to the same standard as the bus shelter project, the minimum costs involved in delivering the project would be approximately £400. This is based on an estimate that the work would take four hours to complete.

Officers have advised that if the area needed to be pre-painted ready for the artwork an additional £80.00 would be added to the price.

Appendix 3: Estimated Cost of Proposed Soft Landscaping Works in Wishaw Close

The External Refurbishment of Housing Stock Short, Sharp Review Group are proposing that soft landscaping work should be undertaken in the courtyard area located to the front of 94 and 88 Wishaw Close using Section 106 funds. The following information has been provided by Officers to produce an estimate for the financial costs involved in completing this work:

Work required:

The courtyard area to the front of 94 and 88 Wishaw Close currently has a bitumen coating. This covers a surface area of approximately 89m². A main sewer cover is located in this area which will need to be lifted by brickwork.

To complete the soft landscape work in a simple form the old bitumen surface would first need to be removed and disposed of. Top soil would then need to be imported and graded over the area to seed for grass.

Estimate: An estimate has been requested from one of the council's contractor's to provide an approximation of the costs involved in delivering this work. The contractor estimated that the work would cost £2,000 – £2,500 + VAT to complete.

Section 106 funding available:

It is estimated that £6,000 of section 106 funds are available which could legitimately be allocated to funding this project.

**Worcestershire County Council
Worcestershire Hub Scrutiny Task Group**



Scrutiny Report: Worcestershire Hub

November 2010

www.worcestershire.gov.uk

Scrutiny Task Group Membership

County Council Members

Bob Banks (Lead Member)
Nathan Desmond
Lucy Hodgson
Beverley Nielsen (until April)
Stephen Peters
David Thain
Liz Tucker (from April)

District Council Co-opted Members

Bromsgrove District Council	Kit Taylor
Malvern Hills District Council	Roger Sutton
Redditch Borough Council	Robin King (January)
	Jinny Pearce (February – May)
	Gay Hopkins (May – August)
	Roger Hill (from August)
Worcester City Council	Geoff Williams
Wychavon District Council	Laurie Evans
Wyre Forest District Council	Graham Ballinger (January – March and from April)
	Jenny Greener (March – April)

Officer Support

Suzanne O'Leary, Overview and Scrutiny Manager
Emma James and Jo Weston, Overview and Scrutiny Officers
Annette Stock and Emma Breckin, Scrutiny Liaison Officers for Corporate Services

Further copies of this report are available from:

Overview and Scrutiny Team
Legal and Democratic Services
Worcestershire County Council
County Hall
Spetchley Road
Worcester
WR5 2NP

Tel: 01905 766916
E-mail: scrutiny@worcestershire.gov.uk
Website: www.worcestershire.gov.uk/scrutiny

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Foreword

I am very pleased to be able to present our scrutiny of the Worcestershire Hub. This report sums up our discussions, evidence taking, findings and recommendations for the Worcestershire Hub, which we hope will provide constructive steps towards the Hub's development in the future.

As part of our investigations we have looked at performance, finance, governance, customer satisfaction and experience, information technology individual services, council staff views, parish council views, councillor awareness, what other local authorities are doing, and best practice. At the start of this scrutiny we agreed that it was very important to look to the future development of the Hub.

This has been the first scrutiny I have led, and it has proved both challenging and rewarding. Within the Worcestershire Hub are single district hubs, as well as the Hub Shared Service, all participating to greater or lesser degrees, and this has made it extremely difficult, if not impossible to identify the differences and make comparisons.

The main reward for the task group has been the opportunity to understand more about an operation which is central to how the public accesses council services, both through the Hub Shared Service, and through the individual district Hubs. We have been surprised by the lack of common knowledge amongst many councillors, and urge our fellow councillors to become better informed. Hopefully, our report will contribute to an increased understanding.

There are a number of people to thank who have assisted with this report, starting with the task group members themselves. In spite of a number of membership changes over the course of the scrutiny, I am very grateful for your dedication and constructive debate.

We would like to thank all of those who have contributed to our investigations, both within Worcestershire County Council and the District Councils. In particular we would like to thank the staff at the various Hub centres around Worcestershire, for the time they took to facilitate our visits, and for their obvious energy and professionalism. A considerable proportion of the information we requested was provided by Rachel Hill, as Head of the Worcestershire Hub Shared Service. We are very grateful for her expertise and attention to detail in what is clearly a very demanding work area.

Finally, I would like to thank the scrutiny officers for their ongoing support in facilitating a very complex scrutiny, and for keeping us on the right track.

Bob Banks

Lead Member of the Worcestershire Hub Scrutiny Task Group

November 2010

Worcestershire Hub Scrutiny Report EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Terms of Reference

- The development of the Worcestershire Hub, including the Worcestershire Hub Shared Service
- How to make the Worcestershire Hub fit for purpose in the future
- Differences in provision across Worcestershire, what they are and why they exist?
- What are the gaps in provision and what are the opportunities?

Main Findings

Development of the Worcestershire Hub, including the Worcestershire Hub Shared Service

The Worcestershire Hub is made up of the Hub Shared Service and separate arrangements for four district councils. This fact means that there are many differences and perhaps, a lack of unity. However, despite the differences, our scrutiny has revealed a clear commitment to the Hub as a whole for the future; no one is retreating.

The pragmatic approach taken in the first few years, to allow authorities to participate in the Hub to greater or lesser degrees, and the subsequent emergence of the Worcestershire Hub Shared Service, has led to considerable differences between shared service and non-shared service authorities in the way they handle customer engagement and differences in the breadth and depth of services provided by each customer contact centre.

It is apparent that if the County Council seeks to encourage the remaining district councils to join the Hub Shared Service, they need to communicate clear evidence about the benefits, including performance, customer satisfaction and cost savings.

Differences in provision

There are substantial differences in the role and depth of use of the Hub across the non-shared service councils and the corresponding lack of comparable data that is available. It is an acknowledged gap in our findings that we have therefore been unable to make clear comparisons between the different Hub operations on their performance and value for money.

Councillors' knowledge of the Worcestershire Hub

Many councillors' knowledge of the Hub is limited or patchy and often restricted to what happens within his or her own area.

Governance

The governance arrangements have developed over time due to the way the Hub has grown and evolved. In effect, two structures have evolved, one for the Worcestershire Hub as a whole and one for the Worcestershire Hub Shared Service. We consider that the current governance arrangements have developed in a piecemeal way, are complex and overly layered.

Costs, funding and savings

There is a huge variation in the cost of the different types of transaction, whether it be in person, over the phone or online. Face to face customer service is very expensive, and although we feel strongly that there will always be a need for it, it is clear that online customer access is in growing demand and offers huge potential for the future.

The more services using the Hub, the better value it becomes.

An acknowledged gap in our findings is that we have not been able to make clear comparisons between the different Hub operations on their performance and value for money. This was due to the differences and lack of comparative data, referred to above.

Performance / Quality of Customer Experience

We are satisfied that lessons have been learned from the performance problems experienced during the Summer 2009, which appear to have resulted when a major ICT implementation project for the Revenues and Benefits Shared Service coincided with the start of the economic decline, when revenues and benefits enquiries increased dramatically. We have made recommendations that plans should be in place to better forecast demand and unpredicted peaks in service demand.

How the Hub continues to perform in the future, and crucially how its performance is measured and monitored is important for building confidence with all partners and services.

The performance information traditionally gathered by the Shared Service and the non shared service areas, focuses largely on processes and transactions – such as numbers of calls and speed of answer. There needs to be a greater focus on measuring the quality of the customer experience. Our remaining recommendations on performance are targeted at improving customer experience as a whole, and the flow of information between the service areas and the Hub, and vice versa.

The Hub brand

The 'Hub' means different things to different people, and more needs to be done to communicate its role and purpose.

Changing the way in which customers access council information – council websites and self-service

There are huge savings to be made by encouraging and facilitating more customers to use online/self-service routes for their enquiries. The demand is there, and needs to be enabled by council websites that are as customer-friendly and efficient as possible. The increasing economic pressures on all public services means we cannot afford not to prioritise this, and that this will then free up the face to face and telephony services for those who need them.

The future

The pressure on all authorities to make efficiencies means that service transformation is essential. We agree that the Hub should be at the heart of this service transformation. A co-ordinated approach to customer service across the county would enable savings to be made and minimise duplication.

Recommendations

RECOMMENDATION 1: If the Hub is to be increasingly used as a basis for service transformation across the County, it is vital that there is councillor understanding and support across all authorities. All authorities should ensure their inductions include briefing about customer service strategies across the whole of the Worcestershire Hub (and not just their local area), including visits to both local centres and the Worcestershire Hub Shared Service Contact Centre (based at Perry Wood Walk).

RECOMMENDATION 2: All authorities consider their scrutiny arrangements of shared services – this could be done at the joint scrutiny chairs and vice-chairs network.

RECOMMENDATION 3: We recommend that each authority and the Worcestershire Hub Shared Service review governance arrangements across the Worcestershire Hub Partnership. The aim would be to ensure clarity, accountability and transparency and to move towards a single governance structure.

RECOMMENDATION 4: We recommend that the District Councils should consider researching the cost of individual transactions for different services, which will build on the work being carried out by the Hub Shared Service.

RECOMMENDATION 5: The more services use the Hub, the better value it becomes. Therefore, as part of the BOLD programme, the County Council should increase its efforts to ensure all its services use the Hub.

RECOMMENDATION 6: In light of future funding and the move towards self-service within the Hub, all authorities and the South Worcestershire Shared Services Joint Committee should monitor and record the efficiencies and savings gained by use of the Hub.

RECOMMENDATION 7: Appropriate resource plans for the Hub are in place to better plan for forecast demand.

RECOMMENDATION 8: The Hub also needs to be prepared to deal with unpredicted peaks in service demand, and we recommend that Business Continuity Plans are in place across the Hub Shared Service and the non shared service Hubs.

RECOMMENDATION 9: Performance information should be consistent across the Shared Service and the non-Shared Service districts, to enable like for like comparisons, and we recommend a single performance management framework is established across the Hub.

RECOMMENDATION 10: All performance information – for shared service and non-shared service districts – should be made available to all councillors.

RECOMMENDATION 11: We recommend that all partners consider the role which scrutiny could play in helping to monitor performance of the Worcestershire Hub, if they have not already done so.

RECOMMENDATION 12: For telephone enquiries, inform customers of their place in the queue, or an estimated wait time for them to be able to speak to a customer service advisor.

RECOMMENDATION 13: Define and agree Service Level Agreements between the Worcestershire Hub and every service area.

RECOMMENDATION 14: Ensure there is sufficient time allocated for service area staff and Hub staff to review any issues or needs, and to monitor service provision via the Hub.

RECOMMENDATION 15: Further work on the flow of information between the service area and the Hub (and vice versa) should take place, to ensure that the correct information is provided by the Hub to the service area, and that service area staff provide a response which enables Hub staff to answer the customer enquiry. It is important that both teams understand the implications of what the information they provide will be for the customer. The creation of Service Level Agreements between the Hub and services will support this.

RECOMMENDATION 16: Give all customers the enquiry reference number, to encourage and enable them to track progress themselves online, and reduce the need for repeat enquiries to the Hub.

RECOMMENDATION 17: move towards more consistent IT packages, as contracts come up for renewal.

RECOMMENDATION 18: In view of the negative feedback from our survey of parish councillors, we recommend further dialogue between senior officer representatives from the Worcestershire Hub and parish councils, to ensure their feedback can be used to improve the overall Hub service.

RECOMMENDATION 19: The 'Hub' means different things to different people. We recommend further communication of the Hub's identity and services to the public. This could, for example, accompany the issue of council tax bills, which would present a cost-effective opportunity for marketing.

RECOMMENDATION 20: Our investigation of best practice advice and customer survey results supports our findings that the website offers huge potential for helping customers to help themselves, and for making substantial efficiency savings. This can only be achieved if the website is as user-friendly and effective as possible. We are pleased to see that the website is being improved and recommend that this work continues in order to realise the potential gains in customer satisfaction and efficiency gains.

RECOMMENDATION 21: In addressing the website and its expanding role in customer contact, we recommend that consideration is given to where the website sits within the council's organisational structure. This should take account of the need to align expertise in customer contact and communication, as well as information technology.

RECOMMENDATION 22: Councils' websites are very important and their profile needs to reflect this. A cabinet member for each authority should have responsibility for the website within his or her portfolio.

REPORT OF THE WORCESTERSHIRE HUB SCRUTINY TASK GROUP

INTRODUCTION

1. The Worcestershire Hub was launched in 2002 and is a partnership between the County Council and the six district councils. It was established to provide a One Stop Service for customers accessing council services in Worcestershire. The aim being to provide a one stop service that could be accessed in person, online and by telephone. The Worcestershire Hub Shared Service was formally established in April 2009. The authorities participating in the Shared Service are: Malvern Hills District Council Worcester City Council and Worcestershire County Council
2. In June 2009 there was a Notice of Motion to the County Council which stated that 'Residents are becoming increasingly frustrated at the difficulty in accessing the Hub and obtaining a response to their enquiries. Concerns included the length of time taken to answer calls and the lack of feedback.'
3. Following an initial briefing to councillors, in December 2009 the County Council's Overview and Scrutiny Performance Board (OSPB) agreed to establish a scrutiny task group, chaired by Councillor Bob Banks and, as the Hub is a joint initiative, to invite each district council to co-opt a councillor onto the group.
4. Although the notice of motion was an initial trigger for considering a scrutiny of the Hub, given the key role the Hub has in the future development and reform of services, the scope of the scrutiny agreed by the OSPB was much broader than just investigating the performance of the Worcestershire Hub Shared Service in 2009. Additionally, by the time the scrutiny exercise had started, it was known that the performance issues experienced during 2009 were already being dealt with.
5. It was therefore intended that the scrutiny would focus on the way forward for the Worcestershire Hub as a whole.

Terms of Reference

6. The terms of reference were to look at:
 - The development of the Worcestershire Hub, including the Worcestershire Hub Shared Service
 - How to make the Worcestershire Hub fit for purpose in the future
 - Differences in provision across Worcestershire, what they are and why they exist?
 - What are the gaps in provision and what are the opportunities?
7. In addressing these terms of reference it has been necessary to obtain information about performance, funding and governance and these are dealt with in separate sections of the report.
8. We have also looked at the way in which customer access to council services is likely to change in the future. This section and our comments on governance address in part the question of how to make the Worcestershire Hub fit for purpose in the future, but we were unable to examine this issue in great depth. Our discussion of the differences in provision across the County sheds some light on the

gaps in provision, but limited time meant we could not look in detail at all service areas across all authorities to see where future opportunities for the Hub may lie.

Methodology

9. Evidence has been gathered from discussions with a variety of officers, and through a series of smaller sub-group meetings, visits and research. Details of the task group's activity and the information considered are detailed at [Appendix 1](#).

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE HUB, INCLUDING THE WORCESTERSHIRE HUB SHARED SERVICE

10. The Worcestershire Hub was established in 2002 to provide customers with a one-stop shop service for all council services that is joined-up, accessible by all, supports the two tiers of local government in Worcestershire, and offers customers a choice of how to access services.
11. There were a number of drivers to establish the Worcestershire Hub:
 - a. Improving customer service including specifically dealing with more enquiries at the first point of contact;
 - b. Improving access to services across the two-tiers of local government in Worcestershire;
 - c. The eGovernment Agenda (the Government had targeted all local authorities with providing 100% of relevant services electronically by 2005);
 - d. Local Public Service Agreement.
12. A co-ordinated approach to customer service across the county would improve the accessibility of services to the general public in all seven authorities, enable savings to be made in the back offices and minimise duplication.
13. In 2002 it was felt that the establishment of a single customer contact centre would be a step too far and therefore a network of smaller teams and centres were put in place with the intention of operating as a single virtual centre, building on the existing "one stop shops" around the County. A legal agreement – the partnership agreement – was agreed to define joint funding and other arrangements.
14. Each authority participated to differing degrees and at different paces. This has resulted in a range of service delivery mechanisms continuing to exist behind a uniformly branded front of house. The Worcestershire Hub has developed progressively through the establishment of a network of customer centres and joined up service delivery.
15. The vision agreed by Leaders and Chief Executives was for “an organisation that is owned by the Local Government family in Worcestershire to deliver excellent services to our communities and being capable of delivering services to a variety of depths”.
16. In 2008 the Chief Executives and Leaders considered a business case outlining the strategic development of the Worcestershire Hub. This resulted in a subsequent decision by three of the partner authorities to establish a shared service for the Worcestershire Hub. The Worcestershire Hub Shared Service was formally established in April 2009. The authorities participating in the Shared Service are: Malvern Hills District Council, Worcester City Council and Worcestershire County

Council. The shared service is governed by the South Worcestershire Shared Services Joint Committee and a legal framework and agreement is in place to support this.

17. As part of the agreed development of the shared service, a contact centre at Perry Wood Walk, Worcester was opened in 2009 and handles all calls for those participating in the Worcestershire Hub Shared Service. The number of services dealt with by Perry Wood has been increasing, and includes libraries, highways, regulatory services, and revenues and benefits calls (for South Worcestershire), amongst many others.
18. The County Council is aiming to make the Hub the first point of contact for all County Council services. Currently approx 70% of County Council services do so.
19. The Worcestershire Hub continues to play a key role in transforming customer services and the way all seven councils deliver services. It is now at the heart of the County Council's BOLD (Better Outcomes, Leaner Delivery) programme to find efficiencies and transform services, and it is also an important element of the Worcestershire Enhanced Two Tier (WETT) programme, helping authorities across the county to deliver efficiencies over the next few years. Key themes to the customer focused transformation are:
 - Make the Worcestershire Hub the first point of contact for council services
 - Reduce the number of contacts customers need to make
 - Increase self-service
 - Ensure services are customer focused and efficient
20. The Hub has evolved and grown since its original inception in 2002, and this journey has led to it being a complex and varied service. There is no single officer with overall responsibility for the Worcestershire Hub across the county.

DIFFERENCES IN PROVISION ACROSS WORCESTERSHIRE, WHAT THEY ARE AND WHY THEY EXIST?

21. The pragmatic approach taken in the first few years, to allow authorities to participate in the Hub to greater or lesser degrees, and the subsequent emergence of the Worcestershire Hub Shared Service, has led to considerable differences between shared service and non-shared service authorities in the way they handle customer engagement and differences in the breadth and depth of services provided by each customer contact centre.
22. It became clear at the start of the scrutiny that the phrase "Worcestershire Hub" means different things to different people. It can refer to the partnership between all seven authorities to consider coordinated customer services, to each authority's individual customer service provision, or to the Worcestershire Hub Shared Service. Councillors' perception of the Hub's performance and its value was largely based on their knowledge of their local customer contact centres. This complexity has hindered parts of our scrutiny, but has also prompted some of the recommendations we make in this report.

23. We held discussions with senior officer representatives from each of the district councils, whose roles were connected with the Hub. A summary of these discussions is included at [Appendix 2](#).

Some of the differences

- differences in the range and depth of services provided by the customer contact centres of the shared service and the non shared service
- not all County Council services use the Hub as the first point of contact, e.g. Family Information Service
- the public could be put through directly to the service area in one district, but be dealt with in full at first point of contact in another (for district council services)
- one district Hub acts as a switchboard (with a single telephone number) for the authority. This means that there are no published direct dial numbers
- all of the district councils each have a single telephone number which customers use to contact the Hub, whereas the county council issues several numbers (3 main telephone numbers, plus service based numbers). The Shared Service has 3 main telephone numbers, plus service based numbers
- there are some different performance indicators between the shared service and the non shared service authorities
- customer contact centres have different opening times (with the exception of the shared service)
- Redditch Contact Centre had started to deal with council tax telephone enquiries from the end of 2009
- different “back office” ICT systems (most relating to district council services) with no integration to the customer relationship management system (CRM)
- other than the Worcestershire Hub Shared Service, staff are employed and managed by the individual district councils.
- the County Council hosts all of the district council websites, with the exception of Worcester City.

Some of the similarities

- visitor access is equal across the county, as there are customer service centres in all the county's main towns
- a standard set of questions is used to seek customer feedback, which is used in centres dealing with contacts in person and over the phone
- if a call is received at a non-shared service district contact centre, which does not relate to one of its services (e.g. Highways), it should be dealt with if possible, or referred to the shared service contact centre
- the majority of contacts made in person relate to district council services
- Common branding and image across all centres
- Common ICT application to support service delivery
- Interactive Voice technology is being used, albeit this is limited at present.

(Interactive voice response technology automates routine telephone inquiries by leading callers through prerecorded voice prompts that let them quickly access, enter or modify data using voice commands or their telephone's touch-tone keypad)

24. One of the differences listed above is the variety of telephone numbers given to the public to access council services. The Task Group explored why this was the case and why there was no single, county-wide telephone number.
25. The Head of the Worcestershire Hub Shared Service advised that the decision had been taken to have specific service numbers for the Worcestershire Hub Shared

Service (e.g. Highways, Revenues and Benefits), as this enabled the right people to answer calls, by directing calls to advisors who have been specifically trained in these areas.

26. Those of us who visited the Shared Service contact centre at Perry Wood could see the advantage of this system and **we recognise the merit in being able to channel certain calls, depending on their subject or simplicity.**

COUNCILLORS' KNOWLEDGE OF THE WORCESTERSHIRE HUB

27. It soon became clear that councillors' knowledge of the Hub was at different levels, partly due to the complexity of the Hub arrangements and the difference in provision across the County. Some councillors had very little knowledge of how the Hub worked, or experience of using it, whereas others made regular use of the Hub as a means of obtaining information, or following up enquires. Some councillors received performance information on the Hub in their area; others did not, or were not aware of it. It is also fair to say that there was a certain amount of distrust among some councillors around the effectiveness of Worcestershire Hub Shared Service and a lack of understanding about the areas that it covered.
28. There was also a difference between the views and experiences of Worcestershire Hub Shared Service council members (Worcestershire County Council, Malvern Hills District Council and Worcester City) and non-shared service council members. Non shared service council members felt that their councils' Hub performance had continued to serve their areas well, and had not been affected by the economic downturn. However, one factor behind this could be that their councils did not use the Hub for customer enquiries on areas such as revenues and benefits, and instead, channelled enquiries via the service areas directly.
29. To gain a better understanding and improve knowledge, we visited the majority of Hub centres across the county. These visits proved invaluable to the scrutiny, and have informed many of the recommendations contained in this report. Indeed the scrutiny as a whole has allowed us all to see what happens in other areas, both within and outside the Hub Shared Service. All of us who visited were surprised by the volume of customer enquiries, and the range and complexity of enquiries being dealt with by each customer service advisor. We would like to place on record our thanks to the staff at these centres for their time, enthusiasm and professionalism in facilitating our visits.

Induction Arrangements

30. We asked each authority what their councillor induction arrangements included about the Worcestershire Hub. We found the induction programmes varied considerably: some councils provide Hub briefing sessions and facilitated visits to telephony and face to face centres, others provide little or no information on the Hub.
31. We have been surprised by the fact that many councillors' knowledge of the Hub is limited or patchy and often restricted to what happens within his or her own area. Inevitably, the future development of the Hub will be influenced by councillor understanding, and if the Hub is to be increasingly used as a basis for service transformation across the County, it is vital that there is councillor understanding and support across all authorities. Improved councillor induction is an essential way of increasing understanding of the Worcestershire Hub, and, crucially, the role it

plays for the public. The Hub is at the heart of the council's communication with the public, and it is therefore important and beneficial to councillors that they understand how it works and what the public's experiences are. A visit to Perry Wood would be especially useful in light of the WETT programme, whereby more services are becoming shared and will use this telephony centre to handle customer enquiries.

RECOMMENDATION 1: If the Hub is to be increasingly used as a basis for service transformation across the County, it is vital that there is councillor understanding and support across all authorities. All authorities should ensure their inductions include briefing about customer service strategies across the whole of the Worcestershire Hub (and not just their local area), including visits to both local centres and the Worcestershire Hub Shared Service Contact Centre (based at Perry Wood Walk).

GOVERNANCE

32. Closely linked to councillor knowledge of the Hub is their involvement in it. There was a feeling amongst some task group members that involvement of non-executive councillors was fairly limited. The main route to engage in the development of the Hub, and in particular the growing number of shared services, is through overview and scrutiny. However, other than this task group and the 2009 Scrutiny of the South Worcestershire Revenues and Benefits Shared Service, it appeared there had not been much thinking yet amongst scrutiny members across the County about how the various shared services would be scrutinised.

RECOMMENDATION 2: All authorities consider their scrutiny arrangements of shared services – this could be done at the joint scrutiny chairs and vice-chairs network.

33. We requested information about the governance arrangements for the Worcestershire Hub in order to look at how decisions are made and who was responsible for the Hub e.g. when performance slipped.

34. A structure chart of the current governance arrangements for the Worcestershire Hub is attached at Appendix 3.

35. The main responsible bodies are:

Worcestershire Hub Partnership Board

36. This comprises two members and one officer from each council, plus the Head of the Worcestershire Hub Shared Service. Chaired by Cllr Stephen Clee, its role was to consider the strategic direction at the start of the Hub's development. It does not have decision making powers, although it can make endorsements, which would then be taken back to the councils. This, and a lack of effective engagement from some partners, has limited its effectiveness. As a consequence, as the direction of the Hub developed, the Chief Executives and Leaders Panel has become the preferred reporting route, and more recently this is now used and the Hub Board meets infrequently.

37. The role of the Worcestershire Hub Partnership Board is supported by the Hub Strategic Management Group which comprises a senior officer from each partner, including the Head of the Hub Shared Service.

South Worcestershire Shared Services Joint Committee

38. This comprises two members from each partner council (Malvern Hills, Worcester City, Worcestershire County Council and Wychavon), but voting limited to members from councils participating in the individual service being discussed. A Legal Agreement is in place to support the delegation of functions for each of the individual services to the Joint Committee. At the time of the establishment of the South Worcestershire Shared Service Joint Committee in 2007, the only participating service was Revenues and Benefits. However, more services have since been added, and the nature of the Joint Committee has evolved, and it is hoped it will now become more strategic.
39. The South Worcestershire Shared Services Joint Committee does not report to the Worcestershire Hub Partnership Board, although it does have links and there are also a number of common representatives.

Worcestershire Hub Shared Service Management Board

40. This comprises one member and one officer from each participating council (Malvern Hills, Worcester City and Worcestershire County Council) plus Head of Worcestershire Hub Shared Service. The Management Board is chaired by Cllr John Waring, Executive Member for Customer Services, Human Resources and Performance at Malvern Hills District Council. The Worcestershire Hub Shared Service Management Board was set up late in 2009, succeeding the Project Board that established the shared service, and meets every six weeks. As well as the officer and member representatives, other officers are engaged as relevant to specific projects or services. The establishment of the Management Board was formally agreed by the Joint Committee in 2009. The more flexible model of a management board has been chosen over a formal sub-committee of the joint committee.
41. In addition to these main bodies, there is a separate joint committee for the new Worcestershire Regulatory Shared Service which uses the Hub to deal with its customer services, and a Joint Committee for the Joint Museums Service between Worcester City and the County Council.
42. We were surprised that the Worcestershire Hub Partnership Board met so infrequently and at its lack of effectiveness. It appears to no longer have a role in its current form, although one of the District Chief Executives pointed out that it was useful for all authorities to be involved in discussions about the Hub across Worcestershire.
43. The Head of the Hub Shared Service advised that she reported to the Joint Committee and Hub Shared Service Management Board on a regular basis, and that there were clear routes to look at issues from the partners. The Worcestershire Hub Shared Services Management Board has a more 'hands on' approach and we heard from the County Council's Director of Corporate Services, and the Chair of the Worcestershire Hub Shared Service Management Board, that it and the Joint Committee are effective in shaping the Hub Shared Service and holding its performance to account.
44. Irrespective of when or whether all district councils choose to join the shared

service, we feel that the current governance arrangements hinder the future development of the Hub and perhaps member understanding. Strategic decisions are now taken by Leaders and Chief Executives Panel rather than the intended governance arrangements. Additionally, the current dual structure does not seem equipped to facilitate progression of the Worcestershire Enhanced Two-Tier (WETT) programme, with more services due to become shared across all councils, such as the recently established Regulatory Shared Service for which all telephony is being provided by the Worcestershire Hub Shared Service Contact Centre.

45. The governance arrangements have developed over time due to the way the Hub has grown and evolved. In effect, two structures have evolved, one for the Worcestershire Hub as a whole and one for the Worcestershire Hub Shared Service. We consider that the current governance arrangements have developed in a piecemeal way, are complex and overly layered.
46. The Task Group found it difficult to determine where decisions were taken. The County Council Director of Corporate Services considered that the current governance arrangements did not restrict the Hub. He noted that not all district councils were signed up to the Hub Shared Service, and that there was a need to respect individual authorities' views and to 'work with the willing'.
47. However, we firmly believe that operating in a way which is clear and transparent to all councillors, would give the Hub a stronger base for future development, and greater opportunity to sell its services to a wider audience. We consider clearer governance is essential to enable any further expansion of the Hub Shared Service.

RECOMMENDATION 3: We recommend that each authority and the Worcestershire Hub Shared Service review governance arrangements across the Worcestershire Hub Partnership. The aim would be to ensure clarity, accountability and transparency and to move towards a single governance structure.

48. One way to conceptualise this would be to see the Worcestershire Hub Partnership as a "business" from which "customers" (i.e. the local authorities) "buy" a range of services. We would suggest there is an overarching, decision making body which comprises a Councillor and Director from each council (or their senior officer representative), which would have an overall view of the whole Hub across the county. As we explore in the next section, no one body that has visibility of the overall cost and budget for the Hub. This overarching body could have this role. The governance arrangements of the Worcestershire Hub Shared Service and other shared services would not be affected, but would link up to the overarching body. A high level, decision making body comprising members from each authority would also help to increase the profile of customer service in Cabinet Members' responsibility, at both county and district level, where this is not already the case.

COSTS, FUNDING AND SAVINGS

49. Important questions for the task group were 'How much does the Hub cost?', 'Who is paying for it?' and 'What savings has it enabled since its creation?' To answer these questions, and to gain a better understanding of the financial model, we met the Head of Worcestershire Hub Shared Service and the Principal Financial Officer with responsibility for the Worcestershire Hub Shared Service accounts.

How much does the Hub cost and who is paying for it?

50. The financial model for the Worcestershire Hub is highly complex and, when considering the way the Hub is funded, it is important to be clear about its different elements – i.e. the Worcestershire Hub Shared Service and the customer contact centres in the other local authorities i.e. Bromsgrove, Redditch, Wychavon, and Wyre Forest. This means there is no one body that has visibility of the overall cost and budget for the Hub.
51. The table below summarises the 2010/11 budget for the Shared Service and how this is funded. It also provides the 2010/11 spend by the non shared service authorities on their customer service/contact centres.
52. Councillors were keen to see unit costs of dealing with a call / face to face / web transaction, but these are not available. We welcome the work being done by the Worcestershire Hub Shared Service to calculate the average cost of a call for the main service areas handled in the Contact Centre, Perry Wood. We consider that this work should be carried out across each of the district councils, to build a full picture, and inform decision making about the future development of the Worcestershire Hub.

RECOMMENDATION 4: We recommend that the District Councils should consider researching the cost of individual transactions for different services, which will build on the work being carried out by the Hub Shared Service.

Table: 2010/11 budget for the Shared Service and how this is funded. 2010/11 spend by the non shared service authorities on their customer service/contact centres.

Service Area	Total Budget 2010/11 £000	Partner Funding 10/11				
		County £000	City £000	MHDC £000	Other Shared Services £000	Non Shared Service authorities £000
Shared Service						
Contact Centre	1,268	750	149	149	220	-
Face to Face Centres	884	270	390	224	0	-
Hub management, operational development, communication, training	307	307	0	0	0	-
Sub total	2,459	1,327	539	373	220	-
Other district Centres (outside of Shared Service)						
Bromsgrove	880	138				742
Redditch	807	185				622
Wychavon	929	208				721
Wyre Forest	741	167				574
Sub total	3,357	698	0	0	0	2,659
All Partner Related						
Hub management, development, Training, ICT support	856	856	0	0	0	0
Central Support Services/accommodation	449	449	0	0	0	0
Sub total	1,305	1,305	0	0	0	0
County Specific						
Reception	62	62	-	-	-	-
Total Cost	7,183	3,392	539	373	220	2,659

Worcestershire Hub Shared Service

53. Worcestershire County Council is the host authority for the Worcestershire Hub Shared Service, for employment and support service purposes, on behalf of the South Worcestershire Shared Services Joint Committee. It is also the largest funder of the shared service, contributing 54% of the budget. The remaining funding is provided by Malvern Hills District Council, Worcester City Council and Shared Services. The County Council employs all staff involved in:
- Contact Centre – Perry Wood
 - Face to Face Centres – Worcester City and Malvern Hills (3 centres)
 - Hub Management, Service Development, Hub Training, Operations and ICT Support
 - WCC Switchboard and County Hall reception functions
54. The contributions from Worcester City Council (City) and Malvern Hills District Council (MHDC) are based on the Shared Service legal agreement, where the districts fund the marginal costs of service, equating to agreed proportions of staff costs and non pay costs of the Face to Face Centres and Contact Centre. Funding from "Other Shared Services" includes Revenues and Benefits and planned support for Worcestershire Regulatory Service and Building Control enquiries.

Non shared service

55. The County Council does not employ the staff at the Hub customer service/contact centres outside the shared service: Bromsgrove, Redditch, Wychavon and Wyre Forest. For these centres the district councils are the employer and the County Council fund an agreed share of operating costs.
56. The basis for joint funding of the Worcestershire Hub is set out in the agreed Partnership Agreement. Information on the specific budgets and costs funded by the district councils was not readily available to the County Council. However, the scrutiny needed to have a full picture of Hub costs, and therefore we asked the districts for the information. We were pleased that all the district councils shared with us the relevant financial information for their customer service / contact centres. These costs are included in the table above.
57. This scrutiny is not commenting on the expenditure by authorities on their customer service/contact centres and has not compared this spend or analysed it to consider value for money. In addition the figures are not directly comparable due to the different nature of services, the different depth of services and differing practices provided and used by each district and the shared service. However we feel it is important that all authorities have an understanding of how much customer service centres cost across the county, to inform discussion of the future development of the Hub.
58. The table above shows the proportion funded by the County Council of the cost of Hub Centres outside the Shared Service. The allocations from the County Council to non shared service contact centres broadly equates to four Customer Service Advisors per district, and recognises that only a small percentage of enquiries received by the districts relate to County Council services.

Additional funding from the County Council

59. The County Council, in its community leadership role to work with the district councils to simplify and improve access to council services, agreed to fund a considerable portion of the central overheads relating to the Worcestershire Hub, e.g. central systems infrastructure.
60. In addition, because the Hub has a key role in driving customer-focussed service transformation within authorities, the budget includes some "implementation effort" to drive further development to enable greater choice in terms of contact, enable the Hub to be the first point of contact, actively seeking to reduce avoidable contact, increase self service and work with service areas to streamline processes. These can be considered as "transition costs" rather than ongoing operational overheads.
61. Overall, the County Council's financial contribution to the Worcestershire Hub Shared Service and non-shared service in 2010/11 is £3.392m, out of a total spend by all authorities on customer service / contact centres across the County of £7.183m.
62. Councillors asked about the County Council's funding of training and it was clarified that the County pays for central training. Each district would have its own budget for specific training needs, for example training for Hub staff in Bromsgrove dealing with revenues and benefits would be met by Bromsgrove DC
63. We heard that the infrastructure costs for the Hub remained relatively steady and would not be greatly impacted by new services coming in to the Hub. The 10-year contract with Hewlett Packard is approaching the end (2013) and discussions have begun regarding future requirements. It is anticipated that arrangements will be different in the future recognising the upskilling of ICT staff in WCC over recent years, making the model more self-sufficient.
64. The task group acknowledge the decision by the County Council to pick up costs for Hub management, operational development, communication and training to drive the Hub forward in its early stages; this is at the heart of the Hub Partnership Agreement. Nonetheless we were surprised to find that the County Council was still funding a large proportion.

County Council Recharges to Frontline services

65. The County Council recharges its "frontline" services for the cost of customer services, in line with other support services such as Human Resources, Information technology and others. When we met with the Interim Head of Culture and Community Service/Strategic Libraries and Learning Manager, it emerged that the Library Service was recharged £689,000 in 2009/10 for the Hub. It was understood that this had been calculated using 2007 data on the forecast call volumes that the Hub would handle for the Library Service, and in the previous five months the Hub had only been receiving about 70% of the calls that had been estimated. This meant that on a basic calculation, the cost of the Hub dealing with a library call was £14 per call, and we were concerned that this was poor value for money. We therefore asked for further briefing about how the Hub's recharges to County Council services were calculated. Details of how County Council recharges are calculated are attached at Appendix 4.
66. The high recharge for libraries reflected the fact that this was a high volume service.

Work had been done to assess the potential volume of library enquiries which were appropriate to route through the Hub. A number of enquiries for library services did not come through the Hub, and further promotion of the shared service number would take place with a view to changing this customer behaviour. A change in customer demand for a service (e.g. more customers accessing the library online rather than through the Hub) would lead to a reduction in the recharge. It was explained that recharges cannot be used to work out the unit (transaction) costs of a visit or telephone call.

67. We queried why all services were charged (even those which did not use the Hub), and were advised that when the Hub was created, this was on the basis that the Hub would be the initial point of contact for all County Council services. The Head of Financial Appraisal stressed that recharges could be scrutinised as part of any scrutiny of the relevant support service.

Is the Hub value for money?

68. We asked whether the value for money offered by the Hub Shared Service was reviewed, and were advised that this was a complex thing to do routinely. However, the Shared Service is constantly reviewing its costs and areas where it can improve and has plans in place to drive efficiencies in conjunction with other shared services.

69. The budget and recharging approach works on the basis that the Worcestershire Hub is the first point of contact for all County Council services. There is an opportunity to make greater use of the Worcestershire Hub for a number of County Council services. If all services were to make greater use of the Hub, this would reduce the overall unit costs.

RECOMMENDATION 5: Since the more services use the Hub, the better value it becomes. Therefore, as part of the BOLD programme, the County Council should increase its efforts to ensure all its services use the Hub.

70. A gap in our findings is that we have been unable to build up a complete picture of the relative value for money of each non-shared service district Hub compared with the Hub Shared Service.

Has the creation of the Hub saved money?

71. The original Business Case for the creation of the Worcestershire Hub stated that the aim of the Hub was to improve customer focus and not to deliver savings. Any savings generated by services from their use of the Hub had therefore not been specifically calculated or recorded in the early years.
72. It was explained that it is possible to look at the improvements in service and efficiencies which have been enabled by use of the Hub, for example the length of the application process for the Blue Badge service, where a customer can now receive their badge during their visit – approx. 15 minutes - to the relevant centre (subject to having the right supporting evidence). Additionally, the South Worcestershire Revenues and Benefits Shared Service scrutiny found that the projected savings in the revenues and benefits shared service had been achieved.
73. We acknowledge that it would be a huge task to retrospectively consider what savings had been created for each service since 2002. Nonetheless we consider it

regrettable that the financial information had not been gathered at the time. This type of information could be a powerful motivator to authorities and service areas to use the Hub, and it would also have allowed a proper understanding of the costs and benefits of the Hub.

RECOMMENDATION 6: In light of future funding and the move towards self-service within the Hub, all authorities and the South Worcestershire Shared Services Joint Committee should monitor and record the efficiencies and savings gained by use of the Hub.

PERFORMANCE OF THE WORCESTERSHIRE HUB

74. Although the scrutiny has focused on the development of the Hub in the future, given the concerns raised in the Notice of Motion, councillors wanted to understand the performance of the Hub Shared Service in 2009 and what lessons could be learned. In addition, how the Hub performs and crucially how its performance is measured and monitored is important for building confidence with all partners and services. We were therefore keen to understand the Hub's performance.

Worcestershire Hub Shared Service Performance in 2009

75. There were real concerns about the performance of the Worcestershire Hub Shared Service, especially in relation to call wait times, during the latter half of 2009.
76. As of June 2009 the Worcestershire Hub Shared Service Contact Centre was handling revenues and benefits calls for all three of the South Worcestershire authorities interfacing with the South Worcestershire Revenues and Benefits Shared Service. Revenues and Benefits calls for Malvern Hills District Council customers had always been handled by the Hub and calls for Worcester City were transferred in November 2008. The South Worcestershire Revenues and Benefits Shared Service carried out a major ICT implementation, converging from three to one system in March / April 2009. This coincided with starting to see the impact of the economic downturn on customers.
77. This resulted in a dramatic increase in demand for revenues (council tax and business rates) and benefits enquiries. The Shared Service equivalent average monthly call volumes in 2008/9 were 37,000. This rose to an average of 53,000 per month between April and September 2009. Call volume across the whole of the Worcestershire Hub (not just the shared service) increased from an average of 60,000 calls per month in 2008/9 to almost 100,000 in 2009/10.
78. This increase had an impact on call handling, worsening performance and increasing the time customers had to wait on the phone:
- In 2008/09 over 75% of calls were answered in 20 seconds (20 seconds is the service level agreement). In August and September 2009 this fell below 20%.
 - During September 2009, the time to answer peaked at just over 5 minutes. [though the average speed was 177 seconds over the month]
 - The number of abandoned calls was 6,023 in May 2009. In September 2009 it peaked at 23,920 with only 50.5% of calls being answered.
79. There was no increase in funding from the Revenues and Benefits Shared Service to support this significant peak in demand. In addition, during September the Worcestershire Hub Shared Service experienced its usual large volume of School Transport enquiries.

80. Another factor was that many of the revenues and benefits enquiries were complex and from people who had not previously claimed benefits, increasing the average "handle time" from 3.22 minutes in May 2009, to 4.22 minutes in September 2009.
81. The Worcestershire Hub Shared Service implemented the following actions to improve call response times:
- Extending opening hours for handling calls relating to revenues and benefits, with customers now able to call from Mon-Fri: 8am – 8pm and Sat: 9am – 5pm.
 - Recruiting new customer service staff as planned. The staffing levels within the Hub Shared Service of 9 additional staff to handle calls, were based on the Revenues & Benefits shared Service Business Case produced in 2006. No additional funding was provided to handle the increase in demand due to the economic downturn.
 - Moving all Hub Shared Service contact centre staff to a single location. This enables robust disciplines and single processes to be embedded.
 - Working with the South Worcestershire Revenues and Benefits Shared Service on a range of actions, including; introducing a single evidence checklist, better staggering of council tax reminders, and improving the quality of information available for Hub advisors and customers.
82. Performance of the Shared Service did improve week on week during October 2009. The average time to answer a call improved from 177 seconds in September, to 38 seconds in October 2009. The percentage of calls answered within the service level agreement (20 seconds), rose from 14.2%, to 59% for the same period. Appendix 5 provides further performance information figures.
83. The Revenues and Benefits scrutiny concluded that the performance problems were caused by the large increase in demand for revenues and benefits services in the south of the county due to the economic downturn. The joint scrutiny found that the recession had placed the service under enormous pressure, testing the resilience of the business case, but there was a clear view that without the shared service, the service would have been much more badly affected. The role of the Hub has been central to Revenues and Benefits Shared Service achievements to date (saving of £1m per annum).
84. The Head of the Worcestershire Hub Shared Service was sure that the district councils which did not form part of the revenues and benefits shared service would have experienced similar increased demand, which they would have handled in a different way. This view was backed up by our discussion with the non-shared service district councils, during which we learned, for example, that Redditch Borough Council revenues and benefits team had struggled and had introduced extra resources as a result.
85. Whilst accepting the unprecedented impact of the recession on revenues and benefits call volumes, some of us asked whether there had been a lack of preparedness? How quickly were the changes in performance information as a result of the recession acted on, and why had this not triggered earlier action? The Head of the Worcestershire Hub Shared Service confirmed that the Hub team had been working hard to address the issues, with a key learning point being the need to have communicated the impact of the recession on customers, demand and therefore performance earlier. More staff had been recruited as soon as possible, and earlier than planned as part of the 2006 business case. However, it had not

been possible to hire staff in May 2009 because of a recruitment freeze which had been advised by Human Resources, in order to minimise staff redundancies as the shared service was formed.

86. We asked how service areas worked with the Hub to help it anticipate changing customer demands, and were advised that the Hub worked very closely with service areas to understand peaks in demand for different services, and that the Operations Manager met with service managers on a regular basis. For example understanding that demand for school transport peaked in September, and demand for revenues and benefit rose at the beginning and middle of the month, as well as in March and April. Council tax queries would be high during April. Apart from this, the Hub did not receive any particular information regarding forecasting of customer demand.
87. There are lessons to be learned from the revenues and benefits situation in 2009. It highlights the importance of having sufficient resilience and capacity to absorb peaks in demand, acknowledging that these cannot always be forecast.

RECOMMENDATION 7: Appropriate resource plans for the Hub are in place to better plan for forecast demand.

RECOMMENDATION 8: The Hub also needs to be prepared to deal with unpredicted peaks in service demand, and we recommend that Business Continuity Plans are in place across the Hub Shared Service and the non shared service Hubs.

How is the Hub performing?

88. When considering performance it is vital to understand the differences between the Hub Shared Service and the customer contact centres in the non shared service areas. It is also important to consider actual performance, rather than perceptions, as we found that councillor and officer perceptions differed depending on levels of knowledge, or which part of the service they were familiar with.
89. Within the County Council, the scrutiny function plays a role in monitoring performance, through reports which are submitted to the Resources Overview and Scrutiny Panel, twice a year. In some other authorities, performance information is also considered by overview and scrutiny.
90. Monthly performance information for the Worcestershire Hub Shared Service and the Worcestershire Hub as a whole, broken down for 2009/10, is attached at Appendix 5. Some of the issues emerging from this data are:
- wait times for face to face visits was recorded by the Shared Service, but was not included in the area breakdown, as it could not be obtained from all centres
 - telephony figures for Wychavon were not listed as all enquiries were dealt with by the service area, apart from the revenues and benefits service (which were included in figures for the Worcestershire Hub Shared Service)
 - call figures for Redditch had significantly increased because the contact centre now dealt with all calls previously received by the switchboard
 - switchboard figures for the County Council were not included, and totalled around 30,000 per month, the majority being business calls
 - the high numbers of face to face enquiries for Wychavon related to the fact that there were three centres, Droitwich, Evesham and Pershore, where the latter is also Wychavon District Council's main reception area.

91. Traditionally the performance of the Worcestershire Hub has been good with over 75% of calls being answered within 20 seconds (the service level). It was clarified that speed of answer is the time it takes for the caller to be answered by a Customer Service Advisor.

Quality of customer experience

92. The performance information traditionally gathered by the Shared Service and the non shared service areas, focuses largely on processes and transactions – such as numbers of calls and speed of answer. It is clear, though, that there needs to be a focus on measuring the quality of the customer experience. We found it is possible to track calls from end to end with some services which are more advanced, such as Highways, but not with all service areas.
93. The task group heard that the Shared Service management team in conjunction with the Operational Management Group across the whole Hub Partnership have been working to measure quality of customer service. This has been done by a number of routes, Mystery Shopping, Customer Satisfaction Surveys and Service Requests Quality Audits. An upgraded customer relationship management (CRM) system was implemented in July 2009. This provides a solid basis on which to improve the quality of recording and processing enquiries as well as underpinning future self service developments. In addition, call recording will also be introduced into the Worcestershire Hub Shared Service Contact Centre later this year.
94. Our discussions with the district councils revealed that customer satisfaction monitoring also takes place for customers visiting centres in person. For example Redditch and Bromsgrove complete 100 questionnaires per month. Wychavon District Council use a simple visual 'How did we do?' survey prompt as part of the GovMetric system also used for Revs and Bens enquiries. Wyre Forest also carries out monthly surveys covering phone, email and face to face channels.
95. We found that there have been a number of satisfaction surveys carried out including very recently the Worcestershire Viewpoint Survey May 2010.¹ This included questions about customer services generally, not specifically about the Worcestershire Hub. The 'topline' results from the survey can be found at [Appendix 6](#) and overall show that there is demand for online access to services, but this is not yet being enabled. An 'Our Customer Questionnaire' was carried out in January/February 2010, to help shape a customer strategy for Worcestershire. This was not a Worcestershire Hub specific piece of consultation, and the responses are more generally about customer contact and experience.
96. It is essential, as councils try to shift customers away from the more traditional communication routes, that sufficient customer satisfaction monitoring is carried out on the telephone, email and online services.
97. The Worcestershire Hub Shared Service has now agreed to focus on the six key performance indicators (KPIs) which cover both quantitative and qualitative measures:

¹ 'ViewPoint' is a survey organised and managed by the Research and Intelligence Unit on behalf of the seven local authorities in Worcestershire, NHS Worcestershire and Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Services. It replaces the previous Citizen's Panel survey.

- KPI 1 – telephone service level – target of 80% of calls answered in 20 seconds
- KPI 2 – face to face average wait time – target of customers to be seen by a customer service advisor in less than 15 minutes
- KPI 3 – self-service – proportion of payments through self-service channels
- KPI 4 – Reducing Avoidable contact
- KPI 5 – Resolution at first point of contact – target of 80%
- KPI 6 – Customer satisfaction – 90% target

98. The Head of the Worcestershire Hub Shared Service would like to see a single performance management framework used across the Hub.

RECOMMENDATION 9: Performance information should be consistent across the Shared Service and the non-Shared Service districts, to enable like for like comparisons, and we recommend a single performance management framework is established across the Hub.

RECOMMENDATION 10: All performance information – for shared service and non-shared service districts – should be made available to all councillors.

RECOMMENDATION 11: We recommend that all partners consider the role which scrutiny could play in helping to monitor performance of the Worcestershire Hub, if they have not already done so.

RECOMMENDATION 12: For telephone enquiries inform customers of their place in the queue, or an estimated wait time for them to be able to speak to a customer services advisor.

Service area and staff views on using the Worcestershire Hub

99. We spoke to officers whose service areas used the Hub as first point of contact, including Library Services and the Shared Regulatory Services. They were very supportive of Hub handling their telephone calls. The Library Service had noted that library staff were now in a position to deal with more people face to face in the library, rather than deal with routine enquiries, such as renewing books. The regulatory service acknowledged that the Hub was key to business transformation and training of all staff was important to understand each other's role.
100. There was a view that there would always be a small percentage of enquiries which would need to be dealt with by specialist staff, and that this percentage may vary depending on the complexity of the service.
101. We carried out an internet based survey of staff of all seven authorities and received over 500 responses. A summary of the results can be found at [Appendix 7](#). The results from 6 core questions and general comments were mixed; a large number of them were rather critical. However, many recognised that there had been some improvement and spoke of the difficulty faced by the customer service advisors, who could only work with the information which was provided to them from individual service areas.
102. What we heard from the staff survey reveals many service area staff, whilst complimentary about the helpfulness and professionalism of Hub staff, question the ability of the Hub to deal with an increasing range and depth of enquiries. There were a number of comments about service to the customer having deteriorated. We perceived an impression that this may be partly due to service area staff's

resistance to change and reluctance to 'let go' of their expertise. There may also be fears of a threat to job security.

103. There were some concerns that the public is not always given the right information, which in turn causes problems and reduces the quality of service received by the customer. Many staff mention problems with the flow of information between the service area and the Hub (and vice versa).

104. Another thread to the free comments was the view that the term 'Hub' was not the best way to describe the service and its purpose.

105. One element that was clear throughout was the professionalism of the customer service staff in the Hub centres.

106. Positive comments focused on staff manner, approach and helpfulness, the efficiency of being able to answer straight-forward queries which gave service area staff more time to do their jobs, and the potential of their unique central role. There appeared to be more appreciation of the face to face service, followed by the telephony service, and then the email/web-based service.

107. Negative comments questioned the expectation on staff to answer in-depth queries on such a range of areas, the need for better flow of information from the service areas to the Hub (and vice versa), the dangers of staff trying to help when in fact they did not know the accurate answer, an unwillingness to put people through to the service area and mis-allocation of queries. Call wait times was a criticism, and several comments referred to the need for clearer navigation of the website and online systems, as well as compatibility of IT systems.

108. Several members felt that although many people had complained about problems getting through to the Hub by phone, once they had made contact they had found the staff very helpful. The Head of the Hub Shared Service acknowledged that Hub staff get frustrated at not being able to 'close the loop'. There was not clear agreement with every service regarding at what point an enquiry would be referred to the service area. If the Hub experiences problems as a result of an action by a service area (e.g. an incorrect letter being sent), it was clarified that the service area would not pick up the cost of any resulting additional customer contact.

RECOMMENDATION 13: Define and agree Service Level Agreements between the Worcestershire Hub and every service area.

RECOMMENDATION 14: Ensure there is sufficient time allocated for service area staff and Hub staff to review any issues or needs, and to monitor service provision via the Hub.

RECOMMENDATION 15: Further work on the flow of information between the service area and the Hub (and vice versa) should take place, to ensure that the correct information is provided by the Hub to the service area, and that service area staff provide a response which enables Hub staff to answer the customer enquiry. It is important that both teams understand the implications of what the information they provide will be for the customer. The creation of Service Level Agreements between the Hub and services will support this.

109. There is further work to do to improve the service, standardise where possible, reduce avoidable contact, increase self-service and to ensure customer feedback is consistent, with more attention given to the quality of the response. Work is ongoing to reduce avoidable contact (i.e. reducing the amount of contact a customer has to make to resolve their enquiry, not reducing overall contact with the customer) and part of this is to document and standardise processes between the contact centre and the service area. The aim is to ensure the Hub can deal with over 75% of enquires at the first point of contact.

RECOMMENDATION 16: Give all customers the enquiry reference number, to encourage and enable them to track progress themselves online, and reduce the need for repeat enquiries to the Hub.

110. Full integration of IT systems between the Hub and the service areas has not yet been achieved and this hinders the flow of information relating to an enquiry. The Head of the Worcestershire Hub Shared Service was very keen to speed this process up, and considerable improvement had been made in some areas. The task group considered that a single software provider would be beneficial and we note that the current contracts are up for renewal from 2013. This gives an opportunity to take this forward.

RECOMMENDATION 17: Move towards more consistent IT packages, as contracts come up for renewal.

Parish Council views on contacting the Hub

111. Our survey was included in the weekly parish bulletin circulated by the Worcestershire branch of CALC (a representative body for parish and town councils), and we received responses from representatives (Clerks, Chairs, Councillors) from over 60 parishes. Parish council representatives often play a role in escalating queries brought to them by parishioners.

112. The preferred methods of contacting the Council were telephone (67%), and email (33%). When asked which services they normally contacted the Worcestershire Hub about, 95% of respondents had lodged enquiries about Highways, 50% about refuse/waste, and 50% had made enquiries about planning. 61% of respondents reported that their enquiries were not normally resolved to their satisfaction and within advertised timescales, which was a disappointing result.

113. A common complaint was the lack of feedback, which meant they had to chase up enquiries, in order to be able to give feedback to their parishioners. The most mentioned service was Highways. For these issues they found using the Hub took much longer and it was difficult to obtain feedback. Several respondents complained that problems occurred through misallocation of the enquiry, or being let down by the website reporting mechanisms.

114. When asked if there were specific occasions when it would be helpful to speak to an officer from a service area, the consistent response was yes, always. When asked how the Hub service could be improved for parish councillors, the consistent response was very critical, with several reports of the Hub being openly criticised in public meetings. Suggestions for improvement included the facility to be able to talk to a member of service staff on occasion, for example in order to be able to explain what action was being taken, or not being taken to their parishioners, a dedicated helpline for parish clerks, direct numbers for service staff, a better online Hub and a

quicker response.

115. Our impression is that parish councillors and clerks see themselves as first tier of the council organisation and that they find it inappropriate that they should have to use the Hub. Many continued to use direct telephone numbers for service officers where possible.

116. We discussed the idea of a dedicated parish line (similar to that trialled in a recent member casework management pilot²). However, the majority view was that this was not needed and that it was more important to work on making sure the system worked, by addressing issues raised such as feedback, website reporting mechanisms etc.

RECOMMENDATION 18: In view of the negative feedback from our survey of parish councillors, we recommend further dialogue between senior officer representatives from the Worcestershire Hub and parish councils, to ensure their feedback can be used to improve the overall Hub service.

117. There were a number of comments made in the staff survey which suggested there may be better brand names to communicate the purpose of the Hub. We also heard similar anecdotal evidence from comments received by councillors from the general public. We believe there are better brand names – in particular we liked Kent County Council's 'Gateway'. However, we accept that re-branding would be a costly exercise, which would certainly not be appropriate in the current economic climate. Nonetheless, there may be other marketing initiatives which could improve public understanding of what the Hub can offer.

RECOMMENDATION 19: The 'Hub' means different things to different people. We recommend further communication of the Hub's identity and services to the public. This could, for example, accompany the issue of council tax bills, which would present a cost-effective opportunity for marketing.

Benchmarking with other local authorities

118. In order to think more about the service in Worcestershire, it was important to look at what other local authorities are doing in relation to customer service and how customers contact their own authority. The Worcestershire Hub participates in benchmarking, but we acknowledge the difficulty of making comparisons because of the differences in provision and huge range and depth of services. We asked other county and unitary local authorities for information about how they enable easy access to council services in person, by telephone and in person. We used a common set of questions, and received results from 11 authorities. A summary of the results is attached at [Appendix 8](#).

119. There was a huge variation in the content of responses, for example, from those councils which have taken the first steps to an integrated approach, to those that have not joined up working. Ten of the authorities have shared customer contact services with other partners, or are in the process of developing shared facilities.

² **Member Casework Management:** This was a pilot project, which ran from December 2009 to February 2010, with the aim of designing a clear route of access for member logging enquiries via the Hub and managing member enquiries on a casework basis. A dedicated member telephone number was established which was administered by a customer service advisors who were trained as specialist in the process.

CHANGING THE WAYS IN WHICH CUSTOMERS ACCESS COUNCIL SERVICES

120. The main ways in which the public can access a council service, such as reporting a pothole are in person, by telephone or online. As more people have access to the internet, increasingly, services in both the public and private sector are encouraging customers to move away from face to face or telephone contact, and to use online methods of communication or transaction. This is known as changing behaviour, or 'channel shifting'.
121. At the start of the scrutiny some of us were concerned that increasing use of the internet would exclude many residents. We were reassured that the Hub recognised that some customers would always prefer a face to face service and that there was no intention to remove choices for the customer, but to maximise the use of self-service options, where there is evidence of demand from customers.
122. A major factor in channel shifting is cost savings, and we were surprised by the huge difference in costs for different transaction types:

Transaction costs (Socitm Insight December 2009)

Face to face	£8.23 per visit
Phone	£3.21 per call
Web	£0.39 per visitor

123. All of the officers we spoke to at each council were supportive of encouraging greater use of internet contact by the public, and had started to work on this. Although cost saving was a motivation, we also learned that the website provides the best way to connect with the back office, and removes the need for data input by the Hub, which was cheaper and less prone to mistakes. Experience has revealed that people find it much easier to submit information online rather than on paper, and a further advantage is that information can be validated along the way. Customers can also access information at anytime, whereas some district Hubs only provide a service around general office hours.
124. The Task Group heard that there needed to be a drive to market self-service, making it as simple as possible, and that as soon as the facilities were available, it was considered this route would take off.
125. During our scrutiny we visited the majority of the Hub centres around the county and witnessed the quality of the face to face service, and its popularity. As one senior district officer pointed out, their face to face service was very good ('perhaps too good'), but is also very expensive in terms of resources, staff and opening times.
126. Although we strongly believe a face to face service will always be required for some customers and for some enquiries, we can see that increasingly, there is a preference for other ways. There are huge savings to be made by encouraging and facilitating more use of self-service options for customers. We can see that increasing economic pressures on all public services means we cannot afford not to prioritise self-service access to council services, and that this will then free up the face to face and telephony services for those who need them.

How easy is it to use the Councils' websites?

127. We were unable to dedicate a great deal of time to this question. However, we consulted Socitm (the Society for Information Technology Management which is the

professional association for information technology managers working in and for the public sector in the UK). The County Council subscribes to Socitm, which also surveys visitors to the website, via a pop-up box which appears on screen for every fifth visitor to the website. We looked at its 2010 survey which compares all local authority websites, looking at factors such as ease of access to information, ease of carrying out transactions, resilience and volume of use. The county and district websites all rated only one or two stars, out of a possible four star rating.

128. We sought advice from Socitm about what local authorities should be doing. Their advice was:

- A need for clear and consistent branding, communicated to the public
- 'You get out what you put in' – this does not necessarily need to be financial, for example the right individuals could transform a website and its navigation
- Cost is crucial (online is much cheaper)
- 'silver surfers' are the fastest growing area in online access
- A face to face service cannot be replaced totally but most things can easily be transferred to a website
- Web content needs to be relevant and topical – for example Exeter City Council's site features the weather and travel information, encouraging the public to make it their homepage
- Websites should have their own cabinet member (or for it be part of their portfolio)
- Websites will inevitably grow, to accommodate some of the intended local authority cutbacks

129. We also heard a lot of anecdotal evidence about the lack of clarity and ease of use of the councils' website. This message also came across through our parish council survey. Initial results from the Council's May 2010 Viewpoint survey results indicate that a high proportion of residents would consider using the website to report issues – however, we learned that for a high volume service such as Highways, currently only 5% of the total number of enquiries are logged in this way.

130. This suggests that the demand for online access to services is there, but is not yet being enabled. However, we are aware that work is underway to improve this, which we would obviously support in order that the council is able to encourage more people to use this method of transaction and access to information.

131. In considering the growing profile of the website in customer communications, it will be important to ensure that development of the website is as customer friendly as possible. We looked at the fact that within the County Council, the teams responsible for communications and for the website, sit within different directorates.

132. A common IT policy would certainly be desirable, although complicated by the fact that IT packages vary between each authority.

133. We are aware that Worcestershire County Council, together with the Worcestershire Hub and District partners, is responding to these low ratings and aiming to improve, by updating our online services to make them easier to use and to give customers access to more services. The county council is aiming to achieve a 3 star rating by the end of 2010/11, and 4 stars by the end of 2011/12. We welcome continuation of this work if we are to encourage as many people as possible to use electronic access, and to enable people to monitor the progress of their enquiry for themselves.

Use of email

134. Similarly, time constraints meant we have not dedicated a great deal of time to looking at the use of email communication. The Shared Service reported that email enquiries are increasing, with approximately 2000 emails received per month (March 2010). Anecdotal evidence indicated that systems to monitor response times and quality of response etc. are not as robust as for telephony enquiries.

135. The summary results from the May 2010 ViewPoint Survey show that a considerable number of people prefer this method of communication with the Council, and therefore it is important to have clear frameworks to monitor the timeframe, quality and customer satisfaction with all methods of communication. We have made some recommendations connected to customer satisfaction in the 'performance' section of our report.

RECOMMENDATION 20: Our investigation of best practice advice and customer survey results supports our findings that the website offers huge potential for helping customers to help themselves, and for making substantial efficiency savings. This can only be achieved if the website is as user-friendly and effective as possible. We are pleased to see that the website is being improved and recommend that this work continues in order to realise the potential gains in customer satisfaction and efficiency gains.

RECOMMENDATION 21: In addressing the website and its expanding role in customer contact, we recommend that consideration is given to where the website sits within the council's organisational structure. This should take account of the need to align expertise in customer contact and communication, as well as information technology.

RECOMMENDATION 22: Councils' websites are very important and their profile needs to reflect this. A cabinet member for each authority should have responsibility for the website within his or her portfolio.

CONCLUSION

136. In reflecting back on this scrutiny, it has without doubt been extremely educational and revealing to all members of the task group. Our attention has been drawn to areas which we did not anticipate at the start. In particular our investigations into governance arrangements and councillor awareness have surprised many of us.

137. The Worcestershire Hub is made up of the Hub Shared Service and separate arrangements for four district councils. This fact means that there are many differences and perhaps, a lack of unity. However, despite the differences, our scrutiny has revealed a clear commitment to the Hub as a whole for the future; no one is retreating. Our recommendations on governance and councillor induction seek to bring greater transparency, clarity and accountability across the partnership. We think it is important that those councils operating within and outside of the shared service have an awareness of what is happening 'on the other side of the fence'.

138. Our scrutiny has involved representation and consultation with each of the district councils. It is apparent that if the County Council seeks to encourage the remaining district councils to join the Hub Shared Service, they need to communicate clear

evidence about the benefits, including performance, customer satisfaction and cost savings.

139. The pressure on all authorities to make efficiencies means that service transformation is essential. We agree that the Hub should be at the heart of this service transformation. A co-ordinated approach to customer service across the county would enable savings to be made and minimise duplication.
140. An acknowledged gap in our findings is that we have not been able to make clear comparisons between the different Hub operations on their performance and value for money. This was due to the difference in the role and depth of use of the Hub across the non-shared service councils and the corresponding lack of comparable data that was available. To enable some comparisons to be made in the future we have recommended a uniform performance framework and that work is done on establishing transaction costs on the non-shared service authorities.
141. A revelation to many of us has also been the huge variation in the cost of the different types of transaction, whether it be in person, over the phone or online. Face to face customer service is hugely expensive, and although we feel strongly that there will always be a need for it, our evidence demonstrates that online customer access is in growing demand and offers huge potential for the future.
142. We are all agreed that self-service using the website is the way forward. If we encourage the public to make use of online access where possible to self-serve, it frees up the face to face service for those members of our community who really need it. Essentially, online access allows helping customers to serve themselves, as well as making some of the savings we need to make. Clearly, we will only maximize online self service if the councils' websites are as user-friendly and effective as possible. We are aware that many improvements to the website are planned, and we are very keen for this pace to continue, as addressed in our report.
143. Regarding the performance of the Worcestershire Hub, although there is always more to be done, we are satisfied that lessons have been learned from the performance problems experienced during the Summer 2009. We have made recommendations that plans should be in place to better forecast demand and unpredicted peaks in service demand. Although the problems experienced in the Summer 2009 were the catalyst for this scrutiny, this was only one aspect of our work, and our remaining recommendations on performance are targeted at improving customer experience as a whole, and the flow of information between the service areas and the Hub, and vice versa.
144. As our scrutiny reaches its conclusion, in many ways the Worcestershire Hub is embarking on major development, especially with the growing pace of service transformation and the growing number of shared council services across the county. We hope that our recommendations help to facilitate this future, and have agreed that we would like to reconvene the Worcestershire Hub task Group at an appropriate point in the future, to consider what influence our report has had, and to assess progress on the recommendations we have made.

SCRUTINY TASK GROUP ACTIVITY

Member briefing for the Resources Overview and Scrutiny Panel Patrick Birch, Director of Corporate Services Rachel Hill, Head of the Worcestershire Hub Shared Service	5 November 2009
A scrutiny proposal was discussed and agreed with the Lead Member, and a Scrutiny Task Group was set-up.	November 2009 – January 2010
Initial overview of the Worcestershire Hub provided to the Task Group Rachel Hill, Head of Customer Service for the Worcestershire Hub Shared Service and Patrick Birch, Director of Corporate Services Covered: background, vision, achievements, current position, performance, future direction, customer focus, challenges, opportunities and thoughts on areas for improvement	27 January 2010
Small group visits to the Hub centres (Malvern, Redditch, Pershore, Kidderminster, Bromsgrove, Shared Service Contact Centre at Perry Wood, Worcester) Sharon Ryder, Telephony Channel Manager	February - March 2010
"Mind mapping" exercise to sharpen our focus on what we wanted to find out from the scrutiny, and what was needed to achieve this Tony Dipple, Head of Financial Appraisal	18 March 2010
Evidence gathering: <u>Wychavon</u> – Vic Allison, Deputy Managing Director, Amanda de Warr, Democratic Services Manager and Nick Jefferies, Head of Revenues and Benefits Shared Service <u>Redditch and Bromsgrove</u> – Kevin Dicks, Joint Chief Executive, (Bromsgrove – Jayne Pickering, Executive Director for Finance and Corporate Resources and Roger Horton, Customer Services Manager), (Redditch – Lynn Jones, Customer Services Manager) <u>Malvern Hills</u> – Ivor Pumfrey, Head of Customer Services and Environmental Services <u>Worcester City</u> - David Thorpe, Head of Customer Services and Business Transformation and Malcolm Cox, Service Manager for Refuse and Recycling <u>Wyre Forest</u> - Linda Collis, Director of Community and partnership Services and Lucy Wright, Customer Services Manager <u>Library Service</u> Kathy Kirk, Interim Head of Culture and Community Service /	March - July

<p>Strategic Libraries and Learning Manager Steve Mobley, Quality and Standards Manager</p> <p><u>South Worcestershire Revenues and Benefits Shared Service</u> Nick Jefferies, Head of Revenues and Benefits Shared Service</p> <p><u>Members involved in the Autumn 2009 Scrutiny of the South Worcestershire Revenues and Benefits Shared Service</u>; Cllrs Rob Adams (Wychavon DC), Paul Cummings (Malvern Hills DC) and Geoff Williams (Worcester City DC)</p> <p><u>Highways</u> Position statement from Matt Nichols, Project Manager for the Worcestershire Hub</p>	
<p>Examination of:</p> <p>Performance information (with Rachel Hill, Head of the Worcestershire Hub Shared Service) Organisational charts (with Rachel Hill) Governance information (with Rachel Hill) Funding and costs (with Tony Dipple, Head of Financial Appraisal, Nick Hughes, Principal Finance Officer for Financial Services and Rachel Hill) Role of Hub within Regulatory Shared Service (with Steve Jordan, Head of Regulatory Shared Service and Ivor Pumfrey, Head of Customer Service and Environmental Service at Malvern Hills DC)</p>	March - July
<p>Information/evidence review:</p> <p>Funding and costs Customer feedback analysis Staff survey results Parish council survey results What are other local authorities doing? Comments from Cllr John Waring, Chair of the Hub Shared Service Management Board</p>	July
<p>Emerging findings / recommendations, including discussion with Director of Corporate Services and Cabinet Member for Corporate Services</p>	29 September – 1 October

INFORMATION CONSIDERED

	Date provided
Handouts from presentation by the Head of Customer Services for the Worcestershire Hub Shared Service, including performance information for 2008/9 – 2009/10	27 January 2010
Agreed action points and requests for information – resulting from task group meeting on 27/01/10	
Contact details for the Worcestershire Hub Customer Service Centres	24 February
Worcestershire Hub Shared Service Customer Service Briefing Bulletins (January 2010, February 2010) – to co-opted district councillor task group members	24 February
Diagram of South Worcestershire Shared Service Partnership Governance arrangements	24 March Task Group Meeting
Worcestershire Hub governance : paper to Worcestershire Hub Board (July 2009)	24 March Task Group Meeting
Membership of Worcestershire Hub shared Service (WHSS) Management Board	24 March Task Group Meeting
Worcestershire Hub Shared Service: paper to Joint Committee recommending establishment of the WHSS management Board (Nov 09)	24 March Task Group Meeting
South Worcestershire Shared Services Joint Committee – link to online agendas and minutes	9 April
'Online services will make savings' – interview article with Martha Lane Fox (Local Government Chronicle 25 Feb 2010)	9 April
Scrutiny plan following mind mapping exercise	14 April
Worcestershire Hub and Libraries - overview	14 April
South Worcestershire Shared Services Joint Committee 19 April 2010 – report on WHSS, including performance report 2009/10	
Summary of comments from visits to Worcestershire Hub contact centres	30 April
Performance information for the Worcestershire Hub Shared Services, and annual summary breakdown for the non-shared service districts	19 May (agenda papers)
Performance report for WHSS Management Board	26 May
Briefing about the Hub submission for Customer Service Excellence accreditation	10 June
Customer Satisfaction Data: Our Customers Consultation ViewPoint May 2010 Customer feedback carried out by the Hub	10 June
Worcestershire County Council Cabinet report and minutes:	24 June

'Worcestershire Enhances Two-Tier Shared Services Programme' 8 February 2010	
News article from Worcestershire County Council staff intranet 'Hub works with service areas to identify improvements'	24 June
News article from Worcester Evening News on a meeting of Worcester City Council's Licensing Committee's consideration of the proposed merger of council regulatory services	24 June
Regulatory Services Business Case and supporting appendices	25 June
List of work underway	22 July
Highways Update	22 July
Comments from Chair of Worcestershire Hub Shared Service Management Board	22 July
Member casework management	22 July
Financial / budget Information (non-shared service)	22 July
Council staff survey results	27 July
Results of questions to other local authorities	27 July
Kent Total Place Initiative – gateway Multi-channel	27 July
Extracts from 'Better Connected 2010: a snapshot of all local authority websites' – from the Society for Information Technology Management (Socitm)	27 July
Parish council survey results	August
Viewpoint Survey 2010 - results	22 September
Worcestershire Hub Full Business Case – Summary Report	7 October
Worcestershire Hub Online Self Service Proposal	7 October
Worcestershire Hub Customer Charter website link	13 October

SUMMARY OF DISCUSSIONS WITH THE DISTRICT COUNCILS**Malvern Hills District Council and Worcester City Council (Joint discussion)**

Both Malvern District Council and Worcester City Council are part of the Worcestershire Hub Shared Service. For services using the Hub, Worcestershire Hub Shared Service Contact centre deals with telephone calls and emails.

Malvern DC has three face to face centres (at Malvern, Tenbury and Upton Libraries)

Worcester CC has a face to face centre at Orchard House.

Malvern had taken the decision to put the Hub at the front of all services.

Worcester City's decision to join the WHSS had been based on a desire to improve customer service. At the time the move was cost neutral, and saving money had not been the motivation to join. However, there were now added pressures to save and to make processes leaner.

Both Worcester City and Malvern felt it was important to address the end to end process of service delivery, and to look at this from the customer point of view.

It was felt that the senior management teams at Worcester and Malvern had similar confidence in the Hub. Confidence had dipped during the period of massive demand as a result of the recession, but there had been general acceptance that the Council wouldn't have coped under previous arrangements.

Some of the members who had initiated this scrutiny were Malvern members. It was acknowledged that the Hub had indeed gone through a bad patch last year and Malvern had carried out analysis to understand the reasons, as well as looking at the Hub through scrutiny arrangements (Joint scrutiny of South Worcestershire Revs & Bens). Some problems were unearthed, for example the flow of information between the Hub and service areas. Having gone through the difficult patch, members were now very supportive.

Members asked the officers' views on the fact that Wyre Forest, Redditch and Bromsgrove Councils would have encountered the same problems during the economic downturn, and yet did not appear to have had the same problems in dealing with the situation. The Malvern officer did not feel it was possible to make comparisons because of the different role of the Hub in different areas in dealing with revenues and benefits enquiries. The Shared Service sought to deal with these enquiries to a much greater depth, and required an average customer time of 4 minutes, compared to the overall Hub average of 2-3 minutes

The Worcester Officers stressed the importance of doing as much as possible at the first point of contact, as each referral meant more time and greater cost.

The Worcester Officers felt that being part of the WHSS gave them a better drive on customer focus, enabling them to work with the cabinet members, and with the Head of Worcestershire Shared Service. They felt less isolated, and were happy with the current Management Board and Joint Committee set-up

When asked whether they felt it was necessary to set up a new Board for each service joining the Hub – the Malvern officer felt that this depended on the complexity of the service concerned. The Joint Committee had to focus at an overall level, and therefore for some services it was useful to have a project team.

The Worcester officers felt that it was important to offer choices, and that the same should be available to customers whether via phone, online etc. The website gave the best way to connect with the back office, and had the fantastic advantage of removing the need for data input by the Hub, which was cheaper and less prone to mistakes. Experience revealed that people found it much easier to submit information online rather than on paper, and a further advantage was that the machine could validate the information along the way. He felt there needed to be a drive to market self-service, and felt that as soon as the facilities were available, this route would take off. Simplicity was key.

The Malvern officer pointed out that currently, many web options did not present themselves easily, and did not present a better offer for the customer. For example, when introducing the recent garden waste scheme, customers had been able to sign up online, but the Hub had had to call them to collect payment

It was agreed that it was important to extend self-service options to those without computers at home, and one way to do this would be via kiosks.

Wychavon District Council

Not a 'typical model' within the Hub partnership. Face to face contact centre provision for over 20 years, with three contact centres (Droitwich High Street, Pershore civic centre, Evesham), managed within Hub partnership.

Unlike the other district councils, all telephone calls (except for revenues and benefits) are answered by a Wychavon DC switchboard (not part of Hub) .

Revenues and benefits enquiries dealt with by Worcestershire Hub Shared Service contact centre (Wychavon has joined Revenues and benefits shared service).

For all services except for revenues and benefits, face to face staff dealt with calls up to a certain point (which varied for each service), after which the enquiry would be passed onto the service area. There was a small facility within each service area, to provide a 'hub-like' service.

Wychavon had not joined the Hub in its full capacity when the partnership was set up in 2002, because its own telephony operation was managed very differently to other districts and the transition to the Hub would have been hugely complex. At the time members felt it important to have experts answering the phones and did not want an automated system, although this view went against officer advice at the time. Some members continued to hold the view that 'calls should be answered by the experts'

The way in which councils worked with their customers continued to change and evolve and Wychavon's integration to the Hub was something which would be kept under review. There was potential for change – the prime incentive to join would be customer experience, although cost saving would also be important

Wychavon's experience of working with the Hub as regards face to face customer service was very positive, and had brought benefits such as improved service, value for money and extended opening hours. Greater partnership working had resulted in a wider service (the Evesham centre worked in partnership with West Mercia Police)

50% of the face to face service time was attributed to revenues and benefits enquiries, something which was a consequence of the shared service. Previously, the face to face service would have dealt with enquiries up to a certain point, after which they would have referred on to the service area – now the face to face staff had to deal with much more in-depth enquiries, of up to one and a half hour duration

The Deputy Managing Director pointed out that face to face service, although popular (maybe too popular) was very expensive in terms of resources, staff and opening times. In addressing the current economic pressures, the scope of this provision would need to be looked at.

Bromsgrove District Council and Redditch Borough Council (Joint discussion)

At Redditch, all external and internal telephone calls are routed through the switchboard. There are no direct dial numbers, even for staff. The Redditch Customer Service Centre is at the Town Hall.

It was made clear during the meeting that Redditch and Bromsgrove had not agreed to have a shared service approach to the Hub and there are no plans to join the shared service, reasons for this differed between the 2 authorities. As Redditch retained a housing stock many of the calls received by the Redditch customer contact centre related to housing, maintenance, rents, repairs etc. and Redditch had a very high volume of calls. There was some concern that the Hub Shared Service (WHSS) would not be able to cope

with all these extra calls.

Bromsgrove members in particular were concerned about a perceived loss of local knowledge in dealing with enquiries. It was argued that the focus of each branch of the Worcestershire Hub needed to remain local as it was important for the customer to feel that the operator had local knowledge.

Bromsgrove had not retained a housing stock and therefore the types of enquiries received there and the use made of the Hub tended to be different, they dealt with many council tax queries. The Bromsgrove customer contact centre had had a major impact in Bromsgrove following the introduction of the service in 2005. Many enquiries were dealt with at the level of the Hub which had helped to reduce the amount of time spent by back office staff on responding to enquiries. For example, out of a sample of 600 calls in a given period only 100 would be referred to a back office function. One consequence of this had been that the length of calls had often become longer, particularly when responding to more complicated enquiries.

Redditch used a number of bespoke systems such as PayPal for customers paying council rents. These could be accessed at a number of local shops and neighbourhood offices. This helped to reduce the flow of customers within the Town Hall and was more convenient for some customers. Increasingly, the Council was also encouraging residents to use direct debit for payments for Council services. There was a discussion about use of kiosks. Bromsgrove had looked at them, but now want to send customers elsewhere. Worcester has had IT problems with kiosks.

The Chief Executive of Redditch Borough Council believed that R&B customer service centres represented value for money. However, assessing the value of the service needed to be explored in further detail. It was questioned whether assessment of the quality of the service should only focus on response times to customer calls and it was suggested that it should also include asking residents whether the Hub was delivering the job they expected and meeting their needs – more work needed to measure the quality of customer experience in the Hub (and maybe in their own customer contact centres?).

Members felt that DCs were dealing with highways queries but not being paid for this and it was noted that some service queries would always go to DCs as people are used to calling a particular number and it is hard to change this habit.

The performance of the quality of the customer service delivered by the R&B's customer contact centres was measured face to face through the completion of 100 questionnaires per month.

In relations to revenues and benefits queries, Bromsgrove had seen a sharp initial increase, which had then tailed off and there had been no significant impact on calls taken (n.b. most revs & bens queries are face to face). The Benefits team in Bromsgrove had a voice recognition analysis (VRA) system. This system was used when responding to benefits calls. The system operated as a form of lie detector test, identifying both high and low risks. Some low risk claims could easily be processed and finalised for payment within a 48 hour period.

Redditch had a more significant increase, especially with face to face queries. Resources to revs & bens team had been increased.

There were particular arrangements in place for responding to complicated enquiries. In these cases the operator recorded all the relevant details provided by a customer. These details were then referred to the back office function and a relevant Officer was required to call the customer to provide a response.

In relation to Regulatory Services, it was noted that there was a need to ensure processes and systems were agreed before launching the shared service; lessons would be learned from the revs & bens change. There would not be an overnight move to Perry Wood taking all calls, there was a phased approach to ensure the systems were in place first. It was noted that building a relationship with the service area is crucial and takes time.

In relation to Hub governance, Kevin Dicks would not like to see the demise of the Worcestershire Hub Partnership Board as it was useful for all authorities to be involved in discussions about the Hub. [i.e. if it was only shared service joint committees, R&B would not be involved at all.]

At both Redditch and Bromsgrove Councils there were Customer Service Managers and both attended this meeting. There did not appear to be a specific structure for operating Hub branches throughout the county. Instead, Hub branches appeared to operate in diverse ways from location to location.

On 15th July a new Head of Customer Services would start work at Redditch and Bromsgrove Councils. This Officer would be working to implement a more customer focussed service with an ultimate aim to reduce the number of calls to the Hub. Increasingly, residents would be encouraged to use the internet rather than to call the Hub. It was also intended that there would be regular meetings for all of the relevant Customer Services Managers in the County with responsibility for the Hub.

Kevin Dicks highlighted R&B's current focus on "service transformation". The WETT programme has secured funding from the West Midland Regional Improvement & Efficiency Partnership to support local authorities to deliver 'transformation' programmes. The idea is the customer should be at the heart of services. R&B's focus will be on transforming the way they do business (from the customer's point of view) and then tackling how they deal with customer service.

Some obstacles to future development were:

Concerns about loss of local knowledge by having a central call centre

Not enough work has been done so far asking customers how they want to contact councils

There was not a clear enough focus on customer satisfaction/quality

20 R&B service areas could potentially move to Hub, but it was not clear how CSAs could deal with all of these. Also, it was perceived that CSAs would not pick up customers' "hidden agendas" (these are training issues)

Wyre Forest District Council

Wyre Forest Customer Service Centre opened in November 2006 and is based in Kidderminster Town Hall. There are also two smaller centres in Bewdley and Stourport. All District Council telephone calls are routed through a single number and handled by the service. Equally, there is one e-mail address for general enquiries. There is one team, with 18FTE staff, who rotate between the 3 sites and are trained in reception, face to face and telephone enquiries to ensure that demand can be met more efficiently. Cashiers are also employed in Kidderminster and handle transactions, 60% of which are cheques.

There are always 2 members of staff when Bewdley and Stourport offices are open, but staff can "plug in" to the telephone system to provide back up to Kidderminster if the need arise. We were told that there is always the need to have at least 4 people on the telephone.

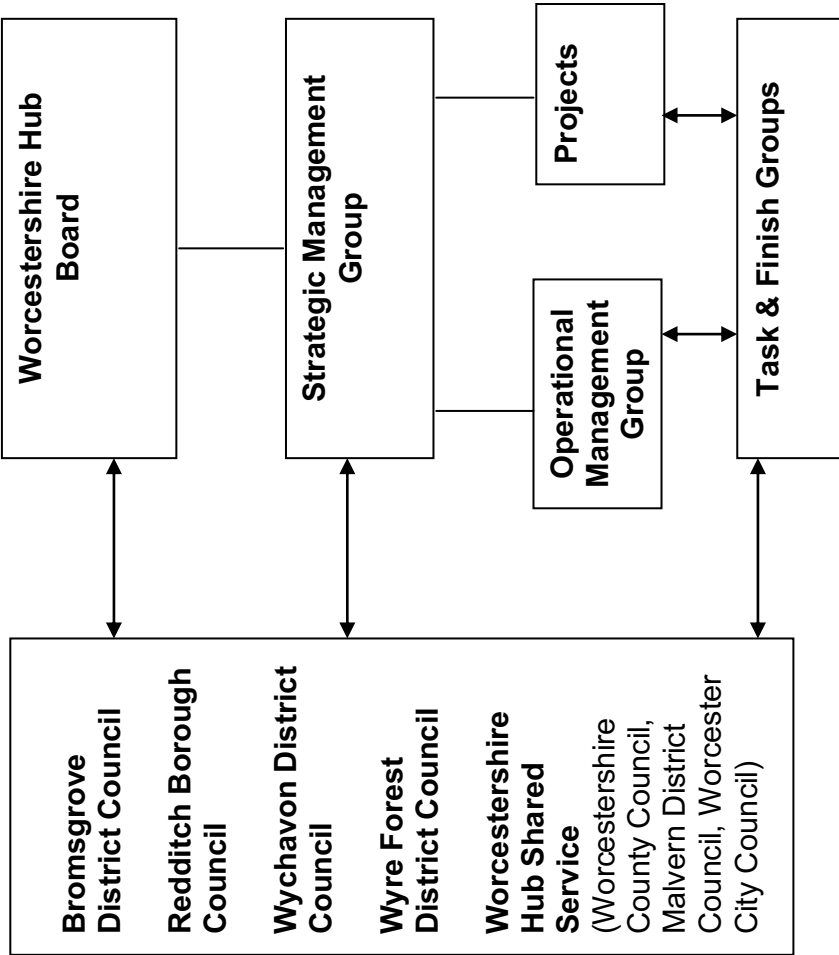
Identifying aspects of the service which could be improved, it was noted that increasing the number of staff would always be useful. Equally it was suggested that departments could update customer service advisors more frequently to enhance the customer experience.

When Highways calls were no longer answered virtually by all Partners in 2009, funding was reduced accordingly. Despite this, customers still call WFDC to report Highways issues and 60-70% of all Highways calls logged for this area, were actually still dealt with by WFDC staff, rather than by Perry Wood staff.

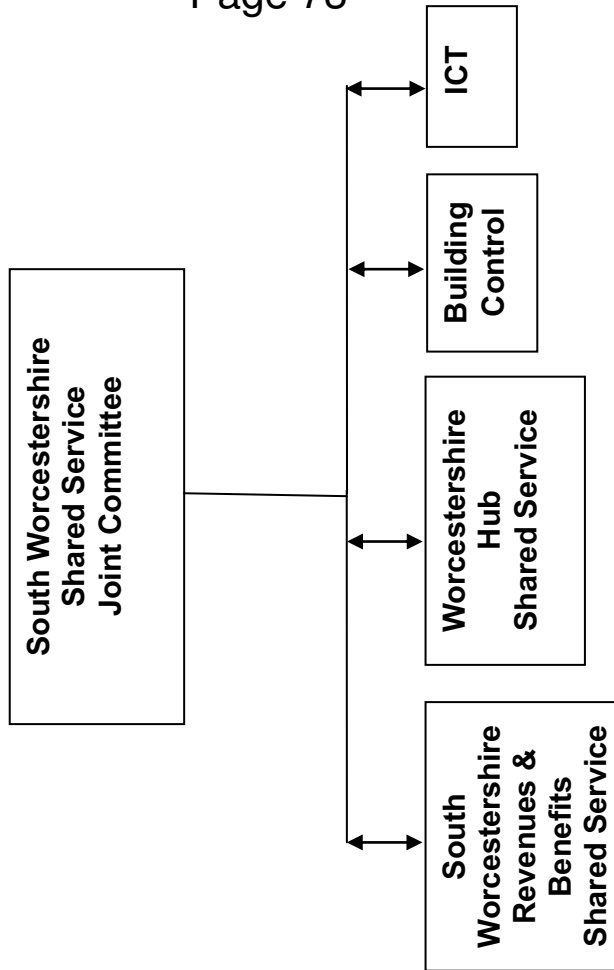
Chief Officers believe the customer service centres provide good value for money for the District Council and provide a consistently good level of performance. Councillors and the public have been impressed with the level of professionalism, although admit there was some resistance in the beginning.

The District Council has the customer at the heart and when considering the future of shared services, it would have to be clear where efficiencies and cash savings are. They are a high performing service and would not accept a drop in service for their customers.

WORCESTERSHIRE HUB GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS



WORCESTERSHIRE HUB SHARED SERVICE GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS



COUNTY COUNCIL RECHARGES

It was explained that the Customer Services function exists to support the frontline services of the County Council and the Hub partners. As such, the recharges system worked in the same way as for other support service functions, such as Human Resources and IT. Under the CIPFA Best Value Accounting Code of Practice, local authorities are required to apportion the costs of service to the services it supports. The County Council adopt a high level approach to this; rather than creating a bureaucratic internal accounting process of charging for actual services provided on an ongoing basis, an apportionment of the approved revenue budget is determined at the time of setting budgets on the basis of actual or planned service, allowing for the possibility for a service to migrate to the Hub. Discussion with Directorates on how to resource the Hub had taken place three years previously.

A budget for the recharge for frontline services is added to the appropriate frontline service's budget as a "top slice" and the actual charge is made at this budgeted level. The frontline service therefore carries the cost of its support services but the recharge does not impact on the service's controllable budget and nor does the service control the recharge's expenditure or take responsibility for budget variances. The Head of Customer Services therefore takes responsibility for control of the revenue budget for the service.

The basis for the apportionment of Customer Services costs to the WCC service areas takes account of:

- The volume of customer contacts for each service made via the Worcestershire Hub in person and over the phone. This data is taken from the management information systems used by the Worcestershire Hub at the time of the recharge calculation.
- A view of plans for any changes including the "migration" of services to the Worcestershire Hub, e.g. known plans to deal with a new service or extension of a service.
- Application of a weighting to take account of the average length of the customer contact (for contacts made in person or over the phone). This recognises that some enquiries, e.g. renewing a library book over the phone, are quicker than others, e.g. application for a Blue Badge.

The following table summarises the recharge to frontline services within the County Council for Customer Services for 2010/11.

Service	Recharge 2010/11 £000	Directorate Total £000
Children's services (non DSG³)		
LEA functions	17.3	
Social Care	120.5	137.8
Adult and Community services		
Social care	150.9	
Blue badge	556.1	
Registration	124.8	
Arts	36.4	
Libraries	740.4	1608.6
Environmental services		
Trading standards	47.7	
Highways	315.9	
Countryside	48.4	
Integrated Transport –Schools	183.5	
Traffic Management	160.5	
Street Lighting	11.9	
Waste Management	212.1	980.0
Corporate services		
Recruitment and Student Finance	111.6	
Admin Buildings – reception services	60.5	172.1
Planning, Economy & Performance		
Emergency Planning	8.8	8.8
Total		2,907.3
Schools DSG Funded		
School Admissions		351.8
Total		3,259.1
Corporate Management Costs (not recharged to frontline services)		133.0
Total County Council Budget		3,392.1

³ Dedicated Schools Grant

PERFORMANCE INFORMATION

APPENDIX 5

The following tables show information for the Worcestershire Hub and Worcestershire Hub Shared Service broken down by month for the year 2009/10.

Summary for the Worcestershire Hub

Indicator	2009/10														
	2008/9	Total	Average	April	May	June	July	August	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
Telephone Channel															
Total Incoming Calls	798055	66505	89614	83148	106681	107173	97080	112229	91964	87724	73444	121037	89980	116725	
Total Calls during Opening Hours	757172	63098	84075	78384	102365	103411	93376	108999	88706	85313	70516	117339	88955	114692	
Total Calls Answered	651086	54257	72166	66197	76415	75977	62707	71419	77070	73060	62868	97068	75561	94943	
Percentage of Calls Answered	85.9%	85.9%	85.8%	84.5%	74.6%	73.5%	67.2%	65.5%	86.9%	85.6%	89.2%	82.7%	84.9%	84.1%	
Service Level: Percentage of Calls Answered within 20secs	75.6%	75.6%	63.9%	64.9%	51.0%	47.5%	38.7%	37.4%	65.7%	61.6%	77.1%	56.0%	64.7%	61.9%	
Average Speed of Answer (seconds)	19	19	32	30	53	58	81	94	29	35	17	36	30	35	
Average Call Duration (hh:mm:ss)	00:02:28	00:02:28	00:02:25	00:02:26	00:02:37	00:02:45	00:02:49	00:02:54	00:02:48	00:02:56	00:02:55	00:03:03	00:02:59	00:03:44	
Face to Face Channel															
Total Number of Visitors (CRM)	179657	14971	14821	12929	13877	11872	11508	16913	17658	17890	14669	17709	16262	21413	
Total Number of Visitors (other)	215401	17950	22516	19151	20587	23728	20580	23791	24169	22783	17974	20047	18380		
Total Number of Payments made in Person	482057	40171	43323	39651	42718	44178	39367	41586	38550	36436	34601	31172	19311		
Total Number of Payments made using the Kiosks	12297	1537	3898	3634	3754	3408	3060	3449	3944	3838	3479	2990	1576	2004	

Worcestershire Hub Shared Service

Indicator	2008/9		2009/10											
	Total	Average	April	May	June	July	August	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
Telephone Channel														
Total Incoming Calls	513544	42795	45372	42405	60317	60381	56539	67483	50503	47224	36985	59568	44726	61560
Total Calls during Opening Hours	443636	36970	42360	39975	57984	58669	54693	66000	48973	46470	36125	58262	44118	60770
Total Calls Answered	374116	31176	34240	30955	36277	36607	29183	33301	41023	37671	33591	49480	39204	51252
Percentage of Calls Answered	84.3%	84.3%	80.8%	77.4%	62.6%	62.4%	53.4%	50.5%	83%	81%	93%	84.9%	88.9%	84.3%
Service Level: Percentage of Calls Answered within 20secs	75.6%	75.6%	55.3%	53.1%	31.6%	30.7%	17.4%	14.2%	59%	51%	80.1%	54.6%	62.2%	56.4%
Average Speed of Answer (seconds)	18	18	41	43	91	96	146	177	38	51	15	39	31	42
Average Call Duration (hh:mm:ss)	00:03:14	00:03:14	00:03:11	00:03:22	00:03:47	00:03:56	00:04:10	00:04:22	00:03:48	00:03:51	00:03:42	00:03:19	00:03:42	00:03:48
Face to Face Channel														
Total Number of Visitors (CRM)	30752	2563	1939	1585	1702	2017	2804	5574	6684	6311	5356	6925	5105	7043

Total Number of Visitors (other)	67496	5625	5968	4243	3527	8409	6799	9004	7766	6525	5612	6475	5756	10342
Total Number of Payments made in Person	76812	6401	4382	4077	4241	4567	3942	4290	3674	3369	2683	2478	1519	2173
Total Number of Payments made using the Kiosks	12297	1537	3898	3634	3754	3408	3060	3449	3944	3838	3479	2990	1576	2004

1. Information by Centre

The following tables show information for the Worcestershire Hub broken down by channel – telephony and face to face, and by centre. The information shown is for the full financial year 2009/10. A comparison to the 2008/9 position is also shown.

Telephone Contacts

09/10	Worcestershire Hub Contact Centres						Total
	Bromsgrove	Redditch	Wychavon	Wyre Forest	Worcestershire Hub Shared Service		
Total Incoming Calls	151051	276553	n/a	115232	633063		1175899
Total Calls during Opening Hours	142120	265662	n/a	109755	614339		1136071
<i>Comparison to 08/09</i>	-2%	77%		4%	38%		33%
Total Calls Answered	127334	229894	n/a	96876	452784		903859
<i>Comparison to 08/09</i>	0%	77%		0%	21%		28%
Percentage of Calls Answered	90%	87%	n/a	88%	73.7%		80%
Service Level	76%	57%	n/a	83%	48%		58%
Average Speed of Answer (seconds)	20	46	n/a	8	64		44
Average Call Duration (seconds)	170	205	n/a	151	228		177

Contacts made in person (2009/10)

09/10	Customer Service Centres (Summarised by area)						Total
	Bromsgrove	Redditch	Wychavon	Wyre Forest	Malvern Hills	Worcester City	
Total Number of Visitors (CRM)	11566	18639	92430	11841	20149	32896	187521
Total Number of Visitors (other)	19177	94928	n/a	65150	22095	58331	259681
Total Number of Payments made in Person	30324	124090	134157	115688	12754	28641	445654
Total Number of Payments made using the Kiosks	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	12659	26375	39034

2008/9 Information - Telephony

2008/9	Worcestershire Hub Contact Centres					Total
	Bromsgrove	Redditch	Wychavon	Wyre Forest	Worcestershire Hub Shared Service	
Total Calls during Opening Hours	145176	63123	n/a	105237	443638	757172
Total Calls Answered	127506	52766	n/a	96698	374116	651086
Service Level	72%	63%	n/a	87%	n/a	75%

Summary for the Worcestershire Hub

Indicator	2010/11													
	Total	Average	April	May	June	July	August	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
Telephone Channel														
Total Incoming Calls	1175899	97992	97568											
Total Calls during Opening Hours	1136131	94678	93784											
Total Calls Answered	906987	75582	82436											
Percentage of Calls Answered	79.83%	79.83%	87.9%											
Service Level: Percentage of Calls Answered within 20secs	57.73%	57.73%	64.09%											
Average Speed of Answer (seconds)	44	44	32											
Average Call Duration (hh:mm:ss)	00:02:57	00:02:57	00:03:05											
Face to Face Channel														
Total Number of Visitors (CRM)	187521	15627	19939											
Total Number of Visitors (other)	259681	21640												
Total Number of Payments made in Person	445654	37138												
Total Number of Payments made using the Kiosks	39034	3253	4126											

Worcestershire Hub Shared Service

Indicator	2009/10		2010/11											
	Total	Average	April	May	June	July	August	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
Telephone Channel														
Total Incoming Calls	633063	52755	48339											
Total Calls during Opening Hours	614339	51200	47043											
Total Calls Answered	452784	37732	43536											
Percentage of Calls Answered	73.7%	73.7%	92.5%											
Service Level: Percentage of Calls Answered within 20secs	48.0%	48.0%	77.7%											
Average Speed of Answer (seconds)	64	64	18											
Average Call Duration	3m 48s	3m 48s	3m 48s											
Face to Face Channel														
Total Number of Visitors (CRM)	53045	4420	6588											
Total Number of Visitors (other)	80426	6702	8249											
Total Number of Payments made in Person	41395	3450	3617											
Total Number of Payments made using the Kiosks	39034	3253	4126											

APPENDIX 6

MAY 2010 WORCESTERSHIRE VIEWPOINT SURVEY – TOPLINE RESULTS

From the questions asked about customer services, some key findings are set out below. *(It should be noted that this was not a Worcestershire Hub specific piece of consultation and therefore the responses are more generally about customer contact and experience):*

Base	Question	Response	%
5264	Do you have access to the internet?	Yes	86%
		No	14%
4434	If yes, please indicate where you access the internet most regularly?	Home	84%
		Work	14%
		Library	2%
		Internet cafe	-
5167	How would you be most likely to get in touch about council services?	In person	10%
		Telephone	49%
		Email	18%
		Online	16%
		Letter	6%
		Local councillor	1%
5184	When you have asked for a council service and we need to get back in touch with you, how would you like us to contact you?	Telephone	44%
		Email	39%
		Letter	17%
		Text message	1%
5179	How important is it that you have a single point of contact for all your council services?	Very important	40%
		Fairly important	34%
		Neither important nor unimportant	17%
		Fairly unimportant	5%
		Very unimportant	4%
	Would you consider using the following methods to access council services?		
5098	Website – to make payments	Yes	59%
		No	41%
5090	Website to report issues	Yes	70%
		No	30%
5087	Website – to apply for services	Yes	70%
		No	30%
5096	Website – to access information	Yes	82%
		No	18%
5045	Text messaging	Yes	24%
		No	76%
5094	Payment kiosks in Hub centres	Yes	32%
		No	68%
5074	Voice activated technology	Yes	22%
		No	78%

WORCESTERSHIRE HUB SCRUTINY: SUMMARY OF RESPONSES TO THE STAFF SURVEY

This was a short online survey of all county council and district council staff. There were 540 responses of which 390 were from county council employees, 68 were from District Council employees (Bromsgrove - 6, Malvern – 2, Redditch -1, Worcester – 21, Wychavon – 16, Wyre Forest – 22) and 82 blank responses.

Staff were asked 6 questions:

- Do you work for the Worcestershire Hub
- Does the service area you work in use the Hub?
- Have you contacted the Hub as part of your day job, and if so, how?
- Have you contacted the Hub as a member of the Public and if so, how?
- What services have you used?

The majority of respondents came from staff whose service area uses the Hub. Of respondents who had contacted the Hub as part of their day job, the most popular method was by phone. (Between 50 and 100% of respondents). However, email was also a very popular method (between 23 and 71%), and the face to face service had been used by around a third of respondents at Worcester City, Wychavon and Wyre Forest.

A surprisingly high % of council respondents had not contacted the Hub as a member of the public (over 40% at Worcester, Wyre Forest and Worcestershire). Of those who had, the majority had used the phone (45.6% at County Council). Email and web were little used by County Council staff who had contacted the Hub (only 11.5% and 22.7% respectively). At Wyre Forest and Wychavon around a quarter had used email. The services most used via the Hub were Highways, council tax, refuse and waste and libraries. Of the 30+ services given as 'other', the top ones planning, finding out a staff or service number and the blue badge scheme.

Free comments

The survey also asked for further comments (including a number of prompts as to what might be included), and almost 300 were received, the vast majority of which came from county council staff. There were 5 comments from Bromsgrove, 1 from Redditch, 15 from Worcester, 17 from Wychavon and 17 from Wyre Forest.

Main themes from the comments:

- A much higher %age were critical than were complimentary, though even some of the critics recognised improvement and the difficulties faced by Hub staff in needing to have detailed knowledge over a number of service areas
- In general Hub staff are found to be friendly, helpful and efficient
- Several staff pointed out the value of the Hub service as a central repository of all customer contact, which does not work in isolation like so many areas, and so is able to make recommendations for information sharing and process improvements.

- Hub staff are expected to know a huge range of information 'staff have become 'jack of all trades and masters of none" – some suggestions that it would be better to train and focus on particular areas, through close working with that service team
- Need improved flow of information between services and the Hub, and vice versa. Where comments specified a particular service, the most commonly referred to was Highways, and the majority of these comments were critical. Many comments spoke about the difficulty faced by hub staff, who needed improved flow of information from Highways staff, and for Highways to answer and take action to calls logged by the Hub
- many complaints received from the public in relation to libraries, about having to go through the Hub, when they know that their enquiry can only be answered by library staff
- Many comments about the Hub being reluctant to put people through to the service area, even when the member of public is confident they need to speak to the service directly. '(the Hub)...should not be used as an obstacle to prevent members of the public accessing the specialist staff'.
- The Hub is an efficient way to answer straight-forward queries information
- Comments that Hub has simply created 'another layer', and that enquiries should be dealt with by the service directly. A number of comments about service to the customer having deteriorated
- Clearer navigation of website and online systems is needed. Difficulty of using the online systems and accessing information on website, including highways reporting system
- Several comments about conflicting IT systems 'an application strategy is needed'. Comments about confusion caused by Highway's IT system (PEM)
- A number of comments were also made about Hub staff mis-allocating enquiries, due to lack of knowledge particularly between Client Services and Highways, which wasted time for the customer and frustrated the staff involved.
- The use of the word Hub to describe the service was confusing and didn't define its purpose.
- 'A little information can be dangerous' - a number of comments pointed out that sometimes Hub staff try to be helpful by providing information, when in fact they do not know the accurate answer – which is misleading for the customer, who believes they are talking to a member of staff from the actual service concerned.
- Many staff valued the role of the Hub and its staff, but would prefer the Hub to put through more queries to the service area than they currently do
- Many comments about queries being 'lost in translation' between the public, Hub and officer.
- Some comments gave the impression that some of the criticism was a resistance to change that might be seen as a threat to job security
- Many staff feel that the public would prefer to speak to the service directly
- There were mixed views on whether the Hub should be for just the public, or also for staff, with more people saying it should just be for the public
- Comments about the face to face service were mainly positive
- Complaints about call wait times.

RESPONSES FROM OTHER LOCAL AUTHORITIES - SUMMARY

- Do you share customer contact services with any other partners? E.g. Police. If so, how does this work?
- How are you tackling the challenge of changing the way the public access services. E.g. telephone, web, self-service online.
- What key performance indicators do you use to measure performance of customer contact?
- Do your contact centres handle all customer enquiries, or can enquiries be referred on to the service area? Is it realistic to aim to answer all queries at first point of contact?
- Are you doing any particular work to tackle avoidable contact?
- What impact has the recession had on customer contact and its performance?
- For two-tier authorities, do you have a shared customer contact provision?
- Overall, what are your Councillors' views on customer contact provision? Is there political support?

All of the authorities have various initiatives to tackle the challenge of changing the way the public access services. Examples given include poster campaigns to encourage direct debit and online payments, highlighting website contact on any documentation, training call centre staff to promote online access. Somerset County Council and Kent County Council have used Total Place projects to look at customer contact. The Kent Gateway Programme is summarized later in this section.

Most responses indicated they aimed to answer the majority of queries at first point of contact, with the general consensus being that some matters would always need specialist 'back office' knowledge and/or judgement, and that there needed to be the facility to pass some calls on. The '80/20' balance was quoted to by several respondents, based on the belief that 20% of business calls were too complicated to be dealt with at the first point of contact, and required back office resources, or expert knowledge.

The type of performance indicators used was broadly similar.

Avoidable contact was measured by all of the responding authorities. Two authorities, Suffolk County Council and Buckinghamshire County Council use specific tools to capture data and analyse why customers may end up in the wrong place. Southend Borough Council had collected data daily across 8 service areas, and through a specific action plan had reduced avoidable contact last year from a baseline of 36% to less than 10%.

When asked about the effect of the recession on the volume of enquiries, surprisingly, only 4 of the 11 responses recognised increased volumes of enquiries, 3 of these specifically for revenues and benefits enquiries.

Most responses indicated there was general political support for customer contact provision.

Some authorities have chosen to outsource their customer contact (where a company is contracted to carry out this service on their behalf), or to set up a partnership with

providers such as IBM or BT. Outsourcing is a growing option for local authorities. However, time constraints have meant we have been unable to look at this option.

Kent Gateway Programme

This project, a joint venture between the County Council and the 12 District Councils, was featured in FOSS 2007 as an innovative example of two-tier working. The Kent Gateway operates on the principle that customer needs determines both the location and mix of services provided in an area. Each of 5 gateways offers services delivered by a range of partners including the County, Districts, NHS and voluntary sector. The participating partners also agreed common governance arrangements, performance indicators and IT infrastructure.

We observed that the Worcestershire Hub has taken on similar ways of working. The main differences appeared to be the inclusion of a greater range of partners such as the NHS, and the perhaps stronger focus on customers' needs, for example regarding opening hours. Of great interest to us was their 'Tell us once' message, where information received from a customer would be automatically passed on to other affected service areas (for example, a customer reporting a bereavement).

We also liked the term 'Gateway', which would seem to be more indicative of its purpose than 'Hub'.

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Scrutiny Review: Worcestershire Hub November 2010

Response of the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Corporate Services to the Recommendations Cabinet, 25 November 2010

Summary

The recommendations of the Joint County / District Scrutiny of the Worcestershire Hub are welcomed and provide further support to the developments already underway or planned. This is valuable in driving a “whole organisation” approach to customer service.

When the Scrutiny exercise was commissioned, the Hub was experiencing challenging times primarily resulting from the increase in demand for service. It is encouraging to receive this vote of confidence in the Hub and the work staff undertake.

The Scrutiny is right to stress the value of the Hub and potential to secure further service improvements and cash savings by using the Hub for more services and developing and promoting the more cost effective online and telephone channels.

It is acknowledged that this exercise has increased the shared understanding of the members involved and that this is critical with regards future developments in customer service provision. The recommendations regarding member induction and sharing performance information with members are welcomed and will be taken forward.

The partnership of seven authorities remains strong within the framework of the partnership agreement that has been in place since 2003. The more recent development of the Worcestershire Hub Shared Service has brought about some more definitive governance arrangements for those participating authorities and whilst this means the governance may be seen as complex, it has been developed in a conscious way. Work is underway to review the overall governance arrangements for the Worcestershire Hub taking account of the key role of the Hub in service transformation. This recognises the aim to have single governance arrangements in place.

Each of the recommendations made as part of the Scrutiny have been taken in turn and a comment provided. A clear updated plan of work is emerging across the partnership and this report is being used to shape and inform the details.

Recommendations

RECOMMENDATION 1

If the Hub is to be increasingly used as a basis for service transformation across the County, it is vital that there is councillor understanding and support across all authorities. All authorities should ensure their inductions include briefing about customer service strategies across the whole of the Worcestershire Hub (and not just their local area), including visits to both local centres and the Worcestershire Hub Shared Service Contact Centre (based at Perry Wood Walk).

This recommendation is welcomed recognising the increasingly central role of the Hub within each authority. Over recent years, Worcestershire County Council has included the Worcestershire Hub as part of the new member induction process. Consideration can also be given to the inclusion of the Hub as part of Senior Management induction.

Work will take place to enable this for 2011 onwards.

Over the last year there have been many visits to the Worcestershire Hub Shared Service Contact Centre from members from a number of the authorities.

RECOMMENDATION 2:

All authorities consider their scrutiny arrangements of shared services – this could be done at the joint scrutiny chairs and vice-chairs network.

The Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen of the overview and scrutiny committees of each authority within Worcestershire meet regularly to share good practice, avoid duplication of work programmes and discuss possible joint scrutiny. It will be helpful to consider possible ways to scrutinise shared services at this network, and the matter will be raised at a future meeting.

RECOMMENDATION 3

We recommend that each authority and the Worcestershire Hub Shared Service review governance arrangements across the Worcestershire Hub Partnership. The aim would be to ensure clarity, accountability and transparency and to move towards a single governance structure.

The governance arrangements for the Worcestershire Hub Shared Service have been established in a conscious, deliberate way. However it is acknowledged that the governance arrangements appear complex recognising the wider partnership agreement for the Worcestershire Hub and then specific arrangements for the Shared Service.

A review of governance arrangements is currently underway by the Worcestershire Hub Strategic Management Group as part of a wider piece of work agreed by the Chief Executives of all authorities in August 2010. The Strategic Management Group will report back to Chief Executives with proposals at the end

of the year.

RECOMMENDATION 4: *We recommend that the District Councils should consider researching the cost of individual transactions for different services, which will build on the work being carried out by the Hub Shared Service.*

Work to identify transaction costs and the differences across the various “access channels” is important. The basis for calculating transaction costs needs to be agreed across the partnership to confirm what costs elements are / are not included.

The Worcestershire Hub Strategic Management Group has agreed to undertake a piece of work looking at the cost model – end-to-end – for key services. This is important as looking at the transaction costs within the Hub alone does not present the complete picture recognising the depth of service provided as the first point of contact varies.

RECOMMENDATION 5

The more services use the Hub, the better value it becomes. Therefore, as part of the BOLD programme, the County Council should increase its efforts to ensure all its services use the Hub.

This is included as part of the Customer Focus work within the WCC BOLD Programme.

Work is also well underway with the Worcestershire Regulatory Service where the Hub will be the countywide first point of contact.

RECOMMENDATION 6

In light of future funding and the move towards self-service within the Hub, all authorities and the South Worcestershire Shared Services Joint Committee should monitor and record the efficiencies and savings gained by use of the Hub.

Agreed. There are two clear areas of efficiency to be gained through increasing the availability and use of self-service. These are; (1) savings within the Worcestershire Hub by reducing the amount of “assisted” contact both in person, by telephone and post and (2) savings within service areas through streamlined processes, removal of re-keying data, reduced data checking, right first time approach, as well as a reduction in paper publications and forms.

RECOMMENDATION 7

Appropriate resource plans for the Hub are in place to better plan for forecast demand.

This requires continued close working with service areas to understand what influences customer demand and patterns of demand. Forecast effects on demand will be covered as part of the regular service review process (where this is not already happening).

The Worcestershire Hub Shared Service is currently in the process of implementing a Workforce Management System. This provides greater capability for using information regarding forecasts to better match resource capacity and demand.

RECOMMENDATION 8

The Hub also needs to be prepared to deal with unpredicted peaks in service demand, and we recommend that Business Continuity Plans are in place across the Hub Shared Service and the non shared service Hubs.

A review of existing Business Continuity Plans will be carried out. The tools available within the Worcestershire Hub Shared Service Contact Centre, including the Workforce Management system, will enable greater ability to plan for peaks in demand. Plans will obviously need to take account of the resources available.

RECOMMENDATION 9

Performance information should be consistent across the Shared Service and the non-Shared Service districts, to enable like for like comparisons, and we recommend a single performance management framework is established across the Hub.

The Worcestershire Hub Strategic Management Group has already acknowledged that information needs to be clear, consistent and visible in order to drive service improvements. As part of the work to address this, the specific elements of performance information will be reviewed and agreed.

RECOMMENDATION 10

All performance information – for shared service and non-shared service districts – should be made available to all councillors.

Once the Performance Management Framework is established, the information will be made available to councillors on a regular basis. It is likely this will be via the internet.

RECOMMENDATION 11

We recommend that all partners consider the role which scrutiny could play in helping to monitor performance of the Worcestershire Hub, if they have not already done so.

Performance monitoring is a key role of the County Council's Overview and Scrutiny Performance Board and the overview and scrutiny panels. The Resources Overview and Scrutiny Panel receives twice yearly performance information which includes the Worcestershire Hub's key performance indicators. The same process is in place for many – if not all – of the other authorities.

RECOMMENDATION 12

For telephone enquiries, inform customers of their place in the queue, or an estimated

wait time for them to be able to speak to a customer services advisor.

The Worcestershire Hub Operational Management Group (Customer Service Managers from across the partnership) will review this in order to determine an appropriate course of action. However, it is important to recognise the recent and current performance with average telephone wait times of approximately 30 seconds. With this level of performance, information regarding the queue is probably not appropriate.

Customers are informed about queues/increased demand at peak times and any incidents which impact on call volumes or customer service. Messages are also used as appropriate to signpost customers to websites or provide information.

RECOMMENDATION 13

Define and agree Service Level Agreements between the Worcestershire Hub and every service area.

Agreed. This is critical to improving the quality of service for our customers. Agreements already exist between some service areas and the Worcestershire Hub and clearly there is an opportunity for these to be reviewed in light of increased focus on self service.

Service level agreements recognise the end-to-end process and provide clarity about the process followed, information available to customer service staff, information passed to service areas, timescales, performance targets, information in order to set customer expectations etc.

RECOMMENDATION 14

Ensure there is sufficient time allocated for service area staff and Hub staff to review any issues or needs, and to monitor service provision via the Hub.

Many regular service reviews take place between customer service managers and service managers. The format of these reviews will be “firmed up” and managers will ensure these take place on a regular, scheduled basis within the resources available. The frequency of service reviews is determined by the nature of the service and / or the stage of development. Clear contact points and escalation routes will also be confirmed (where they are not already clear) for matters arising.

The focus of these reviews is; improving customer service, finding solutions and driving efficiencies.

RECOMMENDATION 15

Further work on the flow of information between the service area and the Hub (and vice versa) should take place, to ensure that the correct information is provided by the Hub to the service area, and that service area staff provide a response which enables Hub staff to answer the customer enquiry. It is important that both teams understand the implications of what the information they provide will be for the customer. The creation of

Service Level Agreements between the Hub and services will support this.

Good customer service is the responsibility of all and the creation of Service Level Agreements for all services will support this.

The Worcestershire Hub Strategic Management Group (7 authorities represented) is concluding the development of a Customer Strategy. This strategy sets out a number of clear principles to improve customer service. The work to adopt this will then be completed within each authority this year.

RECOMMENDATION 16

Give all customers the enquiry reference number, to encourage and enable them to track progress themselves online, and reduce the need for repeat enquiries to the Hub.

When customers make contact via the Worcestershire Hub they are given a service request number as appropriate, depending on the nature of their enquiry.

Work is underway to implement tools to enable the improved monitoring of the status of some open service requests (for certain services) and it is intended to link this to text or email status updates for customers in the future.

For certain services, e.g. Highways, customers will be able to track the status online. This is the desired position for self-service.

RECOMMENDATION 17

Move towards more consistent IT packages, as contracts come up for renewal.

It is important to ensure that the direction of self-service, web services and improved workflow are fundamental elements of any future ICT activity. This will be reflected in ICT strategies and service transformation work across the authorities in Worcestershire.

A contract is currently in place for the support of elements of the Worcestershire Hub infrastructure, e.g. Telephony System, Customer Relationship Management (CRM). This contract ceases in 2013 and work is already underway to scope the requirements of future arrangements beyond this point. This acknowledges that there is now increased knowledge and experience “in-house”.

RECOMMENDATION 18

In view of the negative feedback from our survey of parish councillors, we recommend further dialogue between senior officer representatives from the Worcestershire Hub and parish councils, to ensure their feedback can be used to improve the overall Hub service.

Specific developments and improvements are communicated via the CALC Newsletter. However, representatives from the Worcestershire Hub Strategic Management Group will meet with CALC to take account of feedback to explore making improvements to the service.

The majority of contact made by Parish Councils via the Worcestershire Hub relates to Highways matters. The work currently underway between Customer Services and Highways to improve the quality of information available to customers will help improve the experience had by Parish Councils.

RECOMMENDATION 19

The 'Hub' means different things to different people. We recommend further communication of the Hub's identity and services to the public. This could, for example, accompany the issue of council tax bills, which would present a cost-effective opportunity for marketing.

Information regarding the Worcestershire Hub has been included in previous years as part of the information issued along with Council Tax bills. Work is underway to start preparing for the information to go out with bills in March 2011 and this will take the points regarding Hub Identity into account.

Further communications and marketing activity will also take these points into account.

RECOMMENDATION 20

Our investigation of best practice advice and customer survey results supports our findings that the website offers huge potential for helping customers to help themselves, and for making substantial efficiency savings. This can only be achieved if the website is as user-friendly and effective as possible. We are pleased to see that the website is being improved and recommend that this work continues in order to realise the potential gains in customer satisfaction and efficiency gains.

In the current climate, it is even more important that a commitment is made to self-service as a strategic issue. A working group made of representatives from across the seven authorities has recently prepared a Self Service Strategy and this was presented to Chief Executives at the end of October. This recognises the key role of self service in the future of improving customer service as well as enabling efficiencies.

A joint plan to deliver the strategy is currently being prepared, this acknowledges that progress has been and continues to be made in a number of areas, however further development work and changes are required to make self-service a core part of service delivery.

The web is fundamental to the Self-Service strategy; however it does include other media such as automated telephone services.

RECOMMENDATION 21

In addressing the website and its expanding role in customer contact, we recommend that consideration is given to where the website sits within the council's organisational structure. This should take account of the need to align expertise in customer contact and communication, as well as information technology.

The website is at the heart of improvements and the previous point emphasises the importance of getting self service right and usable. As part of this the positioning of the website within the organisations will be considered. In the meantime, the various services and functions will work together to deliver improvements, e.g. Customer Services, ICT and Marketing & Communications.

RECOMMENDATION 22

Councils' websites are very important and their profile needs to reflect this. A cabinet member for each authority should have responsibility for the website within his or her portfolio.

Alongside the positioning of the website within the organisation, Cabinet Member responsibility for the website will also be clarified where appropriate.

Cabinet**Thursday, 25 November 2010, County Hall, Worcester (10.00 a.m.)****Minutes****Present:**

Mr A I Hardman (Chairman), Mr A N Blagg, Mr S J M Clee, Mrs E A Eyre, Mr S E Geraghty, Mr W P Gretton, Mr M J Hart, Mr D W Prodger and Mr J H Smith

Also attended:

Mr R W Banks, Mr T J Bean, Mr M H Broomfield, Mr R A A Bullock, Mr J M Cairns, Mr J P Campion, Mrs P J M Morgan, Mr D F O Thain, Mrs E B Tucker and Mr T A L Wells

Available papers:

The members had before them:

- A. The Agenda papers (previously circulated);
- B. 'The Worcestershire Hub' – Report of the Worcestershire Hub Scrutiny Task Group (November 2010) (previously circulated);
- C. The Minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 21 October 2010 (previously circulated).

(A copy of document A will be attached to the signed Minutes).

**1185. Apologies and
Declarations of
Interest
(Agenda item 1)**

In respect of item 6, Scrutiny Review – "The Worcestershire Hub" and item 8, Worcestershire Concessionary Travel Scheme, Mr A N Blagg, Mr S J M Clee, Mrs E A Eyre, Mr S E Geraghty, Mr A I Hardman, Mr M J Hart, Mr D W Prodger and Mr J H Smith declared personal interests in relation to their membership of a district council. Mr W P Gretton declared a personal interest in agenda item 8 given his eligibility for a bus pass.

**1186. Public
Participation
(Agenda item 2)**

None.

**1187. Confirmation of
Minutes
(Agenda item 3)**

RESOLVED: that the Minutes of the meeting held on 21 October 2010 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

**1188. Pupil Admissions
Policy for**

The Cabinet had before it a report which set out that there was a statutory requirement for the County Council to consult on the admission arrangements for community and

**Community and
Voluntary
Controlled
Schools –
Academic Year
2012/13
(Agenda item 4)**

voluntary controlled schools. Following a recent Ombudsman's ruling on a case involving the Council the Schools Adjudicator had suggested that the Feeder School link in the Council's current Admissions Policy should not be used for applications to reception classes as there were no feeder school links and some parents could be confused with regard to the status of the nursery class or other local pre-school provision. Whilst all attempts were made to ensure the position with regard to nurseries was made clear, removing this criterion for entry to reception would ensure there was no possible misunderstanding. It was also recommended a review of the feeder links at middle and high school transfer was undertaken at this time. The report set out the advantages and disadvantages of the feeder school link.

'Significant reasons' were currently listed as one of the oversubscription criteria. The report made clear that it was very difficult to identify all the circumstances that would be accepted as a 'significant reason' which made this criterion very subjective. It did not meet, therefore, the aspiration of the Admissions Code of Practice in terms of trying to achieve the highest level of objectivity as possible. Independent Appeal Panels were able to take individual circumstances into account and therefore could be better placed to consider decisions on an individual basis rather than officers. Draft admissions policies with this proposed change and that for the feeder school link were before the Cabinet for consideration.

In March 2010, the Cabinet approved the 2011/12 co-ordinated schemes for Primary and Secondary Schools as well as an In-Year co-ordinated scheme. The Co-ordinated Admission Arrangements proposed for the 2012/2013 academic year were before the Cabinet for consideration.

The Council had a process to keep under review the Published Admission Numbers (PANs) of all community and voluntary controlled schools, working to maintain, as far as possible, sufficient places in an area for the number of pupils seeking to attend their local school. Until three years ago pupil numbers had been falling across the County and the strategy has been to remove surplus places. Pre-school numbers had begun to show a different and variable picture across the County. Proposed variations to the PANs for some community and voluntary controlled schools for implementation in the academic year 2012/13 were before the Cabinet. It was recommended all suggestions were consulted upon before a final recommendation was made.

The Cabinet had before it the performance indicator results for the admissions process for Worcestershire compared over the last four years. This information was regularly

reviewed to inform decisions on improvements to the service.

The report made clear that should the recommendations be approved, consultation involving all admission authorities in the County would take place for a minimum of 8 weeks, between December 2010 and February 2011 and the responses reported back to the Cabinet in April 2011.

Annually, the Council published a composite prospectus, the Information for Parents: Admissions and Transfers to Schools book. For the 2011/12 academic year, the Cabinet agreed not to provide a copy of the book to every child due to transfer to school but only to parents with a child entering reception. The book was made available on the County Council website. The number of hard copies printed was therefore reduced from 26,000 to 10,000. It was now proposed to bring Primary Schools in line with Middle and High Schools and in future not provide a copy of the book for every reception child. Instead it was proposed that an admissions leaflet was produced for distribution to all primary school nursery classes, early years' settings, libraries, GP surgeries and contact centres in the summer term. It was envisaged that only 1,000 books would need to be printed for distribution when requested which equated to a saving of up to £9,000.

Due to changes in funding for maintained Nursery Classes from place funding to pupil funding, the Council had contacted those schools with Nursery Classes where the number of children on roll was less than the number of places available and may be at risk of not being able to meet the costs of running the nursery class. At present consultation was currently taking place on the proposed closure of the St. Clements CE Voluntary Aided Primary School maintained Nursery. No other maintained Nurseries had formally requested any changes be considered at this time.

In the ensuing discussion, the following main points were raised:

- (a) Whether the removal of the "special reasons" category from the Council's oversubscription criteria would in any way hamper the Independent Appeals Panel's ability to make such a finding. Mr Hart confirmed that this would not be the case.
- (b) Clarification was sought on the increase of the PAN for South Bromsgrove High School in respect of its Sixth Form. It was explained that this figure only referred to pupils who were not already on roll in Year 11 and transferring to Year 12 at South Bromsgrove High School in other words "external" students.



- (c) That at this stage the Cabinet were only agreeing the proposal for the purposes of initiating consultation.

RESOLVED: that

- (a) consultation takes place on the Council's School Admissions Policy with two proposed changes to the oversubscription criteria; removing Feeder School links and Special Reasons as set out in Appendix 1a & b of the report;**
- (b) the current (2011/12) co-ordinated schemes for Primary, Secondary and In-Year admissions, be consulted upon for the academic year 2012/13 as set out in Appendix 2a & b of the report;**
- (c) the list of revised Published Admission Numbers for the academic year 2012/13 be approved for consultation as set out in Appendix 3 of the report;**
- (d) Performance Indicators for the operation of Admission Arrangements in Worcestershire be noted;**
- (e) changes to maintained nurseries as a consequence of the changes in Nursery funding be noted; and**
- (f) there is a further reduction in the number of printed copies of the 2012/13 Information for Parents book.**

1189. Joint Commissioning for Speech, Language and Communication Needs (Agenda item 5)

The Cabinet had before it a report which set out that in February 2009, the Cabinet approved the development of joint commissioning arrangements with NHS Worcestershire for children and young people. Speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) were identified as one of the initial priorities as a consequence of concerns expressed about the inequitable provision across the County.

The first phase of the review of SLCN, a needs assessment and service mapping exercise, was carried out to describe the population of children and young people with SLCN in Worcestershire and to map current service provision at a universal, targeted and specialist level. The review identified a substantial need, a lack of clarity regarding current provision, inequities of access to provision, historical structures no longer fit for purpose, duplication of effort across agencies and gaps existing in

The second phase of the review would be to propose a new way of organising services and would be completed by March 2011. The outcome of the review would be included in the report to the Cabinet which would seek approval for the Section 75 agreement. The core principles of the second phase of the review were:

- There was universal information, advice and guidance to all schools, settings and parents and carers
- Those schools and settings in rural and urban areas of poverty received additional targeted support
- There would be integrated speech and language services to meet specialist need available equitably according to evidenced need to children and young people in Worcestershire
- There would be clarity around provision, access to provision and pathways at all levels of need
- The service would provide seamless intervention and support at the earliest opportunity and in the most appropriate environment
- Training and development opportunities would be provided to ensure that the whole workforce was able to identify need at the earliest opportunity and support children.

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel for Children and Young People had a specific on-going scrutiny of the progress of this review and had received regular reports.

The overall budget came from NHS Worcestershire and partnership working with schools and the Council. There was no additional budget from NHS Worcestershire and therefore the proposals would seek to make better and more equitable use of available resources. The revised arrangements would be managed within a formal pooled budget arrangement, subject to Cabinet approval. This would allow for greater flexibility of the use of resources at a universal, targeted and specialist level.

In the ensuing discussion, the following main points were raised:

- (a) concern was expressed that individual cases of children with hearing difficulties being "missed" should not recur. This concern was answered by the suggestion that the thrust of the new approach was to ensure early intervention which would not only ensure better outcomes for the young person, but also reduce the inputs needed by later and more complex intervention
- (b) that the proposals would reduce the ad hoc nature of



same service provision and ensure a more consistent approach with better outcomes

- (c) what training needs would be addressed? It was stated that whole school training would be given at primary levels with specialist support and workforce development. The focus would be on the primary sector with enhanced work with SENCOs at secondary level. This focus would ensure the early intervention emphasis was maintained whilst reducing demands being placed on high schools.

RESOLVED: that

- (a) the progress made by the joint commissioning review of speech, language and communication needs across the County be noted; and**
- (b) a report be received in March 2011 as part of the joint commissioning pooled budget arrangements.**

**1190. Scrutiny Report –
The
Worcestershire
Hub
(Agenda item 6)**

The Cabinet had before it a report which set out that in December 2009 it had been agreed at the Overview and Scrutiny Performance Board's (OSPB) meeting that a scrutiny of the Worcestershire Hub should be carried out by a County Council task group with a representative of each district council co-opted onto the group. The terms of reference were to examine:

- The development of the Worcestershire Hub, including the Worcestershire Hub Shared Service
- How to make the Worcestershire Hub fit for purpose in the future
- Differences in provision across Worcestershire, what they are and why they exist?
- What are the gaps in provision and what are the opportunities?

The task group considered information relating to performance, finance, governance, customer satisfaction and experience, information technology, individual services, Council staff views, Parish Council views, councillor awareness, what other local authorities were doing and best practice. The task group also visited the majority of hub centres across the county and held discussions with each of the District Councils.

The scrutiny proved to be complex and demanding, largely because of the size and complexity of the Hub operation and the differences in the way each authority handled customer services, and the range and depth of the

use of the Hub within different services. The task group looked at the way in which customer access to Council services was likely to change in the future. Customer service was a fast paced environment and the task group was aware of many work projects which were underway. Nonetheless, there was always room for improvement and the group made recommendations on a number of areas.

The OSPB endorsed the scrutiny report on 4 November 2010. The response of the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Corporate Services to the recommendations was before the Cabinet for consideration.

Mr T A L Wells introduced the report as Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Performance Board and Mr R W Banks presented the report as Scrutiny Panel Chairman.

In the ensuing discussion, the following main points were raised:

- (a) the County Council was ahead of the field nationally in many respects and particularly because the Hub involved the participation of all the District Councils in the county. Nevertheless being a "trail blazer" carried with it certain difficulties, not least of which was limited experience from elsewhere to learn from
- (b) some unevenness in Hub services was experienced mainly due to the fact that District Councils were participating at their own pace. However this was an important part of the process and the situation would improve as time went on
- (c) "dual-hatted" members had an important role to play in influencing the District Councils to embrace the shared Hub, improving the services for their residents and reducing costs overall
- (d) issues around peaks in work were being addressed and the lessons learned had made the Hub "smarter" and more resilient. This resilience had been commented upon by District Council partners. Wider experience of working with unpredictable work flows within the County Council was also informing this improvement
- (e) the Hub was seen as highly professional but there were sometimes issues with the promptness of responses from service areas. Greater emphasis should be placed on the financial contributions made by service directorates and as workloads increased on the Hub this had to be reviewed regularly. There were economies to be made by using the Hub more but



also costs to be recovered

- (f) members praised Customer Service Advisers and those who ran the services of the Hub on a day-to-day basis. It was also noted that that the Hub allowed complaints to be tracked electronically
- (g) that the smarter operation of the Hub was also improving performance and operating practices in other parts of the organisation. The Hub was considered vital in assisting transformation and increased self-service

RESOLVED: that

- (a) the Scrutiny Report on the 'Worcestershire Hub', together with the response from the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Corporate Services, be received; and**
- (b) the Scrutiny Report be welcomed and the response of the Cabinet Member with Responsibility be adopted as the way forward.**

1191. Review of the Current Fairer Charging Policy in Adult Social Care (Agenda item 7)

The Cabinet had before it a report which set out that in September 2003, the Department of Health (DoH) issued guidance for fairer charging to aid development of local charging policies for non-residential social services. In response to this, the County Council issued its charging policy which had been updated every financial year. The current local fairer charging policy determined that charges to service users were based on the units of services that they received. In July 2009, the DoH issued new guidance for fairer contributions, in the light of personal budgets, highlighting how local charging policies would need to change.

The proposal, to review charges for adult social care as part of the BOLD programme, had the potential to involve a significant variation to existing charging policy, impacting upon residents/service users. Preliminary work indicated that varying the policy on adult social care charges had the potential to achieve significant savings of up to £2.5m. It was therefore important to carry out a fair and open consultation with service users and carers before any decision was made to vary that policy.

Currently, the amount that service users were charged for services that they received was based on the Charging Policy for Non-Residential Services 2010/11. Officers undertook two calculations and the service user was charged the lower of these. Since April 2009 the Council had been offering service users a personal budget as part

of Choice and Control. It was clear that this current method of charging on a unit basis was not sustainable once a service user was receiving a personal budget.

The new local policy would need to apply the principles of fairness and equity. Applying the new guidance, the calculation of the cost of the services received by the service user would need to change. This calculation would then be compared with the financial assessment, and the service user would be charged the lower of these. The service user would only ever pay up to their ability to pay. It was proposed, for the calculation of the cost of services received by the service user, to consult on an approach where the traditional service user and the personal budget service user were charged on a full cost basis, subject to their ability to pay. This had the effect of removing the subsidy that the current policy afforded to those people who had the means to pay more for the service they received.

Of the 3,424 service users who were currently receiving non-residential services that were assessed under the fairer charging policy, 2,024 (59%) would not be affected by the new proposed policy and would not have to pay any increase to assessed charges. Of the 1,400 service users who would be affected by the new policy, 1,073 (77%) were service users who were currently paying below their maximum assessed available income level and 327 (23%) were self-funders. The majority of those paying below the cap (853 out of 1,073) would potentially have increased charges of up to £25 per week. However, the majority of self-funders (286 out of 327) would potentially incur increased charges of more than £25 per week. It did need to be recognised that a potential risk if charges were increased may be that service users no longer used these services leaving internal services under-utilised and not value for money.

Currently, there were a number of methods of payment of fairer charging invoices. It was recommended, to save processing costs, that the principle of payment by direct debit was adopted with other methods being phased out by 31 March 2012. The Council would however retain some discretion for users to make payments by methods other than direct debit in exceptional circumstances.

The Council would also want to consult on the use of a flat rate Disability Related Expenditure (DRE) allowance which would provide service efficiencies and improve the speed at which financial assessments could be completed. If DRE was assessed as a flat rate contribution, it would need to be granted on an objective criterion such as receipt of Disability Living Allowance or Attendance Allowance.



The aim was to complete a financial assessment as soon as an ongoing care need was identified and to inform the service user of their potential contribution before the care package was purchased. The introduction of a provisional assessment for service users where a non-residential care need was identified was therefore proposed meaning that the service user would start to contribute towards their care immediately. Any under or overpayments could then be adjusted following the full assessment. Naturally, the financial assessment followed the assessment of need, and ability to pay should not influence decisions on services.

It was proposed that if the principle of full cost charging was approved, transitional protection arrangements for existing service users who were severely affected by the future charging policy would apply. Consultation would take place from December 2010. A report on the outcomes of the consultation and recommendations would be brought to the Cabinet in May 2011. In taking decisions the Council had to have due regard to the duty to avoid and eliminate disability discrimination pursuant to Section 49A of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. Accordingly, the report would also include a full Equality Impact Assessment of any changes recommended to the policy.

In the ensuing discussion, the following main points were raised:

- (a) more information was sought on the impact of Universal Benefit. It was recognised that it was very early to assess in any real detail but a report would be made to the Cabinet in May 2011 at which time the position might be clearer
- (b) the likely effect on the services provided by the voluntary sector. It was suggested that the new policy would encourage uptake of personal budgets and this process would probably impact in a positive way for voluntary sector providers. Account would be taken of this in the consultation exercise
- (c) the consultation exercise would include worked examples and would also be couched in plainer English to allow more people to understand and participate
- (d) it was clarified that the review was intended to cover all provision of meals, whether at Day Centres or in the community. The consultation exercise would therefore include explicitly all service users in receipt of meals both in Day Centres and in the community
- (e) user groups, carers' organisations and the voluntary

sectors should also be involved in the consultation exercise.

RESOLVED: that

- (i) **consultation with service users and carers be approved on the principles of:**
 - (a) **equitable charging for traditional and personal budget service users;**
 - (b) **removal of current subsidy levels within existing charging arrangements;**
 - (c) **payment of charges by direct debit;**
 - (d) **use of a flat rate allowance for Disability Related Expenditure;**
 - (e) **use of a provisional financial assessment;**
 - (f) **policy simplification;**
 - (g) **the transitional arrangements as outlined in paragraph 27 of the report; and**
- (ii) **the Director of Adult and Community Services be authorised to finalise the consultation document.**

**1192. Worcestershire
Concessionary
Travel Scheme
(Agenda item 8)**

The Cabinet had before it a report which set out that the concessionary travel scheme in England provided free travel on local bus services for eligible elderly and disabled residents. Eligibility for free travel was for residents of pensionable age and registered disabled residents. There were seven categories of disabled people who were entitled to the statutory minimum concession and these were set out in Section 146 of the Transport Act 2000. The scheme was provided in accordance with the provisions of the Transport Act 1985, the Transport Act 2000, the Travel Concessions (Eligibility) Act 2002, and the Concessionary Bus Travel Act 2007. The Council had to have due regard to its duties to avoid and eliminate disability discrimination under the Disability Discrimination legislation.

Responsibility for the provision of concessionary travel services had traditionally rested with District Councils. The Department for Transport was, however, transferring responsibility to upper tier authorities from 1 April 2011. The County Council had a duty to publish details of the proposed concessionary travel scheme by 1 December this year. The scheme consisted of two components:

- (i) the national minimum scheme (English National Concessionary Travel Scheme) open to all holders of Concessionary Travel Passes issued by English Travel Concession Authorities and funded by central Government; and
- (ii) any discretionary local enhancements funded by the local authority issuing the scheme.



The operator of any service was obliged to accept free passes and was also entitled to claim reimbursement from the local authority in whose area the journey commenced to recompense for revenue lost as a result of compliance with the scheme.

Since April 2008, approximately 100,000 concessionary passes had been issued across the County, of which 80,000 were 'live'. The number of concessionary bus journeys was approximately 6.3 million per annum in Worcestershire. The national minimum scheme specified time restrictions for access to free travel on local bus services by concessionary pass holders. Four districts had no time restriction on usage. The other two did not allow for travel before 09:30. A local concession was also provided for the companions of eligible disabled residents. In addition, some of the local councils provided other local enhancements to the scheme.

The current direct costs of the scheme were approximately £6m per annum. The financial implications of the transfer remained far from certain. The County Council however, expected to receive monies for the national minimum scheme only, i.e. – 09:30-23:00 Monday – Friday, all day on weekends and Bank Holidays and did not expect to receive financial support for any of the current local enhancements. The estimated grant income for the new scheme was approximately £5m per annum. Continuation of the companion pass concession was supported by the Equality Impact Assessment and was affordable within current financial projections. The continuation of the pre 09:30 travel concession across Worcestershire was felt to be unaffordable. The County Council would however, continue to explore the viability of local pre 09:30 solutions with District Council financial support.

In the ensuing discussion, the following main points were raised:

- (a) whether funding from the Government for this Scheme would be "ring-fenced". It was explained that funding would be part of the Council's Formula Grant and might not be as transparent as hoped. A further debate might be required should there be a shortfall when details became clearer
- (b) the Council would have to provide the statutory minimum and this could have further effects on budgets if there was insufficient grant
- (c) there was an intention to include within the Scheme a "companion's pass" which would be of great assistance

(d) the scheme was widely welcomed.

RESOLVED: that the provisions of the new Worcestershire concessionary travel scheme as set out in Appendix 1 to the report be approved.

1193. Money Matters (Agenda item 9)

The Cabinet had before it a report on a number of financial processes to be approved.

Budget Monitoring Update

Treasury management operations continued to indicate that there would be a favourable variance this year in the region of £2.3m. The Council's share of the operating surplus from West Mercia Supplies Joint Committee was in line to rise by £0.286m.

The Adult and Community Services budget continued to require careful budget management with the key areas of cost pressures; this was in part due to increased demand for services. BOLD programmes were in place to target cost reductions. The net forecast overspend was £1.7m. This could be contained by the one-off use of Directorate reserves. The Children's Services financial pressures continued in the Looked After Children placements budget. A strategy for managing down the number and cost of placements was being put into place. The net forecast overspend was £1.3m. This could be contained by the one-off use of Children's Services reserves. Other Directorate budget pressures were being managed within the revised cash limit together with the one-off use of Directorate reserves in accordance with Financial Regulations.

Additional Area Based Grant (ABG)

The final adjusted ABG allocation for 2010/11 had been confirmed. This included a sum of £19,300 in recognition of the duty on local authorities to have a petitions scheme in place. It also included an additional sum of £6,600 for School Improvement partners on top of the £279,000 included in the original ABG allocation. It was proposed that the Corporate Services Directorate and Children's Services Directorate cash limits were increased by £19,300 and £6,600 respectively, to reflect this additional funding. ABG was accounted for as a single amount through Financial Services and its cash limit would be reduced by £25,900.

Capital Programme Update

It was proposed to relocate the Multi Use Games Area opposite the Fairfield Centre site, Worcester to an alternative, more suitable position on the school site. The existing site (0.24 acres) was suitable for social housing



and had little alternative use. A sale at £65,400 had been agreed. The proceeds of the sale would be sufficient to relocate the facilities and provide adequate fencing for the Fairfield Centre to help off-set the risk of vandalism. Approval was therefore sought to apply the proceeds of the land sale for the relocation project described.

Treasury Management – Half yearly progress

(a) Borrowing

Total Council debt outstanding stood at £233.2m at 30 September 2010, well within the Capital Financing Requirement estimated for 2010/11 of £412.9m. The shortfall was temporarily funded by cash backed reserves and working capital. All debt was fixed rate and met the Council's limits on type of debt it held (fixed or variable). There had been no change in the level of debt during the half year. The longer-term debt totalled £232.6m. The average rate of longer-term debt at 30 September 2010 stood at 4.46% unchanged from 31 March 2010. The short-term debt totalled £0.558m on 30 September 2010, a decrease of £0.005m over the half-year.

(b) Lending

The balance of temporary lending transactions as at 30 September was £97m and included £24m held by the Council as part of their administration of the pooling arrangements with the Primary Care Trust and £22m as part of its role in the West Midlands Regional Improvement and Efficiency Programme. The average rate earned on investments during the first-half of 2010/11 was 0.26%. The gross interest earned on investments totalled £0.158m.

BOLD – Programme Update

Since Corporate Strategy Planning Stage 1, a number of priority reviews had been identified which could potentially provide savings in addition to the £43.5m. Of the five reviews below, the first three would begin with immediate effect with findings during the current Financial Year:

- Review of Support Services
- Strategic Review of Transport provision across the Council
- Review of Support to Voluntary and Community Sectors
- Review of Management Structures
- Review of Young People and Economy.

The second stage of the Corporate Strategy Planning

process had also looked at how the Core Service Model (CSM) process could help inform the identification of further savings, including potentially having to look at some functions ceasing to continue. The final stage (Stage 3) of the Corporate Planning Process would take place either early or mid-December 2010 where discussions would be held following the announcement of the Formula Grant settlement for the County Council.

All project proposals were now required to complete an Equality Impact Assessment screening exercise, and where appropriate, a full assessment would be undertaken. The proposals had been developed with consideration of the feedback received through public consultation about the budgetary situation, including analysis of residents' high, medium and low priorities. The information had shown an extremely consistent view from the public about what they felt were higher priority and lower priority services.

In the ensuing discussion, the following main points were raised:

- (a) the Council continued to take a very cautious approach to money market activity
- (b) as part of BOLD whether the review of transport provision might yield further gains
- (c) the Council's finances were sound and provided a firm base for the difficult times ahead
- (d) it was hoped that good work would be done in the area of BOLD in respect of the Review of Young People and the Economy.

RESOLVED: that

- (a) (i) **the conclusions of the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Finance concerning budget monitoring up to 30 September 2010 be endorsed in accordance with the report;**
 (ii) **TO RECOMMEND: that Directorate cash limits be adjusted to reflect the additional Area Based Grant for 2010/11 in accordance with the report;**
- (b) **TO RECOMMEND: that the Capital Programme be updated in accordance with the report;**
- (c) **that the conclusions of the Cabinet Member with Responsibility concerning Treasury Management – Half yearly progress be endorsed; and**



(d) that the conclusions of the Cabinet Member with Responsibility concerning BOLD – Programme Update be endorsed.

**1194. Strengthening
Worcestershire's
Economy
(Agenda item 10)**

The Cabinet had before it a report explaining that although the economy was once again growing, it was clear that the recent recession continued to affect the economy in Worcestershire. With the prospect of significant redundancies from public sector agencies over the coming four year period there was a need to reassess the Council's role as community leader in supporting and facilitating the private sector to innovate and to grow. The bid for a Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) to be established in Worcestershire was part of the strategy to see a greater and more effective working relationship between the business and public sector to unlock potential and reduce the barriers to growth that could sometimes exist.

The LEP bid identified the county-wide priorities as:

- To deliver the strategic employment sites and related infrastructure needed to secure sustainable economic growth and a low carbon economy
- To ensure there was the right support for business start up, business growth, business retention and inward investment
- To deliver the right infrastructure for business
- To invest in the skills of the workforce.

The County Council had, in the past, adopted a role of a facilitator and sought to influence partners, locally, regionally and nationally to support the growth of the economy, rather than support delivery through direct action. These challenges were changing and some of the roles that needed to be undertaken to support the business community and encourage their growth would now be delivered nationally. However, there would be an increased need for a lead to be taken to ensure that the right services were being provided and that the business community was able to access those services from wherever and whomever they were provided requiring a greater level of direct involvement from the County Council. The LEP would not replace the County Council's lead role in infrastructure, strategic planning and community leadership on behalf of the county.

Action needed to be taken quickly in order to build the capacity of the Council to support business in the transition from regional to local focus and to prevent resources and expertise being lost from the region and key projects being threatened. It was therefore proposed that a revenue

budget of £300,000 be added to the base budget of the Planning, Economy and Performance Directorate from 2011/12 to enable this work to be delivered. Assessment would also be made of the potential for joint working, or alternative delivery mechanisms through LEPs and cross-LEP collaboration for such services to be delivered by alternative means at less cost to the County Council.

In the ensuing discussion, the following main points were raised:

- (a) the proposal was an element in strengthening the local economy and ensuring that the county was protected from the worst effects of the current economic situation. It was clarified that the recommendation referred to proposals for the budget from April 2011
- (b) the Council had to re-emphasise its pro-business credentials and this was a step in the right direction
- (c) the Council must be seen to encourage business in all areas of its influence. The example of the A449 was used to illustrate this. It was essential for the Council to achieve the correct balance between road safety and a fast and efficient route for businesses based in Kidderminster and surroundings
- (d) the crucial importance of fast broadband to the county encouraging rural businesses and international trade
- (e) in all these things it was essential to promote and encourage partnership working to achieve the best outcomes for the businesses and people of the county.

RESOLVED: that the proposal that an additional revenue of £300,000 be allocated to the base budget of the Directorate of Planning Economy and Performance from 2011/12 in order to refocus the efforts of the Council on supporting businesses to grow and to invest in Worcestershire be supported.

The meeting ended at 11.18 a.m.

Chairman



REDDITCH BOROUGH COUNCIL**EXECUTIVE
COMMITTEE**

12th January 2011

COUNCIL TAX BASE 2011/12

Relevant Portfolio Holder	Councillor Michael Braley, Portfolio Holder for Corporate Management
Relevant Head of Service	Teresa Kristunas, Head of Finance & Resources
Key Decision	

1. SUMMARY OF PROPOSALS

The report enables Members to set the Council Tax Base for 2011/12.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee is asked to **RESOLVE** that

- 1) the calculation of the Council's Tax Base for the whole and parts of the area for 2011/12, as detailed in the Appendices to the report, be approved; and
- 2) in accordance with the Local Authorities (Calculation of Tax Base) Regulations 1992, the figures calculated by Redditch Borough Council as its tax base for the whole area for the year 2011/12 be **27,569.18** and for the parts of the area listed below be:

Parish of Feckenham	<u>367.29</u>
Rest of Redditch	<u>27,201.89</u>

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 In October 2010, form CTB1 was submitted to the Department for Communities and Local Government. This analyses the draft Valuation List of properties into the various bands and then provides further details of those properties which are subject to the full charge, those entitled to discounts and those which are exempt.
- 3.2 This report is a summary of that return updated to include any known changes since November. It also makes provision for anticipated changes which could arise for a variety of reasons such as appeals, new properties or properties falling off the list. An allowance of 1.00% has been made for non-collection of the tax.

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4. KEY ISSUES

4.1 The figures can be summarised as follows:

	<u>REDDITCH</u>	<u>FECKENHAM</u>	<u>WHOLE AREA</u>
No. of dwellings	34,817	335	35,152
No. of chargeable dwellings	34,265	331	34,596
Net chargeable dwellings (After deduction of discounts)	31,253.50	303.25	31,556.75
Relevant Amount (Band D Equivalent)	27,476.66	371	27,847.66
Collection Rate	99.00%	99.00%	99.00%
Tax Base	<u>27,201.89</u>	<u>367.29</u>	<u>27,569.18</u>

4.2 Appendix A shows a more detailed breakdown of the calculation for the whole area.

4.3 Appendix B shows the same information analysed between the Feckenham Parish and the rest of the Borough.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The increase of 98.76 Band D equivalent properties will result in additional income for the Borough of £20,659.

6. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 The Local Authorities (Calculation of Tax Base) Regulations 1992 require a billing authority to notify its major precepting bodies (and its Parishes, if required) of the Tax Base, for the whole or part of the area for the following financial year. The precepting bodies - Worcestershire County Council, West Mercia Police Authority and Hereford & Worcester Fire & Rescue Service - need this information in order to calculate and notify the Borough Council of their precept requirements for 2011/12. This will enable tax

REDDITCH BOROUGH COUNCIL

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setting resolutions to be finalised and bills to be produced early in March 2011.

6.2 The legislation also requires a billing authority to calculate the tax base for any "special areas" within its boundary. There are no such areas in the Redditch Borough.

6.3 It is necessary to outline the method by which these calculations have been carried out so that the Council can formally adopt them for the purposes of the 1992 Regulations.

7. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

There are none identified.

8. COUNCIL OBJECTIVES

The Council is required to set a Council Tax Base each year, this forms part of the process of setting the following year budget. Failure to do so will result in the Council not being a Well Managed Organisation.

9. RISK MANAGEMENT INCLUDING HEALTH & SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS

There are none identified.

10. CUSTOMER IMPLICATIONS

The Tax Base for 2011/12 has been calculated to be 27,569.18. Once this has been agreed, the County Council, Police Authority and Fire Service will be notified and the figures will be used in the setting of the Council Tax to be presented to the Executive Committee and approved by the Council, on 21st February 2011.

11. EQUALITIES AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

There are none identified.

12. VALUE FOR MONEY IMPLICATIONS, PROCUREMENT AND ASSET MANAGEMENT

There are none identified.

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13. CLIMATE CHANGE, CARBON IMPLICATIONS AND BIODIVERSITY

There are none identified.

14. HUMAN RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS

There are none identified.

15. GOVERNANCE/PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

There are none identified.

**16. COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS INCLUDING SECTION 17 OF
CRIME AND DISORDER ACT 1998**

There are none identified.

17. HEALTH INEQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

There are none identified.

18. LESSONS LEARNT

None.

19. COMMUNITY AND STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

None.

REDDITCH BOROUGH COUNCIL**EXECUTIVE
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20. OTHERS CONSULTED ON THE REPORT

Portfolio Holder	No
Chief Executive	No
Executive Director (S151 Officer)	Yes
Deputy Chief Executive/Executive Director – Leisure, Environment and Community Services	No
Executive Director – Planning & Regeneration, Regulatory and Housing Services	No
Director of Policy, Performance and Partnerships	No
Head of Service	Yes
Head of Resources	No
Head of Legal, Equalities & Democratic Services	No
Corporate Procurement Team	No

21. WARDS AFFECTED

All Wards.

22. APPENDICES

Appendix A Redditch Borough Council Tax Base 2011/12;
Appendix B Feckenham Parish Council Tax Base 2011/12,
Redditch Borough Council Tax Base (Excluding the Parish of Feckenham) 2011/12.

REDDITCH BOROUGH COUNCIL

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23. BACKGROUND PAPERS

CTB1 (October 2010) return.

AUTHOR OF REPORT

Name: Kayleigh Bradford
E Mail: kayleigh.bradford@redditchbc.gov.uk
Tel: (01527) 64252 extn. 3172

Appendix A

REDDITCH BOROUGH COUNCIL TAX BASE 2011/12

	Band A-	Band A	Band B	Band C	Band D
Number of dwellings		7,482	11,629	7,185	4,186
Valuation List changes during year			67	19	18
Exempt dwellings		-240	-209	-125	-53
Net disabled relief	14	40	-16	-13	-6
Number of chargeable dwellings	14	7,282	11,471	7,066	4,145
Number of dwellings entitled to 25% discount	6	4,232	3,809	1,912	902
Number of dwellings entitled to 50% discount		98	105	42	34
Number of dwellings entitled to no discount	8	2,952	7,490	5,093	3,191
Discount deduction	1.50	1,107.00	1,004.75	499.00	242.50
Net chargeable dwellings	12.50	6,175.00	10,466.25	6,567.00	3,902.50
Ratio to Band D	5/9	6/9	7/9	8/9	1
Relevant Amount (Band D equivalent)	6.94	4,116.67	8,140.42	5,837.33	3,902.50

	Band E	Band F	Band G	Band H	Total
Number of dwellings	3,111	1,122	416	21	35,152
Valuation List changes during year			6		110
Exempt dwellings	-25	-9	-5		-666
Net disabled relief	-4	-13	2	-4	0
Number of chargeable dwellings	3,082	1,100	419	17	34,596
Number of dwellings entitled to 25% discount	441	166	48	1	11,517
Number of dwellings entitled to 50% discount	19	9	12	1	320
Number of dwellings entitled to no discount	2,622	925	353	15	22,649
Discount deduction	119.75	46.00	18.00	0.75	3,039.25
Net chargeable dwellings	2,962.25	1,054.00	401.00	16.25	31,556.75
Ratio to Band D	11/9	13/9	15/9	18/9	
Relevant Amount (Band D equivalent)	3,620.53	1,522.44	668.33	32.50	27,847.66
					Collection rate
					99.00%
					Tax base
					27,569.18

Appendix B

FECKENHAM PARISH COUNCIL TAX BASE 2011/12

	Band A-	Band A	Band B	Band C	Band D
Number of dwellings		30	31	40	44
Valuation List changes during year					
Exempt dwellings		-1	-2	-1	
Net disabled relief					
Number of chargeable dwellings	0	29	29	39	44
Number of dwellings entitled to 25% discount		20	15	12	12
Number of dwellings entitled to 50% discount		1	1	2	3
Number of dwellings entitled to no discount		9	13	25	28
Discount deduction		5.50	4.25	4.00	4.50
Net chargeable dwellings	0.00	23.50	24.75	35.00	39.50
Ratio to Band D	5/9	6/9	7/9	8/9	1
Relevant Amount (Band D equivalent)	0.00	15.67	19.25	31.11	39.50

	Band E	Band F	Band G	Band H	Total
Number of dwellings	65	56	57	12	335
Valuation List changes during year					0
Exempt dwellings					-4
Net disabled relief	1	-1			0
Number of chargeable dwellings	66	55	57	12	331
Number of dwellings entitled to 25% discount	11	13	5	1	89
Number of dwellings entitled to 50% discount	1	1	2		11
Number of dwellings entitled to no discount	54	41	50	11	231
Discount deduction	3.25	3.75	2.25	0.25	27.75
Net chargeable dwellings	62.75	51.25	54.75	11.75	303.25
Ratio to Band D	11/9	13/9	15/9	18/9	
Relevant Amount (Band D equivalent)	76.69	74.03	91.25	23.50	371.00
					Collection rate
					99.00%
					Tax base
					367.29

REDDITCH BOROUGH COUNCIL TAX BASE (EXCLUDING PARISH OF FECKENHAM) 2011/12

	Band A-	Band A	Band B	Band C	Band D
Number of dwellings		7,452	11,598	7,145	4,142
Valuation List changes during year			67	19	18
Exempt dwellings		-239	-207	-124	-53
Net disabled relief	14	40	-16	-13	-6
Number of chargeable dwellings	14	7,253	11,442	7,027	4,101
Number of dwellings entitled to 25% discount	6	4,218	3,798	1,860	890
Number of dwellings entitled to 50% discount		97	104	40	31
Number of dwellings entitled to no discount	8	2,943	7,477	5,068	3,163
Discount deduction	1.50	1,101.50	1,000.50	495.00	238.00
Net chargeable dwellings	12.50	6,151.50	10,441.50	6,532.00	3,863.00
Ratio to Band D	5/9	6/9	7/9	8/9	1
Relevant Amount (Band D equivalent)	6.94	4,101.00	8,121.17	5,806.22	3,863.00

	Band E	Band F	Band G	Band H	Total
Number of dwellings	3,046	1,066	359	9	34,817
Valuation List changes during year			6		110
Exempt dwellings	-25	-9	-5		-662
Net disabled relief	-5	-12	2	-4	0
Number of chargeable dwellings	3,016	1,045	362	5	34,265
Number of dwellings entitled to 25% discount	430	153	43		11,398
Number of dwellings entitled to 50% discount	18	8	10	1	309
Number of dwellings entitled to no discount	2,568	884	303	4	22,418
Discount deduction	116.50	42.25	15.75	0.50	3,011.50
Net chargeable dwellings	2,899.50	1,002.75	346.25	4.50	31,253.50
Ratio to Band D	11/9	13/9	15/9	18/9	
Relevant Amount (Band D equivalent)	3,543.84	1,448.41	577.08	9.00	27,476.66
					Collection rate
					99.00%
					Tax base
					27,201.89

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CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE STRATEGY 2011 - 2014
- EVERY CUSTOMER, EVERY TIME

Relevant Portfolio Holder	Cllr Michael Braley, Portfolio Holder for Corporate Management
Relevant Head of Service	Amanda de Warr, Head of Customer Services
Non-Key Decision	

1. SUMMARY OF PROPOSALS

To agree the Every Customer, Every Time, Customer Experience Strategy.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Executive Committee is asked to **RECOMMEND** that

the Every Customer, Every Time Customer Experience Strategy, attached at Appendix 1 to the report, be approved.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 This is the first joint customer experience strategy and aims to build on the achievements of the customer access strategy previously in place in Redditch.
- 3.2 Ongoing actions from the previous strategy as well as customer service actions identified in individual service business plans have been pulled into this Strategy, along with new initiatives aimed at improving the overall customer service we provide as an organisation.
- 3.3 The strategy does not intend to be exhaustive, because in reality almost everything the council does contributes to the overall customer experience.
- 3.4 It focuses on the key principle that 'everybody matters' and pulls together our transformation aspirations and our commitment to developing staff - because great customer service starts with our people. It also covers the basics of excellent customer experience, and understanding our customers.
- 3.5 Whilst customer 'access' is important, this forms only part of the overall customer experience, therefore this strategy looks at the wider picture.

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- 3.6 The strategy aims to be a living document and one which anyone can easily understand. This document will be supported with a staff handbook as well detailed guidance on specific areas of customer interactions.

4. KEY ISSUES

The four key themes in the strategy are already well established within our organisations. The Every Customer, Every Time strategy establishes the link between the themes in respect of our customers but also recognises that great customer service starts with our staff and ends with 'right first time, every time' service delivery.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The only specific financial implications are in respect of the cost of Customer Service Excellence accreditation, and gathering customer feedback. However, the lack of budget would not entirely prohibit activity in these areas and we can find ways of managing within the resources available.

6. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no specific legal implications.

7. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

As set out in the Strategy at Appendix 1.

8. COUNCIL OBJECTIVES

The recommended strategy is in line with the Council's vision in respect of putting the customer first

**9. RISK MANAGEMENT INCLUDING HEALTH & SAFETY
CONSIDERATIONS**

- 9.1 Failure to adopt a clear strategy aimed at improving the customer experience would indicate a failure to understand customers needs and an unwillingness to drive customer service improvement. This could have a negative impact on the Council's reputation.
- 9.2 Identified risks have been included in the Customer Services Risk Register.

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10. CUSTOMER IMPLICATIONS

This strategy puts the customer at the heart of everything we are doing and aims to ensure we become a truly customer' obsessed' organisation evidenced through our actions, our staff, the way we behave, and the decisions we make in respect of service delivery.

11. EQUALITIES AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

The strategy applies to all customers and recognises that some customers have individual needs. An impact assessment based on the proposed strategy has been completed and there are no specific actions arising.

12. VALUE FOR MONEY IMPLICATIONS, PROCUREMENT AND ASSET MANAGEMENT

Improvements in customer service generally results in a reduction of preventable contact which increases value for money, by increasing capacity to deal with other issues. The transformation work in particular will not only improve customer service, but also identify savings,

13. CLIMATE CHANGE, CARBON IMPLICATIONS AND BIODIVERSITY

Development of improved online service will enable more customers to do their business on the internet thus potentially reducing travel to the Customer Service Centre and One Stop Shops.

14. HUMAN RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS

This strategy impacts on every member of staff and also future members of staff as we set out clear expectations of the team in respect of their behaviour.

15. GOVERNANCE/PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

Improving the customer experience improves general satisfaction with the Council.

16. COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS INCLUDING SECTION 17 OF CRIME AND DISORDER ACT 1998

None.

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17. HEALTH INEQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

None.

18. LESSONS LEARNT

Not applicable.

19. COMMUNITY AND STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

The strategy has been distributed to members of the Community Forum for feedback and also some staff consultation has taken place via a newly formed staff customer focus group. Senior Managers and Heads of Services have been consulted. Wider consultation was not considered necessary at this time, as customers are unlikely to disagree with the aims or actions which will provide for a better customer experience for all. We will use customer feedback to help establish future actions.

20. OTHERS CONSULTED ON THE REPORT

Portfolio Holder	Yes
Chief Executive	Yes
Executive Director (S151 Officer)	Yes
Deputy Chief Executive/Executive Director – Leisure, Environment and Community Services	Through CMT
Executive Director – Planning & Regeneration, Regulatory and Housing Services	Through CMT
Director of Policy, Performance and Partnerships	Through CMT
Head of Service	The Author
Head of Resources	Through CMT
Head of Legal, Equalities & Democratic Services	Through CMT
Corporate Procurement Team	Not applicable

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21. **WARDS AFFECTED**

All Wards.

22. **APPENDICES**

Appendix 1 - Draft Customer Experience Strategy.

23. **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

Not applicable.

AUTHOR OF REPORT

Name: Amanda de Warr
E Mail: a.dewarr@bromsgrove.gov.uk
Tel: 01527 881241 or 01527 64252 ext 3177

Draft

EVERY CUSTOMER EVERY TIME

“Everybody matters”

**A Customer Experience Strategy for Bromsgrove District and
Redditch Borough Councils**

2011 - 2014



Bromsgrove
District Council

www.bromsgrove.gov.uk

REDDITCH BOROUGH COUNCIL

*making
a
difference*

www.redditchbc.gov.uk

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1. Foreword

Welcome to the customer experience strategy for Bromsgrove District and Redditch Borough Councils.

This is the first joint customer strategy and marks an important step in our aim to share services whilst maintaining local identity and political control.

We recognise that the needs of individuals vary but customers, wherever they live or do their business, have the same expectations in respect of customer services and access to services. As Councils have no tangible 'product' and customers have no choice about which council they can go to, our reputation rests on the quality of our service provision which is why the provision of excellent customer service is so important to us. By working together we can also ensure value for money.

This strategy builds on the good work already done in both Councils to improve customer service and access to services in recent years. It sets out our vision for customer service delivery and how we will make a real difference to the customer service provision.

Councillor Geoff Denaro
Portfolio holder, Bromsgrove District
Council

Councillor Michael Braley
Portfolio holder, Redditch Borough
Council

Insert pictures of portfolio holders

2. Introduction

Bromsgrove District and Redditch Borough councils began sharing the services they provide to residents, and the management team that operates both authorities, during 2008/09. We have now started a radical 3 year transformation programme to review all our services and look to share provision when opportunities arise.

Our vision for high quality customer services is driven by the need to improve the experience customers have when contacting us, or doing business with us. We want to give our customers confidence that we can be relied upon to provide the best quality service within available resources. We want to ensure value for money, whilst also aiming to get more right first time. We want to ensure that customers do not have to contact us several times to get the service they have requested which will also save taxpayers money.

Considerable work had already been done in both Councils. In Bromsgrove through the Customer First Programme, and in Redditch, the Customer Access Strategy, and we have seen many achievements in the development of customer service provision. This strategy will build on these achievements. The work that has been done in Bromsgrove to map customer journeys and identify improvements to service delivery through the service action plans will continue and will, by joined up business planning, spread across both authorities. In Redditch work such as in respect of Customer Service Excellence in Housing and the improvement plans in Benefits support the actions in this strategy.

In developing a joint strategy it is necessary to accept the differences within the two Councils, in respect of customer base and culture, and work with them for the benefit of the customer, taking both organisations forward on a journey to excellence.

Whilst many of the national drivers for such a strategy have been removed by the coalition Government this does not remove our desire to ensure we have a strong commitment to driving customer service provision locally.

The shift of power from Westminster to local people will give communities and individuals a bigger voice. The Structural Reform Plan also includes proposals for giving residents the power to instigate local referendums on any local issue and veto excessive council tax increases. 'New Localism' – the name the Government has given this new way of thinking and working - also suggests an increased focus on community engagement, through techniques like participatory budgeting and neighbourhood budgets. We recognise that services built around customer needs are a priority in the current political and economic climate and, more importantly, an expectation of customers and tax payers. Transformation of service delivery using the 'systems thinking approach' will help to ensure that we achieve this priority.

This strategy sits alongside our other local strategies, such as the Council Plan, Equality and Diversity Strategy, Workforce Development, and our Climate Change Strategy and the Worcestershire Local Area Agreement, which makes the link between national, regional and local policy. It also fits with the Total Place agenda, which looks at how we can work with other partners to drive through efficiencies and take a holistic approach to public service provision.

At both Bromsgrove at Redditch we have strong local priorities.

Bromsgrove District Council Priorities	Redditch Borough Council Priorities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economic Development. • Town Centre. • Value for Money • One Community. • Housing. • Climate Change. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An enterprising community. • Safe. • Clean and green. • A well managed organisation

This Strategy and all related objectives have synergy with the priorities of both authorities and specifically help to ensure we provide **Value for Money** and have a **Well Managed Organisation**

A robust service business planning framework exists and customer service delivery forms an integral part of the development plans of each service.

Finally, we work closely with Worcestershire County Council, though the Worcestershire Hub Partnership to deliver joined up customer access. This partnership, made up of all the districts and the county council has successfully developed face to face, telephone and online access points for customers to gain easy, one stop access to services. This strategy sits alongside the Worcestershire Hub 'Our Customers' Strategy and the countywide Self Service Strategy.

This document not only sets out our vision but also how we aim to make this happen. This will only be a part of the journey and as customer needs change, and service delivery develops to meet those changing needs, this strategy will also change. Therefore it will be reviewed annually in line with our timetable for business planning and budget setting.

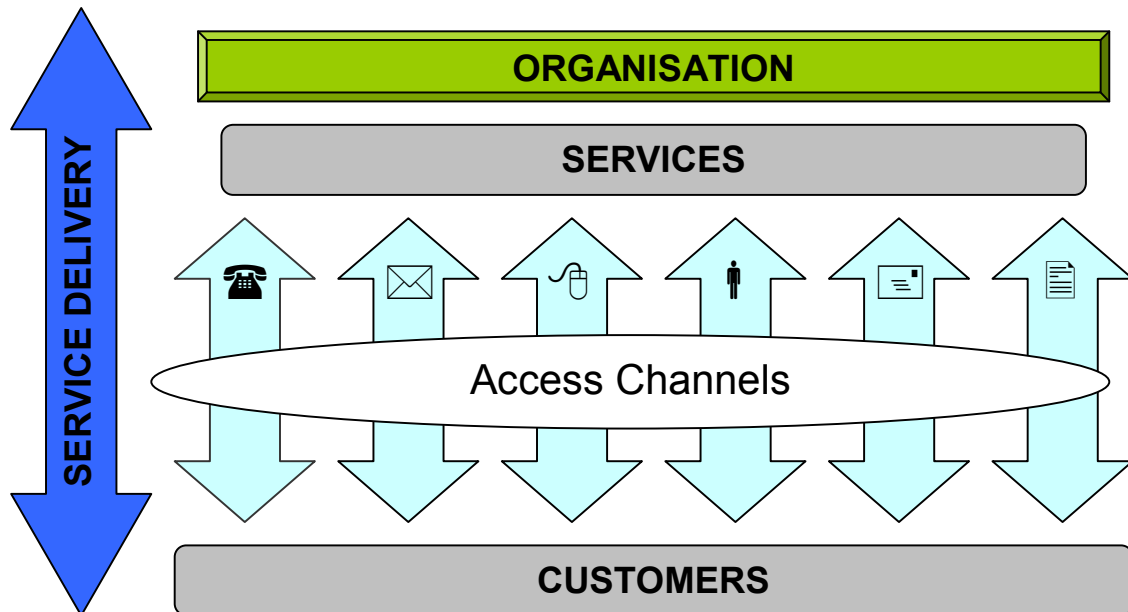
Consultation with staff has taken place via our staff Customer Focus Group, as well as with senior managers and members. The strategy takes into account the results of the Hub customer survey, conducted in Dec 2009 and the View Point survey conducted early in 2010. Feedback has been received from the Ethnic and Diversity Forum (Bromsgrove) and the Community Forum in Redditch.

3. Current Position

Both authorities had Customer Access Strategies in place which have steered the work to improve customer service over recent years. These have resulted in many improvements such as:-

- ✓ More services are now available through the Hub Customer Service Centres in both Bromsgrove and Redditch.
- ✓ Clear standards of service are in place for all services.
- ✓ Bromsgrove District and Redditch Borough Councils are now signed up to the county wide interpreting and translation service which enables customers for whom English is not a first language to receive translation and interpretation support. It is hoped that providing the same service across the County, which manages requests on a case by case basis rather than just translating leaflets on mass, that people who live and work in different parts of the County will receive the same service Countywide.
- ✓ The Housing Service in Redditch was awarded the Charter Mark, which recognises excellent customer service, for the 5th year running.
- ✓ The benefits team in Redditch has recently introduced visiting officers who go to people's homes to assist with benefits applications.
- ✓ Redditch Borough Council introduced the Community Forum and this is now a thriving group of partners, stakeholders, and residents, who meet regularly to discuss the equality and diversity issues that relate to our services and the way they are delivered to minority groups.
- ✓ Customer First training was delivered to all staff in Bromsgrove and backed up with useful guidance in respect of handling customer feedback.
- ✓ The websites for both Bromsgrove District and Redditch Borough Councils were re-launched, using a countywide template to make navigation consistent and information easier to find. We worked with the RNIB and a local visually impaired support group to ensure the site meets the specific needs of people with sight problems. We have also reduced the number of contact addresses and 'phone numbers published on the website to make it easier for customers to contact us. We also increased the number of online services available, for example online benefits applications in Redditch.
- ✓ Customer Feedback is being used to inform changes to service delivery and reported regularly to members and customers, and we invested in a system to ensure we can properly track and report on this feedback.
- ✓ Customer service based improvements are a key part in every service's business planning.
- ✓ Redditch Matters magazine has been launched to ensure residents are kept informed of council and community developments.
- ✓ Customers now have a say in the way that the Council spends their money with a budget jury made up of people from across the Bromsgrove District and Redditch Borough.
- ✓ Customer service behaviour and objectives now form part of the annual personal development review for each member of staff.

4. What do we mean by 'access to services?'



However customers make contact with us, whether it is by telephone, email, the internet, in person, or via other means, we want them to find that access is quick and easy. However, the geographical nature of the district of Bromsgrove and Redditch Borough means that access may be limited to a smaller number of channels and customers will, by necessity, be forced to use particular means of contacting us.

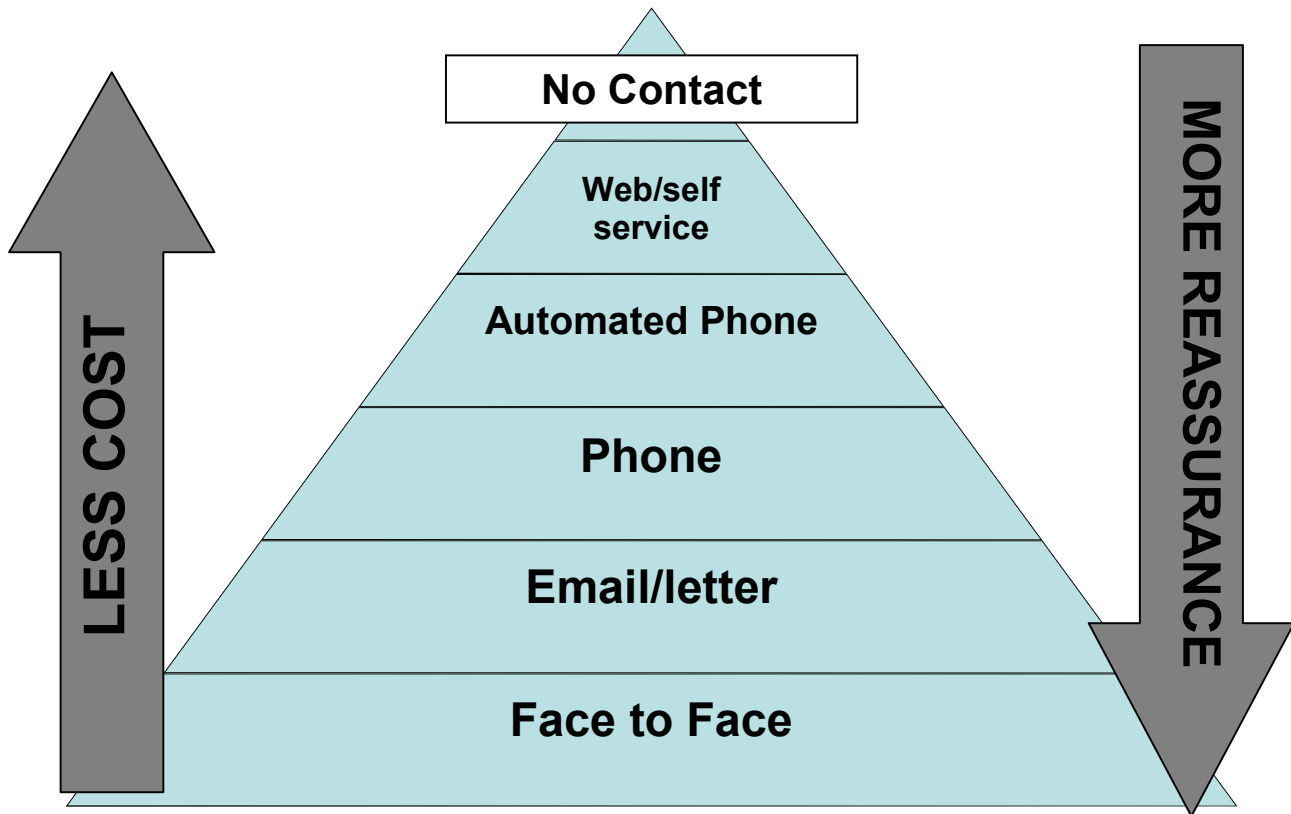
A recent survey of 1,185 residents of Worcestershire, carried out in December 2009 indicated that nearly 40% of residents contact us by telephone and 30% through face to face contact at one of the Customer Service Centres or One Stop Shops. 24% of people who completed the survey said they made contact online, via the internet or email.

83% of people said they used the internet at home and over half of all the people asked said they would consider using the internet to access council services. The survey also told us that people who tried to do their business online were also more likely to have to contact us more than once to resolve their enquiry. 43% of all responders who had to get in touch with us more than once did so because their enquiry was not resolved, and a further 38% were trying to find out what progress had been made in respect of their issue.

This suggests that we have some work to do to improve the online contact channels as this could provide better access for those people who cannot use some of the other methods of contacting us. We also need to get more right first time and get better at telling customers what is happening, or when they can expect action, in respect of matters they raise with us.

We also have contacts with many people which are instigated by us, or through everyday activities, for example at the Leisure or Community Centres, or contact with Shopmobility, or Dial a Ride amongst many others, and it is equally important to us that these contacts are positive for our customers.

There is a generally accepted model for the effectiveness of the major channels of contact available which is shown below.



What this model shows is that as we move up the triangle the costs gets lower for the organisation. However, for some types of contact a greater level of human contact is necessary, particularly where greater reassurance is needed. It is therefore vital to understand the types of contacts and the level of reassurance that a customer is likely to require when designing services for customers.

5. Our Vision

This strategy applies to **all** our customers, whether they live, work or visit Bromsgrove or Redditch. It applies to businesses, partners, other agencies and our internal customers (employees). The strategy is driven by a clear vision which links directly with our corporate priorities.

Our vision is to:-

- **make it easy to access services, joining up with other organisations where possible;**
- **provide a high quality customer experience for all customers who make contact with us, regardless of when or how they make contact;**
- **ensure customers get the information and advice they need in a way that suits their needs and is easy to understand.**

In practical terms this means that for all services and activities we will:

- Always put the customer first by:
 - Treating them as individuals.
 - Listening to them.
 - Taking ownership of problems.
 - Doing the little things – ensuring attention to detail, and going the extra mile, because we know it makes a difference.
- Work with other organisations to provide joined up services.
- Listen to and act on feedback and tell customers what we've done.
- Ensure customers get a quick response, and action or information on progress, so that they don't have to keep chasing us.
- Keep everyone informed.
- Communicate in plain language, which is easy to understand and removes the need for customers to contact us for explanations.
- Get the basics right.
- Develop our online services to provide easier access for those who can do their business with us online, and ensure it meets customer's needs.
- Use our service reviews to tailor services to our customers needs.
- Look for more efficient ways of doing things to make savings wherever possible to deliver value for money services.
- Get more right first time.

The ultimate aim of this strategy is to have people, systems, and processes in place which make it easy for customers to contact the Council by using a variety of access points. To ensure everyone gets the same excellent level of service and to have questions and issues dealt with at the first point of contact as often as possible.

We aim to exceed expectations and delight our customers.

6. Understanding our customers

Both Councils undertake a great deal of work to consult with our customers. We also gather a lot of data about customers which is held on various systems.

We use customer feedback, such as complaints and compliments to tell us how well we are doing and where we could do better and customer satisfaction surveys are used by many departments to gain direct feedback from service users.

We need to further develop our knowledge of customers and their needs, so that we can tailor our services appropriately. There is a growing need to use 'customer insight' to enable us to target services, communications and inform service developments. Whilst customer insight data can be bought in, it is how we use it that will affect the success of its use.

We will further exploit the potential of customer insight tools, to inform on lifestyle profiling which if used in conjunction with other information we already hold about customers, will help to provide a coherent view of our customers.

We will also continue to actively engage customers in decision making through dialogue where major changes in service provision are likely.

7. How will we know we are getting it right?

The judges of the success of this strategy will be the users of the services, - people who contact us for whatever reason.

Greater satisfaction with the Council and the individual services will be a key indicator of success.

Other measureable outcomes will be:

- More things done right first time.
- Increased take up of the cheaper access channels, such as online or automatic payment methods.
- Excellence in customer service provision recognised by achieving the Customer Services Excellence accreditation.
- Resolution of enquiries at the first point of contact.
- The removal of avoidable contact.
- Joined up services or co-location of public services, so that customers can access a wider range of services in one place.
- Removal of unnecessary red tape.
- Customer focused staff.
- Confident, decisive and supportive managers.
- Greater customer and staff involvement in the design of service delivery.
- Reduced costs and better value for money.

Satisfaction surveys, Worcestershire Viewpoint (resident's panel) results, Customer feedback through complaints and compliments, and reduced avoidable contact will be used to measure success. We will also use the Customer Service Excellence Accreditation to assess our progress.

8. Delivering value for money and making savings

This is obviously a major priority.

Technology needs to be exploited to provide greater ability to self serve and allow customers to do their business with us at a time that suits them, from the comfort of their own home or workplace. For the 17% of residents who do not have access to the internet at home we need to ensure that other mechanisms exist and this may mean extending public internet in Council offices, or finding other alternatives such as mobile phone technology, kiosks, or digital TV.

We will actively encourage the use of contact-less and self service channels for payments, which are expensive to handle face to face.

We will work with our partners across Worcestershire to ensure we provide joined up services. We will also develop other partnerships, where it is appropriate to do so, to bring services together and reduce costs.

Our approach to reviewing how we deliver services will enable us to assess what customers really need and remove unnecessary and costly steps in the process. This will also reduce 'avoidable' contact – contact that could have been prevented if we had done things differently. This not only reduces costs but also significantly improves the service to customers.

9. Responding to the challenge

This strategy is built around 4 key themes which enable us to focus on how we meet the challenge of delivering the best quality services that meet the needs of individuals for the lowest possible costs.

Customer experience - going back to basics to ensure that the customer's experience of contacting us is always positive – even when we can't give the answer the customer wants.

Transform – reviewing, and changing, service delivery based on what customers actually want and need and building the processes around the customer rather than to meet organisational needs.

Understanding the customer (including internal customers or partners) – through feedback, complaints, compliments, surveys, forums, and using customer insight tools such as Mosaic and the information held on our own systems.

Our Staff – ensuring all our staff are truly customer focused, and share the values and behaviours necessary to ensure we exceed our standards and our customer's expectations.

By implementing this Strategy we will make a significant contribution to the delivery of both Council's priorities specifically ensuring we provide **Value for Money** (Bromsgrove District Council) and have a **Well Managed Organisation** (Redditch Borough Council). We will also ensure that the needs of all our customers are met and that we meet our pledges in respect of **equality and diversity**.

EVERY CUSTOMER – EVERY TIME
"Everybody matters"

THEME 1 – CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

Good customer service is an entitlement, not a privilege. By going back to basics to ensure that the customer’s experience of contacting us is always positive, even when we can’t give the answer the customer wants, we will ensure that we exceed our standards and delight our customers. We know that customers expect a high level of customer service and we must never lose sight of the fact that we are here for the customers benefit.

We believe:	We will:	Key actions needed to deliver the objective
<p>✓ That every customer should receive a high quality service every time.</p> <p>✓ That every customer should be treated with respect.</p> <p>✓ That customers should know we are genuine.</p> <p>✓ That customers should understand the information we provide them with.</p> <p>✓ That customers should know who is dealing with their issues and have confidence that something will be done.</p> <p>✓ That customers have the right to feedback to us their</p>	<p>Aim high – OK is not good enough and excellence will be our standard.</p> <p>We will go the extra mile and take pride in our work, setting goals to strive to achieve excellent results.</p> <p>Treat everyone as we would like to be treated whether customers, colleagues, staff or Members.</p> <p>Treat people as individuals.</p> <p>Be consistent and fair.</p> <p>Mean what we say and do what we say we will.</p> <p>Let customers know if we cannot meet the timescales originally agreed, or set out in our Customer Service Pledges</p> <p>If we cannot meet a customers needs we will be up front about this because even though we can’t give the answer a customer wants we do care about their issue.</p> <p>Use Plain English, and present information in a way that is easy for all to understand</p> <p>Ensure staff use the website in their every day</p>	<p>1.1 Revise and relaunch our customer service standards (Customer Experience Pledges)</p> <p>1.2 Review our Customer journey mapping and ensure all actions are completed.</p> <p>1.3 Review recruitment procedures to ensure customer focus is at the heart of successful candidates.</p> <p>1.4 Develop staff ‘protocols’ to ensure all staff are clear of the behaviour expected of everyone when dealing with customers.</p> <p>1.5 Develop and implement a customer focused training plan</p> <p>1.6 Develop and launch a staff customer service guide.</p> <p>1.7 Implement Plain English Training</p> <p>1.8 Review all information/letters/web pages to ensure they are easy to understand, are empathetic, and remove the need for clarification.</p> <p>1.9 Develop and conduct a customer satisfaction survey</p> <p>1.10 Develop peer review and mystery shopping mechanisms.</p>

<p>experiences and that we should use this information to shape future improvements.</p> <p>✓ That we should evaluate our customer service performance</p>	<p>work to ensure that it is fit for purpose</p> <p>Give our names when we have contact with customers</p> <p>Take ownership, not pass the buck and never blame others when things don't go to plan.</p> <p>If we have made a mistake we will be open and honest and work with the customer to establish a satisfactory outcome</p> <p>Improve our customer feedback process to ensure that customers who find it necessary to complain can do so easily and receive a quality response – even if we can't change the outcome.</p> <p>Work towards Customer Service Excellence Accreditation.</p>	<p>1.11 Achieve Customer Service Excellence accreditation.</p> <p>1.12 Reduce avoidable contact</p> <p>1.13 Get more 'Right First Time'</p> <p>1.14 Tailor our marketing, promotional and communication materials to suit the needs of all our customers.</p> <p>1.15 Work with minority groups where appropriate to improve access to services.</p> <p>1.16 Use customer complaints as a force for good, identifying service improvement opportunities.</p>
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THEME 2 – TRANSFORMATION

By reviewing, and changing, service delivery based on what customers actually want and need and building the processes we use around the customer rather than to meet organisational needs, we will drive out waste, reduce preventable contact and make savings. Customers will see changes to the way we do things as we roll out our three year programme of transformation. This is coupled with a move to sharing services wherever possible to maximise resilience within the teams, provide a more cost effective service and ensure a consistently high standard of service for customers of both authorities.

Wherever possible we need to work with other organisations to develop joint service provision and make it easier for our customers to do business with all public services. We know that customers see local government as a single organisation so we already provide joint access to County Council and District council services. We also need to explore how we could extend this to include other public services through co-location or joint service delivery.

Many services already have good working relationships with other organisations in the course of delivering services and these will continue to be developed and maximized for the benefit of customers.

We believe:	We will:	Key actions needed to deliver the objective
<p>✓ Services should be customer focused and easy to access across a range of access channels.</p> <p>✓ In getting the best possible value out of our resources.</p> <p>✓ In eliminating wasteful duplications or inefficient process.</p> <p>✓ In reducing preventable contact, where customers have to contact us a number of times to get something done, or to chase progress.</p> <p>✓ That technology should support and enhance customer access and service delivery.</p> <p>✓ That by working with others we can make better use of resources and expertise.</p> <p>✓ That partnerships are fundamental to delivering excellent joined-up services.</p>	<p>Review our service delivery and processes to shape them around the customers needs, using systems thinking methodology, which assesses customer demand and plans for 'perfect' service delivery.</p> <p>Ensure that when planning new processes we cut out non value work.</p> <p>Work with other organisations to develop joined up service delivery and make it easier for customers to access public services</p> <p>Ensure that wherever possible customers can access services online, over the phone and face to face.</p> <p>Provide a one stop service and reduce the number of times customers have to make contact with us to get something done.</p> <p>Develop a way of enabling customers to tell us about change of personal details once rather than numerous times.</p> <p>Develop our web service to enable more to be done through self service.</p> <p>Encourage customers to use self service where it is possible to do so.</p>	<p>2.1 Review key frontline services using the systems thinking methodology and put the customer at the heart of changes to the end to end process.</p> <p>2.2 Increase resolution at first point of contact, where ever and with whomever that contact might be.</p> <p>2.3 Develop a 'Tell us once' mechanism for customer changes of address and other details.</p> <p>2.4 Implement Shared Services where it is appropriate, cost effective and beneficial to service delivery.</p> <p>2.5 Work with partners to join up service provision and provide more cost effective services.</p> <p>2.6 Work with our local government partners across Worcestershire to develop self service.</p> <p>2.7 Review and revise web content to ensure it is relevant and fit for purpose.</p> <p>2.8 Continue to develop our online service to ensure that those who want to, can access information and services via the web.</p> <p>2.8 Maintain public internet access at our Customer Service Centres.</p> <p>2.9 Provide mediated web access and customer awareness training to encourage take up of self service.</p> <p>2.10 Maintain one phone number for council services (with limited number of 'specialist' phone numbers to allow 'menu-less' access to telephone services).</p>

		<p>2.11 Ensure customer service features in action plans in all services, as part of our business planning process.</p> <p>2.12 Review face to face service to ensure resources are most effectively used.</p> <p>2.13 Use previously developed customer service initiatives where appropriate across any new shared services.</p>
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THEME 3 – UNDERSTANDING THE CUSTOMER

In order that we communicate properly with customers, fully understand customer needs and shape our services in a way that best suits the majority we need to use all of the feedback we gather. We currently receive feedback via Members, complaints, compliments, surveys and forums and we need to use this ‘intelligence’ to help shape service improvements. By actively engaging with customers, staff, Members and partners and joining up all the information we hold we will be able to develop a wider view with which to inform the service transformations and service improvement plans. This will enable us to build service delivery around the needs of customers rather than around the organisational structure.

Customer insight information is valuable to help us to target communications appropriately and cost effectively. We need to use the information we receive through customer insight tools to inform the redesign of services and mainstream it’s use within the decision making process for all policy and procedural changes.

We believe:	We will:	Key actions needed to deliver the objective
<p>✓ That customers have the right to tell us if they are unhappy with the service we have provided.</p> <p>✓ That our customers concerns are our concerns – we should know what they are and act on them if it is possible to do so.</p>	<p>Ensure our customer feedback process is easy to understand and that complaints are dealt with at the highest possible level</p> <p>Publicise the ways in which residents and business can engage with us.</p> <p>Consult with customers</p> <p>Conduct customer satisfaction surveys</p>	<p>3.1 Relaunch our Customer Feedback policy.</p> <p>3.2 Implement computer software to ensure all complaints are captured and followed up.</p> <p>3.3 Develop a method of monitoring web content to ensure it meets customers needs</p> <p>3.4 Provided guidance on how to get involved at the Council.</p>

<p>✓ That customers should know how to get involved with the Council.</p> <p>✓ Customers should have a say in how/where savings are made.</p> <p>✓ That we should ask you what you thought of the service we provided.</p> <p>✓ That our own staff are also a valuable source of information</p>	<p>and follow up calls to make sure customers received the information or service they needed.</p> <p>Consult with staff about internal service provision.</p> <p>Look at best practice in other organisations and identify projects where better customer knowledge would help us to engage and consult better.</p> <p>Use customer insight data to inform and target publicity campaigns.</p> <p>Implement automated feedback technology.</p>	<p>3.5 Provide the public with the opportunity to get involved in our budget setting via the annual Budget Jury and on-line budget consultation</p> <p>3.6 Continue to consult with customers through public forums and customer satisfaction surveys</p> <p>3.7 Conduct Staff/internal customer surveys</p> <p>3.8 Implement a joint staff customer focus forum, to act as champions of customer service throughout the organisations.</p> <p>3.9 Maintain and develop individual service satisfaction surveys</p> <p>3.10 Implement a ‘follow up calls’ regime where by staff contact a sample of customers to ensure that a recent request for service has been properly dealt with.</p> <p>3.11 Implement GovMetric to capture real time customer feedback on their experience.</p> <p>3.12 Develop a joint Consultation Strategy? Is this planned?</p> <p>3.13 Use customer insight to inform decision making and communications</p> <p>3.14 Include Customer Impact assessment in decision making process .</p> <p>3.15 Improve the quality of data held about customers on our customer relationship management system.</p> <p>3.16 Carry out service consultation with users (and non users where appropriate) and use the results to inform service improvement.</p>
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THEME 4 - OUR STAFF

Great customer service starts with our staff and they are key to ensuring we are a truly customer focused organisation. It is vital that all staff understand the value of great service and share the values and behaviours necessary to ensure we exceed our standards and our customer's expectations. Excellent examples should be celebrated and shared for others to learn from. Poor performance will be addressed and opportunities to develop will be provided. Many of our staff have little contact with external customers but this does not mean they don't have customers. The role of these staff is to support the front line services, who are therefore their customers and this strategy applies equally to all.

We believe:	We will:	Key actions needed to deliver the objective
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ That all staff should be 'customer obsessed'. ✓ Staff should be praised for good service and helped to improve if they sometimes fall short of our expectations. ✓ That all staff should be sensitive to individual customer needs. ✓ That only people who are committed to provided excellent customer service should join the team. 	<p>Make sure that all staff understand their role within the organisation and that the role of the Council is to provide customer service.</p> <p>Use customer feedback and our own observations of staff behaviour to evaluate performance and address issues through our performance development framework</p> <p>Make sure that every member of staff sees others points of view, is sensitive to people's feelings and acknowledge the customers concerns.</p> <p>Ensure our recruitment policies are clear about expected behaviours.</p> <p>Ensure that sufficient and appropriate training is in place</p>	<p>4.1 Performance development will include customer service development for all staff.</p> <p>4.2 Our Corporate Training Plans will include customer service training, to help staff deal with specific areas and general customer awareness.</p> <p>4.3 Core skills will be developed for all staff which will include customer service skills.</p> <p>4.4 Core Skills for managers will be developed which will include skills for managing a customer focused service and staff performance issues</p> <p>4.5 Maintain the Corporate Management Team (CMT) Back to the Floor initiative and develop this to encourage all managers to spend at least one half day per year working with a different team.</p>

<p>✓ That managers should ensure that their team provides the expected level of service.</p> <p>✓ Staff should understand who their customer is.</p>	<p>Ensure excellent service is recognised and poor performance addressed.</p> <p>Ensure that all teams, regardless of their function consider how they serve their customers whoever they may be.</p> <p>Remove blockages and challenge issues which create barriers to providing excellent service.</p> <p>Lead change positively throughout the organisations</p> <p>Create pride in the organisations and our achievements</p>	<p>4.6 Develop our Induction Packs and training to ensure customer focus is a key part of our instruction to new starters</p> <p>4.7 Maintain CMT Walk the Wards initiative</p> <p>4.8 Staff Awards (BAFTAs / Redditch Staff Awards scheme)</p> <p>4.9 Utilise Staff Ideas Schemes to capture staff ideas and suggestions</p> <p>4.10 Develop home working where appropriate to support staff in undertaking their duties.</p> <p>4.11 Develop the staff intranet to ensure that all staff have access to appropriate information.</p>
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Appendix 1

Our Customer Service Pledge

Our customers are important to us and we aim to provide high quality services, exceed customer expectations and delight our customers. We will treat you as individuals, listen carefully to you, be sensitive to your needs, and take ownership of problems so that you can be confident that someone is dealing with your issue.

What customers can expect from us...

We will:-

- be friendly, polite, helpful, attentive and considerate at all times;
- provide accurate and clear information;
- use plain English and avoid jargon or technical terms;
- be open and honest about what we can and cannot deliver;
- get back to you when we say we will, and advise you of our progress when we are taking longer than anticipated to address an issue.

We always aim to get it right first time, every time so that you don't have to keep contacting us about the same issue.

If the first person you have contact with cannot help you and they have to pass on your enquiry to someone else they will tell you who will be dealing with it.

If your enquiry cannot be dealt with at the time you contact us we will make sure you know what is happening and when you can expect to receive further contact from us.

Some services have to work to different standards because of laws that set out how they must operate and details these are available online or from the relevant service. Otherwise the following timescales will apply when you contact us.

We will always make our services, offices and information as accessible as possible to all our customers.

Whilst our focus is on quality, we also aim to provide a quality response within an acceptable period. As a guide these are the timeframes we aim to work within:-

Emails

When you **email** us we aim to respond to all customer enquiries requiring a response within **48 hours** of the time it was received by us. In most cases this will be a full response but if the issue will take longer to investigate or resolve we will tell you when you can expect a full response.

If the officer you have emailed is out of the office you will be advised when that officer will be available and who to contact in the meantime if your enquiry is urgent.

Letters

We aim respond to all customer enquiries made by **letter** within **7 working days** of the date it is received by us. In most cases this will be a full response but if the issue will take longer to investigate or resolve before we can get back to you we will tell you when we intend to get a full response out to you.

In person

If you visit one of our customer service centres in **person**, we aim to see you within 5 minutes of your arrival to find out the nature of your enquiry. If you need to see a customer service advisor we will then

see you as soon possible and wherever possible within 15 minutes. We will advise you of approximate waiting times if it will be longer than 15 minutes and advise you of alternative options if appropriate.

If the person you see cannot help you they will tell you who can and provide you with facilities to speak to them if they are within our organisation or pass on contact details if this is more suitable. If you need assistance with English a telephone interpreter can be provided at this time.

If it is appropriate for you to have an appointment with a specialist officer we will make the necessary arrangements for you to see them at the time that is most convenient to you (within normal office hours). If you need assistance with English an interpreter, or a British Sign Language interpreter (subject to availability) will be arranged for the appointment.

If you have an appointment with a member of staff they will see you on time.

Telephone

If you call the customer services centre one of our customer service advisors aims to answer telephone calls within 20 seconds (6 rings) during opening times ([link to opening times](#)).

At times of peak demand we will advise you if you are in queue and will keep waiting times as short as possible.

Staff in all other offices aim to answer 100% of their 'phone calls within 20 seconds (6 rings) between 9am and 5pm.

If you need assistance with English a telephone interpreter can be provided at this time.

If voicemail is activated you will be told when the member of staff is going to be available and given an alternative number to call in the event the enquiry is urgent. Staff will respond to voicemail messages within 1 working day of the date of the call, or within 1 working day of the date the message tells you they will return to the office.

Online

We will ensure all the information on our website is accurate, up to date and makes sense to customers.

Complaints

We will acknowledge all complaints made through our complaints procedure within 2 working days and carry out investigations to enable us to respond to you within 15 working days of receipt of your complaint. If this is not possible we will tell you exactly when you can expect a response from us.

Home visits

If we have an appointment to visit you at home we will:

- ensure you understand the reason for the visit;
- let you know if we cannot keep the appointment, or if we are going to be delayed;
- ensure you and your home is treated with respect; and
- let you know what we will do next if follow up action is necessary.

We value the diversity of our communities and want to ensure that everyone has fair access to our services. We are therefore committed to equality and diversity in the way we respond to your needs and in the way we provide our services. We will not discriminate unfairly or unlawfully on any grounds and in particular the grounds of race, gender (including gender identity), disability, age, religion or belief, or sexual orientation. Different services may be offered, or services may be provided in a different way where it would be appropriate to do so (e.g. different services may be offered based on age or a service may be provided differently to include reasonable adjustments for disability).

Customer access points

Bromsgrove



Go online

www.bromsgrove.gov.uk



Telephone enquiries

01527 881288

Monday to Friday	09:00 - 17:00
Saturday	09:00 - 12:00 (Noon)
Sunday	Closed



Telephone Payments

01527 881474



In Person

Bromsgrove District Customer Service Centre
School Drive
Bromsgrove
Worcestershire
B60 1AY

Monday to Wednesday	09:00 - 17:00
Thursday	10:00 - 17:00
Friday	09:00 - 17:00
Saturday	09:00 - 12:00 (Noon)
Sunday	Closed

Redditch



Go online

www.redditchbc.gov.uk



Telephone enquiries

01527 534123

Monday and Tuesday and Thursday	09:00 - 17:30
Wednesday	10:00 - 17:30
Friday	09:00 - 17:00
Saturday	09:00 - 12:00 (Noon)
Sunday	Closed



Telephone Payments

01527 534021.



In Person

Redditch Customer Service Centre
Town Hall
Walter Stranz Square
Redditch
B98 8AH

Monday, Tuesday and Thursday	09:00 - 17:30
Wednesday	10:00 - 17:30
Friday	09:00 - 17:00
Saturday	09:00 - 12:00 (Noon)
Sunday	Closed

Batchley One Stop Shop
Batchley Shopping Centre,
183 Batchley Rd
Batchley
Redditch
B97 6JB

Monday, Tuesday and Friday	09:00 - 12:30
Wednesday and Thursday	13:30 - 17:30

Winyates One Stop Shop
Unit 3 Winyates Centre,
Redditch
B98 0NR

Monday and Tuesday	13:30 - 17:00
Wednesday, Thursday and Friday	09:00 - 12:30

Woodrow One Stop Shop
Woodrow Shopping Centre
Studley Road
Redditch
B98 7RY

Monday and Tuesday	09:00 - 12:30
Wednesday, Thursday and Friday	13:30 - 17:00

Amanda de Warr
Head of Customer Services

Bromsgrove District and Redditch Borough Council's

October 2010

REDDITCH BOROUGH COUNCIL**EXECUTIVE
COMMITTEE**

12th January 2011

LEARNDIRECT - RELOCATION UPDATE

Relevant Portfolio Holder	Councillor Gay Hopkins, Portfolio Holder for Leisure and Tourism.
Relevant Head of Service	John Godwin, Head of Leisure and Cultural Services.
Non-Key Decision	

1. SUMMARY OF PROPOSALS

To provide an update on the relocation of the service and its current position, and to update Members on the current position on 54, South Street, Redditch.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Executive Committee is asked to RESOLVE that

- 1) **the report be noted; and**
- 2) **a full review of the property known as the REDI Centre, 54, South Street, Redditch, be undertaken by Worcestershire County Council Property Services to identify options available to the Council for Members' future consideration.**

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Following the Council Decision on the 9th August 2010 to relocate the Learndirect element of the REDI Centre service to another Council owned location, Officers have identified premises at Greenlands Business Centre that can accommodate the requirements of Learndirect.
- 3.2 All necessary permissions and regulations have been secured and works to adapt the facilities to meet the requirements of Learndirect and DDA have been completed.
- 3.3 Learndirect staff have continued to provide learning support and Learndirect courses from the REDI Centre during the transition period from August to December 2010.

REDDITCH BOROUGH COUNCIL

**EXECUTIVE
COMMITTEE**

12th January 2011

4. KEY ISSUES

- 4.1 The service has relocated to the new premises and currently has 87 active learners. Staff have worked hard to ensure that continuity of courses has been maintained wherever possible.
- 4.2 Staff will undertake a general satisfaction survey with users to determine the impact of the relocation on existing customers and gauge the feeling of new customers attending at the new location.
- 4.3 The REDI Centre building has been secured and security services provided to oversee the property during its closure, utilities and non essential services have been disconnected.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The costs of transition from the existing Centre to the new location at the Business Centre were included in the financial implications element of the report to the Executive Committee on the 28th July 2010. Currently there are no concerns with the agreed budget; income from learners is on target to meet budget requirements.

6. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

A hire agreement has been signed for the occupation of Units 4 & 5 at the Business Centre in line with normal letting procedures.

7. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

There are no major policy implications contained in this report.

8. COUNCIL OBJECTIVES

The relocation of the service has been a key objective contained in the improvement plan and has been achieved.

**9. RISK MANAGEMENT INCLUDING HEALTH & SAFETY
CONSIDERATIONS**

The current Learndirect contract runs up to the end of July 2011; any new contract offer for August 2011 – July 2012 is usually communicated in May/June time when the service will know if a further contract and its value will be forthcoming. Members were advised in the Executive report

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on the options for the REDI Centre service, that future contracts may not be offered, which would have a significant impact on the future of any Adult learning services provided by the Council.

10. CUSTOMER IMPLICATIONS

There are no new customer implications that have arisen.

11. EQUALITIES AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

None contained in this report.

12. VALUE FOR MONEY IMPLICATIONS, PROCUREMENT AND ASSET MANAGEMENT

12.1 The service is now delivering in line with the option agreed by Council on the 9th August 2010. The use of the Business Centre is a very cost effective option.

12.2 The REDI Centre building is now vacant and secured, weekly security checks have been put in place to monitor the property whilst empty.

12.3 This may provide opportunity for the facility to be let or disposed of, or re-used by the Council. Worcestershire County Council Property Services provide a full property review service to help identify local property needs and what options are available to the Council.

13. CLIMATE CHANGE, CARBON IMPLICATIONS AND BIODIVERSITY

The Council will see a reduction in carbon emissions whilst the REDI Centre building is closed. Depending on decisions on future use this could contribute to a long term reduction.

14. HUMAN RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS

There are no Human Resource issues relating to this report.

15. GOVERNANCE/PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

None related to this report.

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**16. COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS INCLUDING SECTION 17 OF
CRIME AND DISORDER ACT 1998**

None related to this report.

17. HEALTH INEQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

None related to this report.

18. LESSONS LEARNT

None reported.

19. COMMUNITY AND STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

None required as this is an update for Members.

20. OTHERS CONSULTED ON THE REPORT

Portfolio Holder	
Chief Executive	
Executive Director (S151 Officer)	
Deputy Chief Executive/Executive Director – Leisure, Environment and Community Services	
Executive Director – Planning & Regeneration, Regulatory and Housing Services	
Director of Policy, Performance and Partnerships	
Head of Service	Yes
Head of Resources	Yes
Head of Legal, Equalities & Democratic Services	
Corporate Procurement Team	

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21. **WARDS AFFECTED**

All Wards.

22. **APPENDICES**

None.

23. **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

Executive Committee Report 28th July 2010.
Council report 9th August 2010.

AUTHOR OF REPORT

Name: Kevin Cook
E Mail: Kevin.cook@redditchbc.gov.uk
Tel: 01527 534113

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**COUNCIL RESPONSE TO “LOCAL DECISIONS: A FAIRER FUTURE FOR
SOCIAL HOUSING”**

Relevant Portfolio Holder	Councillor Brandon Clayton – Housing, Local Environment and Health
Relevant Head of Service	Liz Tompkin – Head of Housing
Key Decision	

1. SUMMARY OF PROPOSALS

Members are asked to consider the Council’s response to the consultation document “Local Decisions: A Fairer Future for Social Housing” in Appendix 1.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee is asked to RESOLVE that

the response to the consultation paper: Local Decisions, A Fairer Future for Social Housing be endorsed.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 On the 22nd November the Government published Local Decisions: a fairer future for social housing paper. This is a consultation on the future of social housing which sets out its proposals for a fundamental reform of the provision of social housing in England. The proposals are to change legislation governing the way social housing is allocated, how local authorities discharge their main homelessness duty and the types of tenancies granted to social housing tenants.

3.2 Each Local Authority is asked to respond back with their comments by the 17th January 2011. Any changes following the outcome of the consultation will be introduced in the forthcoming Localism Bill.

4. KEY ISSUES

4.1 The proposals are to reform social housing by introducing:

- a) a new flexible local authority affordable rent tenancy with a minimum fixed term of two years;
- b) reforming the social housing allocations system;

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- c) introducing a nationwide social home swap programme;
 - d) enabling local authorities to fully discharge homelessness duties into the private sector;
 - e) addressing overcrowding;
 - f) focusing social housing regulation on economic regulation with a stronger role for local tenants to hold landlords to account for service delivery;
 - g) replacing the HRA with a self financing arrangement;
 - h) produce a duty on Landlords to publish a strategic policy on tenancies.
- 4.2 There are 30 questions in the consultation paper covering the above areas which have been responded to on behalf of the Council in Appendix 1.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The review of the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) will be know in January 2011, this could have a major impact on the finances for housing. It is therefore important that we take the opportunity to use any changes in legislation that will help in using the limited resources of housing stock that the council own.

6. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

Legislation will be brought in to make changes to the 1985 Housing Act, as amended by the 1996 Housing Act, amended by the Homelessness Act 2002. Under section 111 of the Local Government Act 1972, the Council has the power to do anything (whether or not involving expenditure, borrowing or lending of money or acquisition of any disposal of any property or rights) which is calculated to facilitate or is conducive or incidental to the discharge of any of its functions.

7. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

There will be changes required to the Council's Allocations Policy.

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8. COUNCIL OBJECTIVES

- 8.1 Enterprising Communities – the reform will introduce a more flexible approach to providing social housing.
- 8.2 Safe – the introduction of flexible tenancies will help in managing tenants who do not abide by their tenancy conditions.

9. RISK MANAGEMENT INCLUDING HEALTH & SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS

None identified.

10. CUSTOMER IMPLICATIONS

By introducing flexible tenancies this will allow best use of the council's housing stock in the future, freeing up accommodation for those who have a real housing need for social housing.

11. EQUALITIES AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

The allocations policy will cover all areas of equality and diversity through Impact Assessments.

12. VALUE FOR MONEY IMPLICATIONS, PROCUREMENT AND ASSET MANAGEMENT

None identified.

13. CLIMATE CHANGE, CARBON IMPLICATIONS AND BIODIVERSITY

None identified.

14. HUMAN RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS

There will be an increased workload for officers with the introduction of more home visits and increased housing advice.

15. GOVERNANCE/PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

This will form part of the proposed changes to the regulation for housing.

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**16. COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS INCLUDING SECTION 17 OF
CRIME AND DISORDER ACT 1998**

Flexible tenancies will assist in providing a short term tenancy to ensure tenants abide by their tenancy conditions where anti social behaviour is known.

17. HEALTH INEQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

None identified.

18. LESSONS LEARNT

None identified.

19. COMMUNITY AND STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

19.1 The consultation response has been produced through discussions with officers. Further consultation will now take place with tenants through the council's Borough Tenants Forum and Community Forum.

19.2 A briefing has taken place with the Leader of the Council and the Portfolio Holder for Housing.

20. OTHERS CONSULTED ON THE REPORT

Portfolio Holder	Yes
Chief Executive	No
Executive Director (S151 Officer)	No
Deputy Chief Executive/Executive Director – Leisure, Environment and Community Services	No
Executive Director – Planning & Regeneration, Regulatory and Housing Services	Yes
Director of Policy, Performance and Partnerships	No
Head of Service	Yes

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Head of Resources	No
Head of Legal, Equalities & Democratic Services	No
Corporate Procurement Team	No

21. WARDS AFFECTED

All Wards.

22. APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Consultation Response: Local Decisions, a Fairer Future for Housing.

23. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Communities and Local Government Consultation Document;
CIH Briefing on Social Housing Reform – November 2010.

AUTHOR OF REPORT

Name: Liz Tompkin, Head of Housing
E Mail: liz.tompkin@redditchbc.gov.uk
Tel: Ext: 3304

Redditch Borough Council's Consultation response: Local decisions: a fairer future for social housing

Q.1. As a landlord do you anticipate making changes in light of the new tenancy flexibilities being proposed? If so, how would you expect to use these flexibilities? What sort of outcomes would you hope to achieve?

Redditch Borough Council (RBC) would consider introducing the use of flexible tenancies as a further option to providing tenancies. Our approach would be to use these tenancies to help make best use of our stock in the future. One of the concerns most local authority landlords have is that they have a limited housing stock, especially family accommodation, which is not being replaced when Right to Buys are taking place and a housing need which is constantly increasing. As a landlord we know that a large proportion of our large family accommodation is taken up by families whose children have left home and in a lot of cases only the couple are left in a property. We therefore would look to introduce flexible tenancies to help free up family accommodation, by giving 10 year tenancies to families at the end of the ten year period the tenancy would be reviewed and depending if the children had left home the tenancy could be extended or ended and housing advice provided to find alternative housing which meets the needs of the current household this could be local authority housing, private sector or by purchasing accommodation.

We would also look to use flexible tenancies for those households who the council would look to provide housing to meet their immediate housing situation but where in the near future the assets they have tied up could be released to provide them with alternative housing in the private sector.

Outcomes would be:

- Better use of housing stock
- Reduction in waiting list time
- Reduced housing related fraud / unauthorized sub-letting.
- More second chances with Social Landlord accommodation for former 'bad tenants'
- Reduced anti-social behaviour / rent arrears as tenants will need to demonstrate that they are good tenants to have flexible tenancies renewed.
- Attraction of Key workers / skills that are lacking into an area
- Improved links with alcohol / drug rehabilitation programs as will make landlords more willing to try things out with risky tenants if restrictions

of removing them or impact of bad behaviour on other tenants are reduced.

Q.2. When as a landlord might you begin to introduce changes

Any changes would be introduced after the review of the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) being introduced in April 2012 we see no changes being introduced before this date if legislation is changed. We would need the time to undertake consultation with partners and local people and ensure that flexible tenancies added value to the area and are aligned with Economic Development, Homelessness and Housing Need Strategies.

Q.3. As a Local Authority, how would you expect to develop and publish a local strategic policy on tenancies?

We would expect to undertake consultation with local residents including customers on the waiting list, existing tenants. All partner RSL's operating within the area, internal partners such as Planners and Economic Development, the Local Strategic Partnership, Community Safety Partnership, Private Landlords, Voluntary Sector Partners and other Statutory Agencies operating in the area. The strategy must show clear links to priorities in the Economic Development, Homelessness and Housing Need Strategies and be published on the Local Authority website, news papers, radio and the council's local magazine.

Q.4. Which other persons or bodies should local authorities consult in drawing up their strategic tenancy policy?

Ward Councillors would be key in helping develop this with their constituents. We would also have to take into account the changes to the Housing Benefit reform. Also see partners in Q3.

Q.5. Do you agree that the Tenancy Standard should focus on key principles? If so, what should these be?

Key Principles should include:

- Enabling tenants to move out of social housing
- To make best use of the housing stock
- To ensure that social housing accommodation is for those that require social housing
- Reduce under occupancy
- Making it fair for all to access social housing that require it short term and long term

Q.6. Do you have any concerns that these proposals could restrict current flexibilities enjoyed by landlords? If so, how can we best mitigate that risk?

RBC have found the use of introductory tenancies very beneficial in ensuring a tenant abides by their tenancy conditions in the first 12 months to

demonstrate that they will be good longer term tenant. RBC would therefore want to use legislation to change introductory tenancies to enable an introductory tenancy to go into a flexible tenancy rather than always a secure tenancy.

Q.7. Should we seek to prescribe more closely the content of landlord policies on tenancies? If so, in what respects?

The Tenancy Standard should be sufficient so long as it outlines the aims and objectives of offering flexible tenancies.

One size does not fit all and it would be difficult to legislate in what circumstances a flexible tenancy should be given, landlords understand what works and what doesn't in terms of tenancy management and local authorities should be able to subscribe in their local policy the requirements for their own local communities.

However, the introduction of Flexible Tenancies could result in increased social exclusion and homelessness if social landlords do not operate responsibly. Local Authorities should be given increased powers to influence RSL's on the number and type of tenancies given to ensure that housing provision assists in delivering the priorities of the area as a whole whilst also protecting vulnerable people within our communities.

Q.8. What opportunities as a tenant would you expect to have to influence the landlord's policy?

It is essential that tenants and potential tenants have the opportunity to influence the landlord's policy, if tenants understand the purpose for the policy their views may identify areas for inclusion. Areas tenants may wish to influence are:

- The conduct of tenants / whether they breach agreements
- Housing Need
- Affordability of alternative accommodation
- Availability of accommodation in an area

Q.9. Is two years an appropriate minimum fixed term for a general needs social tenancy, or should the minimum fixed term be longer? If so, how long should it be? What is the basis for proposing a minimum fixed term of that length? Should a distinction be drawn between tenancies on social and affordable rents? If so, what should this be? Should the minimum fixed term include any probationary period?

Local Authorities should be given scope to decide themselves what length of flexible tenancy is awarded based on the priorities within their area. A minimum time of two years would be appropriate initially as this offers stability to the tenant. However RBC would see 10 years as a more appropriate time period for all their tenancies. The concern RBC would have is regarding the

level of housing advice which would be required for all the tenancy at the end of the fixed term period.

The same minimum requirement should be offered between affordable and social rented tenancies.

The minimum period of a flexible tenancy would follow the introductory tenancy period of 12 months, therefore the tenancy could run for up to 11 years before it would come to an end.

A probationary period would be welcomed for fixed term tenancies, the first year being the introductory period. This would work on the same basis as an introductory tenancy which is currently used for a secure tenancy.

Q.10. Should we require a longer minimum fixed term for some groups? If so, who should those groups be and what minimum fixed terms would be appropriate? What is the basis for proposing a minimum fixed term of that length? Should a distinction be drawn between tenancies on social and affordable rents? If so, what should this be?

No

This should be down to the Local Authority to decide upon based on household circumstances and will be determined in the strategic policy. It is important that we consider individuals rather than groups of people when considering if a flexible tenancy should be any longer than a standard fixed term. Our policy should reflect how we apply discretion to the type of tenancy that is offered as we currently do in our allocations policy to enable tenants with social or medical grounds to have a priority move over others.

Distinction on rents does not apply to local authority tenants.

Q.11. Do you think that older people and those with a long term illness or disability should continue to be provided with a guarantee of a social home for life through the Tenancy Standard?

No

RBC believes groups of people should not be given a guarantee of a social home for life, it should be based on the type of accommodation.

For example, Extra Care Housing and sheltered housing should be more secure as the emphasis on this type of housing is to help people live independently by providing support and care when required. Generally people have moved into this type of accommodation as their last housing move and if there is a need to move them on that is generally with the tenants agreement, for example into a care home.

Q12. Are there other types of households where we should always require landlords to guarantee a social home for life?

No each household should be looked at individually.

Q13. Do you agree that we should require landlords to offer existing secure and assured tenants who move to another social rent property a lifetime tenancy in their new home.

Yes

As a local authority we need to make best use of our stock by working with tenants to agree to move to smaller accommodation when the numbers in their household reduce. If an existing secure tenant knows they would be moving into a non secure tenancy they may be less likely to move.

However we would like secure tenants to be only given a further secure tenancy if they have abided by their tenancy conditions, where this is not the case and a Notice for Possession Proceedings has been served and for example the family have had to move due to protection of themselves or others in the area either a fixed term tenancy could be given or an introductory tenancy.

Q.14. Do you agree that landlords should have the freedom to decide whether new secure and assured tenants should continue to receive a lifetime tenancy when they move?

Yes

This may help with cases where tenants have breached their tenancy conditions, for example where anti social behaviour has been involved and families are having to be re housed as there is not enough evidence to take action against their tenancy. This would help in the same way as introductory tenancies, as these have proven that a tenant will abide by their tenancy conditions if they know that the local authority can refuse to give them a secure tenancy.

Q.15. Do you agree that we should require social landlords to provide advice and assistance to tenants prior to the expiry of the fixed term of the tenancy?

Yes

Social landlords should provide detailed advice and assistance to tenants prior to the expiry of the fixed term of their tenancy and not to just forward tenants onto housing advice teams.

Q.16. As a landlord, what are the factors you would take into account in deciding whether to reissue a tenancy at the end of the fixed term? How often would you expect a tenancy to be reissued?

Factors to take into account:

- Household occupant size
- Financial capacity to access alternative accommodation
- Health
- Social
- Breaches of tenancy
- Ability to sustain a tenancy outside of social housing

The tenancy would be re-issued as many times as necessary until the household reaches a stage where they are able to access alternative suitable accommodation.

Q.17. As a local authority how would you expect to use the new flexibilities to decide who should qualify to go on the waiting list? What sort of outcomes would you hope to achieve?

The current open waiting list allows anyone to apply for social housing. As social housing is for those who can least afford to find alternative affordable housing, the waiting list should not allow those who could afford private accommodation or in a position to purchase a property to qualify.

By restricting the waiting list this would prevent owner occupiers from applying for council housing, those owner occupiers who approach the local authority for assistance as their accommodation does not meet their need should be addressed through either the homelessness route or through the Care and Repair Agencies to see if their accommodation could be adapted to meet their need.

Applicants with more than £20,000 in savings should be restricted from the waiting list.

Applicants with sufficient income and savings to buy accommodation on the open market should be excluded.

A form of incentive should be offered to those who enter into employment to encourage them to move into better accommodation.

Although RBC would look to restrict those entering the waiting list for residents in Redditch we would also look to encourage key workers into the area.

Q.18. In making use of the new flexibilities, what savings or other benefits would you expect to achieve?

The housing waiting list would be smaller to manage and easier for reviews to be carried out. Savings would be made on the officer's time and in the cost of paperwork and postage in notifying applicants on the waiting list,

Stock would be retained for those who need it and prohibit owner occupiers who are downsizing from accessing the waiting list and encourage them to occupy private rented accommodation which would meet their needs. The stock is retained for those who need it to be used as a stepping stone into alternative accommodation.

Q19. What opportunities as a tenant or resident would you expect to have to influence the local authority's qualification criteria?

Tenants and residents opinions are crucially in influencing the qualification criteria. This would be done through the development of the policy working with tenants groups. The main areas they would be interested in are:

Those residents or tenants, who live locally to be given priority to move over those coming into the area.

To ensure there is a housing need

Not able to afford alternative housing due to a low income
Compliance with tenancy conditions
Willingness to engage in training / paid employment to facilitate progression to other types of accommodation in the longer term

Q.20 Do you agree that current statutory reasonable preference categories should remain unchanged? Or do you consider that there is scope to clarify the current categories?

RBC agree that the reasonable preference categories should remain unchanged. (In particular Intentionally Homeless households should not be given more priority as this will encourage more people to act recklessly).

Q.21. Do you think that the existing reasonable preference categories should be expanded to include other categories of people in housing need? If so, what additional categories would you include and what is the rationale for doing so?

No

The current categories are correct but under the proposals Local Authorities will have increased scope to allocate accommodation in accordance with local needs and priorities.

Q.22. As a landlord, how would you expect to use the new flexibility created by taking social tenants seeking a transfer who are not in housing need out of the allocation framework? What sort of outcomes would you hope to achieve?

The previous home swap scheme did require a lot of work to administer it. Hopefully the new scheme would be WEB based?

The current Choice Based Lettings scheme (CBL) enables local authorities to reserve larger accommodation or adapted accommodation for certain allocations. From a local authorities point of view our transfers have not reduced as we have administered the number of properties let through the CBL through our adverts across the categories of different housing need. We believe by advertising our properties across the 3 bandings on the CBL system we are helping to move existing tenants on who have a further housing need and are also meeting the need of people on the waiting list.

RBC believes that the existing tenants wishing to move should be able to remain on the councils transfer list and apply for accommodation through the CBL system and also apply through the new Home Swap scheme for a move.

Q.23. What are the reasons why a landlord may currently choose not to subscribe to a mutual exchange service?

- Financial constraints due to subscription costs and limited budgets.
- The amount of staff resource required to operate a scheme.

- Officer time in carrying out inspections of properties as these could increase. Inconsistency in approach between landlords and regions leading to disappointment from tenants

Q.24. As a tenant, this national scheme will increase the number of possible matches you might find through your web-based provider but what other services might you find helpful in arranging your mutual exchange as well as IT-based access?

- Information regarding local schools / Job opportunities / Local Amenities
- Details regarding Landlord Services
- Details of schemes that might assist to cover transport / storage costs if moving due to employment whilst long term unemployed or on low income
- Energy performance certificates

Q.25. As a local authority, how would you expect to use the new flexibility provided by this change to the homelessness legislation?

In cases such as Domestic Violence applicants under homelessness legislation can have significant assets such as a property which is jointly owned or savings. Whilst there is a need to provide interim accommodation at crisis point, there are often legal processes available which would allow them to seek their rights to the matrimonial home or joint assets. In the current system we are required to offer secure accommodation, despite there being affordability to purchase again once the assets have been distributed. In such cases it would make sense to use the private rented sector to discharge duty by which time they would be able to secure alternative accommodation independently. The current system is open to abuse and there are examples where victims have separated then return to former partners once secure accommodation has been offered so that the original house can be sold off retrospectively. Other examples are applicants applying due to unsuitability of accommodation based on disability. There is no means test currently, yet the applicants can often afford to sell their home and purchase something more suitable to meet their needs. In such cases it would make sense to offer Private Rented accommodation in the interim whilst the owned property is sold giving them time to find something suitable to meet their needs. This could prevent tenants from coercing landlords into obtaining notice purely to help them access social housing.

Q.26. As a local authority, do you think there will be private rented sector housing available in your area that could provide suitable and affordable accommodation for people owed the main homelessness duty?

Yes.

We already have significant success in preventing homelessness via this route. The changes to housing benefit could impact on the number of private landlords who will be willing to house people on benefits.

Q.27. Do you consider that 12 months is the right period to provide as a minimum fixed term where the homelessness duty is ended with an offer of an assured shorthold tenancy? If you consider the period should be longer, do you consider that private landlords would be prepared to provide fixed term assured shorthold tenancies for that longer period to new tenants?

Yes

Twelve months is sufficient time to discharge duty. The government should give consideration to legislation which would increase the minimum length of Assured Shorthold Tenancy Agreements to be two years (in line with the minimum length of time proposed for flexible tenancies). This would encourage Landlords entering into agreements of this nature to give greater consideration to becoming a landlord in the first place. It would also reduce the number of repeat homelessness cases. If circumstances changed and customers could no longer afford such accommodation landlords should be encouraged to allow them out of agreements (subject to appropriate notice being given).

Q.28. What powers do local authorities and landlords need to address overcrowding?

Landlords should be given access to funding to allow them to extend housing where demand for large stock is high to meet the needs of its existing tenants without requiring them to move. This will allow households to retain social links and offer greater stability to children attending school.

Q.29. Is the framework set out in the 1985 Housing Act fit for purpose? Are any detailed changes needed to the enforcement provisions in the 1985 Act?

The current framework is predominately fit for purpose. We would suggest that a lounge is removed as a habitable room as utilising a lounge for a bedroom does not provide a long term sustainable solution in a family sized house with more than one occupant.

Whilst the enforcement provisions are adequate we would suggest that a standard scale 1 fine is not a sufficient deterrent or punishment for over occupying a property due to the possible ability to recoup a greater sum from letting to multiple occupants

Q.30. Should the Housing Health and Safety Rating System provide the foundation for measures to tackle overcrowding across all tenures and landlords

We would agree that the 1985 Act and the HHSRS should be harmonised however with the HHSRS being a risk based assessment subject to individuals interpretation with no confirmed space requirements there is a need to keep the current legislative framework provided by the 1985 Act or the inclusion of the space standards from the 1985 Act being incorporated into the HHSRS

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GARDEN WASTE COLLECTION SERVICE - OUTCOMES OF TRIAL

Relevant Portfolio Holder	Councillor Brandon Clayton, Portfolio Holder for Housing, Local Environment And Health
Relevant Head of Service	Guy Revans, Head of Environmental Services
Key Decision - yes	

1. SUMMARY OF PROPOSALS

A report to Executive Committee on 20th October gave full details of the trial garden waste service which ran from March to November 2010. Members identified their preferred option which was to extend the trial area in the West of the town and stop the service in the East but this was subject to a further consultation exercise to seek customer response on likely take up and viability of the scheme. This report contains details of this consultation exercise.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 That 'Option D', as detailed at in the 20th October report to Executive, 'Stop trial in East and increase West trial to cover 10,000 properties (figures based on 10% take up)', be approved as the preferred option for the future of the garden waste collection service; or

2.2 That the trial service ends.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 In January 2010 Members agreed that a trial chargeable garden waste collection service would run across two trial areas of the Borough. The service was offered to approximately 4,800 households and began in March, running to the end of November at a charge of £35 per customer.

3.2 This report supplements the report presented to Executive on 20th October, with the outcomes of the additional consultation that Members requested be carried out in the West area and further key issues.

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- 3.3 It was agreed on 20th October that officers explore options for the sharing of the service with Bromsgrove District Council, including roll out of the service across the whole Borough, as part of the transformation programme of environmental services during 2011/12;

4. KEY ISSUES

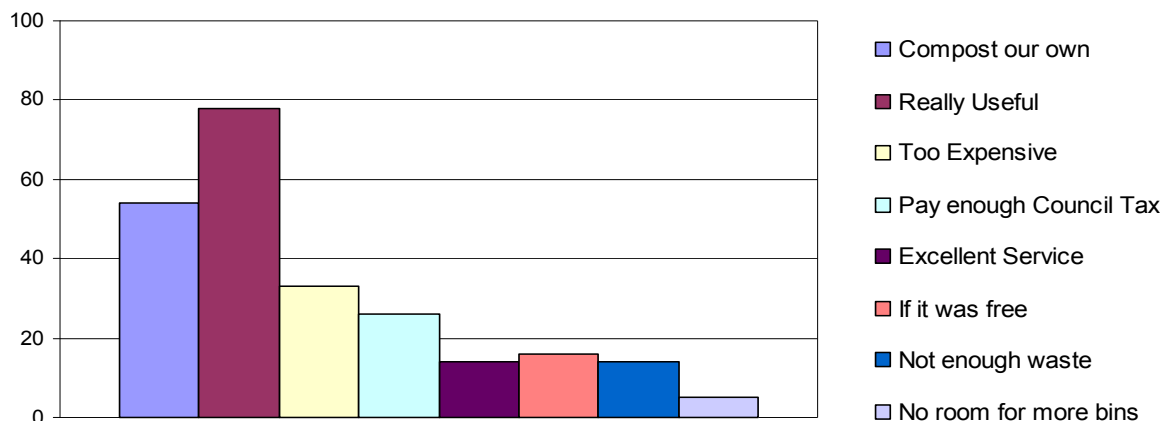
- 4.1 A summary of the key issues presented in the 20th October report is below:
- a) Garden waste collection is a key way of increasing performance against NI 192 which measures the amount of household waste re-used, recycled and composted.
 - b) 4,800 residents across two trial areas in the west and east of the Borough were offered the service as part of the trial.
 - c) There was a greater level of customer take up in the west (10.5%) than the east (2.6%) with the overall take up rate at 6.7%.
 - d) All districts in Worcestershire offer a chargeable garden waste service. Some garden waste is disposed of in grey bins and many residents use orange sacks to dispose of garden waste in the summer months.
 - e) There is a need to support the county wide approach and reduce the amount of biodegradable waste which is disposed of to landfill.
- 4.2 Members identified their preferred option for taking the service forward as 'option D' which is to end the trial in the East and extend the trial in the West of the town.
- 4.3 If option D is implemented, it is important to note that the service will still be a trial. With a 'non permanent' service we are unable to set up automated phone/on-line payment mechanisms and therefore all calls have to be dealt with manually. This creates a short term peak in customer contact and requires a temporary back office system in place to deal with calls and bookings. This will be done by putting additional temporary resources in the contact centre to deal with the calls – this could cost around £1K per week – or by externalising the calls to a specialist company; we are currently finding out what this would cost.

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- 4.4 It is important to note that we will not be able to carry out any borough wide/press promotion of the service as it generates calls from residents outside the trial area – this increases impact on the contact centre and reduces customer satisfaction when they have to be told that they don't qualify for the service.
- 4.5 Worcestershire County Council have confirmed that a local delivery point at Bromsgrove would be available for the disposal of garden waste collected. This reduces transport emissions and costs in taking the waste to Pershore, which has been done during the trial in 2010/11.

Consultation outcomes

- 4.6 A pre-paid postcard was delivered to the targeted properties in the west area during early December with a closing date of 13th December. Of the potential 9,760 new customers (excluding the 244 existing customers), 54% (244) said that they would take up the service and 46% (208) said that they would not.
- 4.7 The card also asked for feedback and the graph below details the most popular comments:

Most popular responses from consultation

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- 4.8 Towards the end of the trial a user satisfaction survey of the existing customers in the west resulted in 185 customers stating that they would use the service again next year.
- 4.9 The consultation exercises have identified that we have a 'confirmed' customer base of 244 new customers in the west and 185 existing customers in the west – a total of 429 or just over 4%.
- 4.10 It is important to note that this survey has generated a response rate of 4.5%. Statistics based on small sample sizes can be imprecise and therefore the limitations on this data must be recognised. This coupled with the fact that this is not a good time of year to undertake consultation, particularly to a service that is more high profile in spring and summer months, the outcome of the consultation may not be a true reflection of the level of take up that could be achieved.

East area

- 4.11 Whilst we had a significantly lower take up in the East area (just under 3%) Members requested that we consider ways that we maintain the service in the East. Members were concerned about the cost of providing a small number of collections in the East and officers have calculated the cost of providing each collection in the East compared to the West as below:

	Cost per bin collected	Number of customers	Total cost of trial (based on 16 collections)	'profit' per property
West	1.20	242	4646	15.84
East	1.49	73	1740	11.16

- 4.12 The 35 for sixteen collections = 2.19 per Income per collection – which covers the cost of collection.

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5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Members have supported the Joint Municipal Waste Management Strategy approach of the service charge covering the cost of the garden waste collection service.
- 5.2 The table below shows the original costs of Option D provided in the 20th October report and the costs based on the predicted customer take up.

Service components	OPTION D	OPTION D based on predicted customer take up
	£'000	£'000
Publicity printing & delivery	8	8
Operational costs (staff & vehicles & Fuel)	27	27
Total cost of running service	35	35
Income received	35	15
Shortfall	0	-20

Estimated charge per customer to cover cost of service	£35	£82
Additional wheeled bins required (approx £21 each)*	£16k	£3.6

- 5.3 *for the extension of the area to 10,000 properties, green bins would continue to be used as the service would still be a trial; the costs of the 73 bins in the East area have been deducted.
- 5.4 For the continuation of the service a number of bins would have to be purchased for customers. There is currently a £15k saving within the service area relating to grant received for waste management. It is proposed that this saving be utilised to fund capital costs arising from the

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additional bins. It should also be noted that the 73 bins which are currently with East area customers could be utilised.

6. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

Under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 the Council has a duty to collect household waste, which includes garden waste generated by households, but may make a charge for its collection.

7. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

7.1 A summary of the policy implications is given below:

- a) the Joint Municipal Waste Management Strategy (JMWMS) 2009 sets a target of 43% recycling/composting by 2014 and a garden waste collection service helps to meet this target and is in line with all other Worcestershire districts;
- b) the majority of residual waste collected in Worcestershire is land filled and we need to reduce the amount of biodegradable waste sent to landfill in order to meet Landfill Allowance Trading Scheme limits in future years.
- c) residents should continue to be offered the option of purchasing up to two orange sacks per fortnight for the disposal of extra household waste until such a time that the service is offered borough wide.

8. COUNCIL OBJECTIVES

Provision of good quality, customer focused waste collection services meets the Council priority of a 'Clean and Green' Borough.

**9. RISK MANAGEMENT INCLUDING HEALTH & SAFETY
CONSIDERATIONS**

9.1 A risk management plan will be developed as part of the roll out of the service, should this be agreed. The main risks associated with the details included in this report are:

- a) loss of income due to lack of customer take up;
- b) failure to increase performance (NI 192) and meet county wide targets set in the JMWMS;

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- c) County Council levied Landfill Allowance Trading Scheme (LATS) penalties if limits for the amount of biodegradable waste landfilled in Worcestershire are exceeded;
- d) if the take up level is higher than 10%, we will not have sufficient bins and will need to try and provide residents with an alternative or even borrow them from neighbouring authorities.
- e) the small window for publicity between full council on 7th February and the start of the service in March may not be enough time to attract the target 10% level of customers, particularly as we cannot undertake borough wide publicity.

9.2 These risks along with a risk management plan will be entered into the risk registry.

10. CUSTOMER IMPLICATIONS

There are 242 existing customers in the west and 73 in the east. A large % have said through consultation that they are pleased with the service and would take it up again.

11. EQUALITIES AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

Assisted collections, different sized bins and information on the service in different formats are all available to residents upon request.

12. VALUE FOR MONEY IMPLICATIONS, PROCUREMENT AND ASSET MANAGEMENT

12.1 In accordance with the JMWMS, it was agreed that the service should aim to be cost neutral.

12.2 Members may wish to consider increasing the charge of the service to reduce the risk of running at a deficit.

12.3 The option of sharing the service across Redditch and Bromsgrove is one which will be explored further as part of the transformation programme for environmental services during 2011/12.

12.4 The aim is for the service to be self financing including provision / replacement of bins to existing customers

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13. CLIMATE CHANGE, CARBON IMPLICATIONS AND BIODIVERSITY

13.1 A summary of the implications is given below:

- a) Last year **2,216** tonnes of garden waste were taken by residents to the Household waste site which involves residents using their own vehicles to transport small amounts of waste;
- b) The Strategic Environmental Assessment which forms part of the JMWMS, states that “**options which have area wide green waste collections secure more benefits overall than other options because of increased tonnages of waste recycled, principally biodegradable waste**” (SEA p.38).
- c) The service has an impact on climate change indicator NI185 due to increased transport emissions. Mileage has been minimised by the size of vehicle used and next year, we will be able to dispose of the garden waste locally rather than transporting it to Pershore.
- d) Whilst Redditch waste currently goes to an energy from waste facility, diverting biodegradable waste from this route could provide capacity for other Worcestershire waste to be diverted from landfill.
- e) In accordance with the Waste Hierarchy, our initial aim was to prevent waste and our publicity materials promoted home composting as the best way to deal with garden waste, “**our garden waste collection service is specially designed for residents who generate a lot of garden waste but don’t have sufficient home composting facilities.**”

14. HUMAN RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS

Agency staff would be employed to operate the service if it is agreed that it will be further rolled out during 2011. This would continue until the preferred option of service delivery has been identified as part of the transformation programme.

15. GOVERNANCE/PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

15.1 Since the introduction of targets for increasing the amount of waste recycled and composted (NI 192), one of the key reasons for providing a garden waste service has been to improve performance.

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15.2 For comparison, recycling performance including garden waste stands at 28.9% year to date. Without the garden waste this figure is reduced by 0.3% to 28.6%.

16. COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS INCLUDING SECTION 17 OF CRIME AND DISORDER ACT 1998

There are no direct community safety implications.

17. HEALTH INEQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

There are no direct health inequalities implications.

18. LESSONS LEARNT

The trial has allowed us to assess: level of customer demand, costs, operational and administrative impacts and effective publicity.

19. COMMUNITY AND STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

As part of the trial several pieces of customer consultation were completed.

20. OTHERS CONSULTED ON THE REPORT

Portfolio Holder	Yes
Chief Executive	Yes
Executive Director (S151 Officer)	Yes
Executive Director – Leisure, Cultural, Environmental and Community Services	Yes
Executive Director – Planning & Regeneration, Regulatory and Housing Services	No
Director of Policy, Performance and Partnerships	Yes
Head of Service	Yes
Head of Resources	Yes
Head of Legal, Equalities & Democratic Services	Yes
Corporate Procurement Team	No
Climate Change Manager	Yes

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21. WARDS AFFECTED

There are a number of affected wards and these vary depending on the preferred option

22. APPENDICES

None

23. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Report to Executive 20th October 2010: Garden Waste Collection Service –
Outcomes of trial
Draft Revised Joint Municipal Waste Management Strategy 2009

AUTHOR OF REPORT

Name: Sue Horrobin
E Mail: sue.horrobin@redditchbc.gov.uk
Tel: (01527) 64252 extn. 3706

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REDDITCH BOROUGH COUNCIL ESTABLISHMENT

Relevant Portfolio Holder	Councillor Michael Braley, Portfolio Holder for Corporate Management
Relevant Head of Service	Teresa Kristunas, Head of Finance and Resources
Non-Key Decision	

1. SUMMARY OF PROPOSALS

The report provides an update on the Council's establishment and the number of vacant posts currently in place.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee is asked to **RESOLVE** that

subject to any comments, the report be noted.

3. BACKGROUND

At the 11th June 2008 meeting of this Committee, Members requested a brief report to be brought to alternate future meetings, outlining the current vacancies with the Authority's establishment.

4. KEY ISSUES

A table has been included at Appendix 1 detailing all vacant posts as at 1st December 2010 not covered by temporary staff or other arrangements.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

These will be included within the quarterly budget monitoring report.

6. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

None specific.

7. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

None specific.

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8. COUNCIL OBJECTIVES

The establishment of Redditch Borough Council needs to be well maintained to allow all objectives of the Council to be obtained, specific posts included in Appendix 1 will relate to different objectives. The report links into a well maintained organisation.

9. RISK MANAGEMENT INCLUDING HEALTH & SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS

None specific.

10. CUSTOMER IMPLICATIONS

None specific.

11. EQUALITIES AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

None specific.

12. VALUE FOR MONEY IMPLICATIONS, PROCUREMENT AND ASSET MANAGEMENT

None specific.

13. CLIMATE CHANGE, CARBON IMPLICATIONS AND BIODIVERSITY

None specific.

14. HUMAN RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS

None specific.

15. GOVERNANCE/PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

None specific.

16. COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS INCLUDING SECTION 17 OF CRIME AND DISORDER ACT 1998

None specific.

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17. HEALTH INEQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

None specific.

18. LESSONS LEARNT

None specific.

19. COMMUNITY AND STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

None specific.

20. OTHERS CONSULTED ON THE REPORT

Portfolio Holder	
Chief Executive	
Executive Director (S151 Officer)	
Executive Director – Leisure, Cultural, Environmental and Community Services	
Executive Director – Planning & Regeneration, Regulatory and Housing Services	
Director of Policy, Performance and Partnerships	
Head of Service	Yes
Head of Resources	Yes
Head of Legal, Equalities & Democratic Services	
Corporate Procurement Team	

21. WARDS AFFECTED

All Wards.

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22. APPENDICES

Appendix 1 Table of Vacant posts as at 1st December 2010

23. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None.

AUTHOR OF REPORT

Name: Sam Morgan
E Mail: sam.morgan@redditchbc.gov.uk
Tel: 01527 64252 ext 3790

Appendix 1**Vacant Post Savings 2010/11 - to 1st December 2010**

Service Area	Job Title	Job Grade	Date Vacant
Planning Services	Development Plans Manager	MO3	June 2008 - (Ruth Bamford now Head of Service) - funding secondment
Planning Services	Planning Assistant - DP	SO1	Vacant from 28/11/2010
Planning Services	Reception (post vacant)	Scale 5	Vacant since 2006 - Used previously to fund Admin Ass Post
Land Charges	Reg Services Officer 18.5 hrs	Scale 5	Vacant since end July 2010
Economic Development	Economic Development Manager	MO3	funding two assistant posts
Local Taxation	Senior Revenues Officer	SO1	Vacant pre April 2010
Local Taxation	Enforcement Officer	Scale 3	Vacant pre April 2010
Housing Capital	Technical Officer	SO1	Vacant from 1/4/2010
Warden Service	Home Support Officer	S3	Vacant from 1/4/2010
Customer Service Centre	Customer Service Adviser	Scale3/5	Given up as saving 2011/12
Customer Service Centre	Customer Service Adviser	Scale3/5	Appointment to be made



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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 Brandon Clayton, Roger Hill, Derek Taylor and Mr M Collins (Standards Committee Observer).

Officers:

D Bennett, H Bennett, J Bough, M Bough, S Hanley, S Horrobin, G Revans and L Tompkin

Committee Services Officer:

J Smyth and I Westmore

130. APOLOGIES AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES

No apologies for absence had been received.

131. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND OF PARTY WHIP

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

132. MINUTES

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 27th October 2010 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

.....
Chair

Overview and SCRUTINY

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133. ACTIONS LIST

Members considered the latest version of the Committee's Actions List. Officers advised that, in relation to item 2 on the list, a report on options for public speaking at Overview and Scrutiny Committee meetings would be presented to the Committee at its meeting on 8th December 2010.

In respect of Item 1 on the Actions List, the Chair requested that Officers address the outstanding query on what courses would not be provided following the closure of the REDI Centre, as soon as possible.

RESOLVED that

the Actions List be noted.

134. CALL-IN AND SCRUTINY OF THE FORWARD PLAN

There were no specific call-ins relating to the Decision Notice of the Executive Committee meeting held on 10th November 2010.

It was noted that, whilst not all of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's recommendations on the Climate Change Strategy had been accepted, the Executive had agreed an additional recommendation on a policy being approved for all new public buildings to aim to exceed nationally set Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Method (BREEAM) standards. It was further noted that of the Committee's recommendations relating to the Review of the Dial A Ride Service had been accepted and incorporated in the Executive Committee's recommendations to Council.

There were no pre-scrutiny requests in relation to items scheduled on the Forward Plan for consideration by the Executive Committee.

135. TASK & FINISH REVIEWS - DRAFT SCOPING DOCUMENTS

There were no draft scoping documents for consideration.

136. TASK AND FINISH GROUPS - PROGRESS REPORTS

It was noted that the final report on the External Refurbishment of Housing Stock Short-Sharp Review was to be presented later in the meeting under Item 9 on the agenda.

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

a) Joint Worcestershire Hub

The Council's Co-opted representative, Councillor Roger Hill, reported that the report on the review of the Worcestershire Hub was due to go to the County Council's Cabinet for consideration on 25th November. Members further noted that an e-link could be provided to access the report on the County's website if they wished to view the report online.

b) Work Experience Opportunities

The Chair of the review, Councillor Peter Anderson, reported that investigations had revealed that an organisation, the Worcestershire Education Business Partnership had been set up to provide assistance and access to a substantial database that schools and young people could tap into to help them find work experience placements and which had, in the previous year, assisted with placing 6,000 students.

He further reported that some schools in Redditch were not, it would seem, taking advantage of this database or enabling their students to make use of it and the Task and Finish Group would be investigating if this was the case and why. He commented that, between this organisation, Careers Advisers and Connexions, there should be plenty of opportunities for work experience placements.

Members also noted that a planned visit by the Chair to a Student Council meeting on 16th November to consult with them on work experience issues had been postponed due to unforeseen circumstances and that he would be meeting with them at the end of January 2011 instead.

c) Promoting Redditch

On behalf of the Task and Finish Group Chair, Councillor Graham Vickery, Officers reported that the Group had held their first meeting on Friday 5th November, at which they received a presentation on the subject of the "Its My Place" Pride Campaign. The Group's next meeting would be held on 23rd November when the work of the Council's Economic Development Unit in promoting Redditch and opportunities for Redditch, given its close proximity, for tapping into Stratford's tourist market and providing places to stay would be discussed.

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Members further noted that the Group had also organised an interview with a representative from North East Worcestershire Tourism (NEWT) on 30th November and was also organising an interview with Sir William Lawrence, former Chair of the defunct Heart of England Tourist Board which, it was hoped, would take place some time in December.

Councillor Derek Taylor, reported that he had received a few responses from Councillors on his research survey "What's good about Redditch", but would welcome more. Members suggested that other external groups, such as businesses, voluntary groups, young and older people should also be consulted on the survey.

RESOLVED that**the update reports be noted.****137. CRIME AND DISORDER SCRUTINY PANEL - CHAIR'S UPDATE**

The Committee received a report from the Chair of the Crime and Disorder Scrutiny Panel which provided details on discussions held with Officers from the Worcestershire PCT on the possibilities for establishing a Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC) in the West Mercia Police area and the impact the lack of funding and changes to the NHS and PCT's would have and were asked to endorse the Panel's request that the Council write to the Health and Wellbeing Board on the issues highlighted in the report.

The Deputy Chief Executive and Chair of the Redditch Community Safety Partnership reported that she had already received the Panel's letter on funding issues and that the matter would be taken to the full Partnership for consideration.

Members also noted updates on public consultation responses the Panel had received in relation to the Home Office White Paper "Policing in the 21st Century – reconnecting police and the people".

RECOMMENDED that

- 1) Redditch Borough Council endorse and support the need for a Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC) in the West Mercia Police area; and**
- 2) the Council issue a letter to the Health and Wellbeing Board highlighting the level of uncertainty for future provision of a SARC within the West Mercia Police Area**

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and the apparent gaps in the NHS White Paper *Equity and Excellence: Liberating the NHS*” in this regard.

138. EXTERNAL REFURBISHMENT OF HOUSING STOCK SHORT-SHARP REVIEW - FINAL REPORT

The Committee considered the final report from the External Refurbishment of Housing Stock Short-Sharp Review Group on proposals for a number of actions to be taken to improve the appearance of properties in the Council’s housing stock and surrounding environment in Woodrow specifically, but also potentially for future implementation in other parts of the Borough, at a relatively low financial cost to the Council.

The Chair of the Review Group, Councillor Graham Vickery, reminded Members of the reasons behind the review, which was to address concerns about the appearance of some of the Council’s housing stock and the impact it had on local residents and their environment. He outlined the stages of the review namely a walkabout in Woodrow with Officers, during which various issues were identified, followed by a further meeting of meeting of the Group when a number of recommendations were formulated for the Committee’s consideration.

Supported by photographic evidence, Councillor Vickery briefly went through each of the proposed recommendations and the reasons behind them. He considered, however, that there were still a number of outstanding issues that needed to be considered, namely:

- a) the colouring of the rough cast pebble dash on houses in Ombersley and Rushock Close; what colours tenants might prefer and consideration as to what might be achievable within existing budgets;
- b) the condition of the road surface at the entrance to Rushock Close; and
- c) the demolition of under-used garages and potential use of some Section 106 monies allocated for use on capital landscape work on soft landscaping work in the courtyard area located in Wishaw Close.

In respect of the rough cast work to houses at a) above, Members were referred to Appendix 1 of the report, which provided estimated costs. Officers advised, however, that there was currently no budget available to undertake the work.

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It was noted that the issue of the road surface in Rushock Close would be the responsibility of the County Council.

The Portfolio Holder with the responsibility for Housing, Councillor Brandon Clayton, advised that Wishaw Close was currently listed on the Council's Estate Enhancement Programme but he was not in a position to advise on timescales for works to be undertaken as the Close was one of thirty-plus in the programme.

Officers reported, in responses to a Member's query, that should tenants be interested in undertaking external redecoration of Council properties themselves, they would have to write to the Council as Landlord and that any requests would be judged on a case by case basis as appropriate.

RESOLVED that

- 1) the report be noted; and
- 2) **Officers provide clarification on the three outstanding issues highlighted in the preamble above for Members at the next meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee; and**

RECOMMENDED that

subject to Resolution 2 above and further consideration of the outstanding issues by the Committee, the following recommendations be approved:

- 1) **light colour paints be utilised to decorate garage doors to improve their visual appearance;**
- 2) **the lintels featured on Council properties be decorated to improve the visual appearance of those properties;**
- 3) **the retaining wall to the rear of 1-12 Martley Close be redecorated as part of a Council arts project;**
- 4) **the Council assume responsibility for the maintenance of small strips of land located close to private properties and public spaces;**
- 5) **the Council ensure that, when replacing diseased and dead plants, different types of plants are introduced to ensure there is a variety of leaf colours and foliage in any given area;**

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- 6) the remaining section 106 money available for use on capital landscaping work on the Greenlands Open Spaces be allocated to soft landscaping work in the courtyard area located in Wishaw Close;
- 7) in order to minimise the level of disruption experienced by local residents, there should be a holistic approach to the delivery of frontline services;
- 8) representatives of local schools be invited to participate in estate walkabouts; and
- 9) representatives of the local GP's Consortium be invited to participate in the estate walkabouts once the consortia have been introduced in 2012/13.

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

Further to consideration of the Portfolio Holder for Housing, Local Environment and Health's written report at the previous meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 27th October 2010, and Members agreed themed questions to be put to the Portfolio Holder, Councillor Brandon Clayton, in respect of his Annual Report to the Committee, the following responses were provided:

1. How are Government policy changes to housing benefit expected to impact on Redditch residents?

The Committee was advised that, as the Government's proposed changes to Housing Benefit policy was still being debated in the House of Commons, it was too early to gauge the impact on residents. Decisions on single payments to banks or rent accounts were also yet to be finalised but could potentially provide savings on administration costs and proposed changes in social housing could potentially help with housing figures.

2. What impact is expected of the Government White Paper *Equity and excellence: liberating the NHS* on local health provision?

Cllr Clayton advised that the White Paper was still being discussed and until the final outcomes were known it was difficult to know what impact the proposals would have on local health provision at this time.

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Members were informed, however, that the potential for some health funding to be transferred to the County Council from the PCT was already known and the proposed changes to PCTs could also potentially impact on services; discussions had taken place with the PCT and some GP's had also been approached for their views.

Some concerns were raised relating to the County Council having control of funding and whether it would be detrimental to Redditch. Whether GP's were ready and willing to take on a bigger role in local health provision and the potential changes to NICE and the allocation of drugs at a more local level was also highlighted with some Members concerned that local determination on drug allocation could lead to inequitable provision according to location.

Councillor Clayton reiterated that until final decisions had been made and all of the details were known on Policy proposals for local areas to determine their own needs in local health provision, it was too early to speculate on how it would affect the Borough.

3. What progress has been made on the 10:10 Climate Change agreement?

Members were advised that the Executive Committee had already agreed an Action Plan, including those for CO₂ emissions. The Executive Committee had agreed the Salix funding, 100% of which would go into Climate Change. The Crematorium, Abbey Stadium and Council vehicles were also being looked at for potential improvements as was the use of solar panels to reduce usage at the Palace Theatre (with the potential for it to become an "A" rated building) and St David's House. It was also noted that all new buildings would have to comply with climate change requirements.

It was suggested that the Council was still using large quantities of gas and electricity and needed to be more proactive in reducing its basic energy usage. Councillor Clayton advised that long term solutions were being investigated and every effort would be made to continue reducing emissions and costs.

4. What have been the outcomes following the implementation of the Introductory Tenancies Service?

Councillor Clayton advised that five hundred and forty new tenancies with good levels of security had been achieved since the implementation of the Introductory Tenancies Service, with only three tenants currently in notice of eviction and being reviewed. It was noted that no additional information had been received from the Government on Introductory Tenancies at present.

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5. What effect has there been the switch of the Care and Repair service from a local service to the Worcestershire Care and Repair Agency?

Councillor Clayton advised that he had attended a recent Agency Board meeting and understood that there had been a reduction of 2% in overhead costs. However, given the changes to the service had only recently taken place and that there were no figures to compare performance to at this time, this information could not be verified. Members were also advised that there had been no reduction in the number of people receiving help since the switch.

6. What recent action has been undertaken to tackle health inequalities?

Councillor Clayton advised that a number of actions had been taken to tackle health inequalities such as:

- a) Health Trainers being able to see more people as a result of contract changes;
- b) County Councillors in Redditch providing funding for projects to improve quality of life;
- c) action to promote smoking cessation within the Borough; and
- d) the Sustainable Community Strategy Plan was due to be considered by the Executive Committee in March 2011.

7. What is your position regarding transition towns?

Councillor Clayton advised that he considered transition towns to be a good concept and one that the Council supported.

8. What costs does the Council accrue by ridding the roads of detritus?

The Committee was advised that it was difficult to cost removal of detritus from the Borough's roads as it was not possible to separate the detritus from other debris picked up such as leaves. In response to a suggestion that removal of detritus be re-evaluated, it was reported that cleaning regimes had been revised to improve the situation at no additional cost.

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9. What plans are there to work with partners to provide social housing during the next twelve months?

The Committee was advised that, the Council had been working with other Social Housing providers for many years and would continue to do so, to provide different types of housing to meet its targets and Officers were in regular contact with the town's Social Landlords. Members also noted that the Council was willing to assist social landlords who were looking to formulate business plans.

In response to Members questions on the number of housing units currently in the planning process, Councillor Clayton advised that it was difficult to say, but in general terms, over a hundred new units had been provided in the previous year and it was hoped to provide similar numbers this year.

On redeveloping other areas of land for social housing, such as Church Hill District Centre, Councillor Clayton reported that all appropriate land, including Redditch Borough Council land, was considered and the Council was prepared to work in partnership with developers to provide as much social housing as possible.

In response to a Member's speculation that the Council was to be given funding to build Council homes and questioned whether the Portfolio Holder had been aware of this, it was noted that Officers had received an indication that there was something in the pipeline but that nothing had been confirmed.

10. Will the Council consider selling off any of the existing housing stock?

Councillor Clayton advised that the question was difficult to answer in so far as residents themselves would have to opt out of any whole sale voluntary transfer of the housing stock. The Council was, however, still selling housing stock through the Right to Buy scheme and, as appropriate, looking to dispose of specific housing stock like that at Upper Norgrove House.

Members were further advised that the matter was a HRA issue in that the Council had to consider how much debt it was able to take on. It was considered, however, that selling off stock would not be to the Council's benefit in the future as there was no funding available.

On behalf of the Committee, the Chair thanked Councillor Clayton for his Annual Report.

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140. 2011/12 GRANTS POLICY

The Committee considered a report which detailed proposed changes to the Grants Policy 2010 to ensure the Council's voluntary sector grant funding provided value for money and increased access for voluntary and community sector organisations.

Members welcomed and supported the proposed changes which would also provide for more rigorous monitoring of how grants were being spent and assist organisations to move away from their dependence on the Council for funding.

RECOMMENDED that

- 1) **the updated Voluntary Sector Grants Policy, as attached at Appendix 1 to the report, be approved;**
- 2) **the option for themes and percentages of funding being allocated for the 2011/12 voluntary and community sector grants process, as detailed in the report, be approved;**
- 3) **the option for funding being made available from the main Grants scheme to deliver a support programme to the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) organisations, be approved; and**
- 4) **the option for authority being delegated to the Head of Community Services, in consultation with the Grants Panel, to agree the allocation of community grants under the Local Strategic Partnership 'Stronger Communities' theme, be approved.**

141. CAMPAIGN TO DISCOURAGE DOG FOULING

The Committee considered a report which detailed results of the dog fouling awareness campaign that had been running since late August 2010.

Officers reported on the work undertaken to draw the public's attention to the problem of dog fouling and the monitoring exercises that were undertaken in the targeted areas, which had been highlighted specifically as hot-spots. Members were referred to the before and after figures detailed in the appendix to the report.

Members noted the successful reductions in dog fouling incidents in all but one of the targeted areas, Brockhill Park and Officers

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advised that further monitoring would be needed in the area initially to gather more evidence before any enforcement action could be carried out. Officers advised, however, that limited resources would not allow for constant monitoring of the areas at the same level but work with community support officers and taking enforcement action where appropriate would hopefully help to maintain the campaign which Officers hoped to refresh in the Spring.

Officers agreed to contact one of the Members on two other areas that she had previously reported, in relation to dog fouling issues, namely Terry Springs Field and the Redditch Rugby and Cricket Club.

Members welcomed the report and successful outcomes and congratulated Officers for their work on the campaign.

RESOLVED that

the outcomes of the dog fouling campaign detailed in the report; the ongoing work on raising awareness; and enforcement action being taken to tackle dog fouling, be noted.

142. PERFORMANCE REPORT FOR THE SERVICES WITHIN THE CORPORATE MANAGEMENT PORTFOLIO

The Committee received a written report which detailed the performance of services within the remit of the Portfolio Holder for Corporate Management, Councillor Michael Braley. In response to the Chair emphasising that questions be based on the information contained in 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 8th December 2010.

- 1) What is the current position in respect of sickness absence?
- 2) ICT Shared Services - how successful has Phase 1 been and how is Phase 2 proceeding?
- 3) What are the Options for the former Covered Market area?
- 4) What effect have the Shared Service arrangements for the Senior Management Team had on the lower levels of management at the Council?

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- 5) How can we improve Customer Services when the Council is beholden to the Worcestershire Hub which does not perform well and over which we have no control?
- 6) What has been done to sort out recent ICT and Phone system failures?
- 7) Please explain the “systems thinking” method introduced for 4th tier Managers.
- 8) What problems does he foresee in respect of services within his Portfolio and how will he deal with them?
- 9) How much has Bromsgrove District Council benefited from Shared Service arrangements?

RESOLVED that

- 1) **the Portfolio Holder for Corporate Management be invited to answer the questions detailed in the preamble above when delivering his Annual Report to the Committee; and**
- 2) **the report be noted.**

143. REFERRALS

There were no referrals.

144. WORK PROGRAMME

Members received an update on the programme for the forthcoming Budget Scrutiny Workshop on Monday 22nd November.

RESOLVED that

the Committee’s Work Programme be noted.

The Meeting commenced at 7.02 pm
and closed at 9.20 pm

.....
CHAIR



Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Wednesday, 8th December, 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:

Michael Braley, Andrew Brazier, Roger Hill and Derek Taylor

Officers:

H Bennett, T Kristunas, S Skinner and A de Warr

Committee Services Officer:

J Bayley and M Craggs

145. APOLOGIES AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES

There were no apologies or named substitutes.

146. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND OF PARTY WHIP

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

147. MINUTES

The minutes of the last meeting were agreed as an accurate record.

148. ACTIONS LIST

Members considered the latest version of the Committee's Actions List. Officers advised Members that all the actions had either already been completed or were due to be completed during the course of the meeting.

RESOLVED that

the Committee's Actions List be noted.

.....
Chair

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

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149. CALL-IN AND SCRUTINY OF THE FORWARD PLAN

Members were advised that, as detailed in the Decision Notice of 2nd December 2010, all of the Committee's recommendations regarding the Council's Grants Policy had been accepted by the Executive.

Members were referred to the Forward Plan and were advised that the proposed item on North Worcestershire Economic Development and Regeneration Service would be received beforehand at a meeting of the Shared Services Board.

There were no call-ins and no items were selected for pre-scrutiny.

150. TASK & FINISH REVIEWS - DRAFT SCOPING DOCUMENTS

There were no draft scoping documents for consideration.

151. TASK AND FINISH GROUPS - PROGRESS REPORTS

Members considered the following reports in relation to current reviews:

- 1) External Refurbishment of Housing Stock – Chair, Councillor Graham Vickery

Members were advised that this review was to be considered under item 9 on the agenda.

- 2) Joint Worcestershire Hub – Redditch Borough Council representative, Councillor Roger Hill

Members were advised that this review was to be considered under item 8 on the agenda.

- 3) Work Experience Opportunities – Chair, Councillor Peter Anderson

The Chair of the review, Councillor Peter Anderson, informed Members that he had met to discuss work experience opportunities for young people with an Officer from the local Connexions office. A more detailed update would be provided at the following meeting.

- 4) Promoting Redditch

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The Chair of the review, Councillor Graham Vickery, informed Members that the Group had held a number of meetings and were making significant progress in terms of collecting both written and verbal evidence on which to base their final report. The evidence contained both positive and negative perceptions of the Borough. The Group had received a tutorial on social networking sites and how these were increasingly useful tools in terms of communicating with local residents.

The Chair advised Members that the Group was on course to complete their review by March as required and he praised the hard work of the Officers involved.

RESOLVED that

the update reports be noted.

152. JOINT WORCESTERSHIRE HUB TASK AND FINISH GROUP REPORT

Members received the final Joint Worcestershire Hub Task and Finish Group Report for consideration. The co-opted member from Redditch Borough Council on the review, Councillor Roger Hill, provided a verbal summary of the report and referred to the Group's recommendations. Members were also referred to the response of the County Council Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Corporate Services to the report and were informed that the Task Group had also taken on-board the recommendations of the Redditch Overview and Scrutiny Committee that had been proposed in September 2010.

Members expressed some disappointment with the review. There were concerns about the approach that had been adopted to joint scrutiny for this review, the number of recommendations that had been proposed and the potential difficulties involved in monitoring implementation of any approved actions due to the number of recommendations. However they endorsed the presentation of the Group's report and recommendations for the consideration of the Executive Committee.

Councillor Braley informed Members that he would address the Committee's concerns regarding the Hub at a forthcoming meeting with Councillor Adrian Hardman, Leader of Worcestershire County Council.

RESOLVED that

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- 1) the 22 recommendations contained within the Joint Worcestershire Hub Scrutiny Task Group's final report be noted and presented for the consideration of the Executive Committee;
- 2) a letter be sent to Worcestershire County Council outlining the Committee's concerns with the Hub and the approach that had been adopted to the Joint Scrutiny Review; and
- 3) the Chair raise the Committee's concerns regarding both the Hub and the approach to the joint scrutiny review at the following Joint Scrutiny Chairs' and Vice Chairs' Network meeting.

153. EXTERNAL REFURBISHMENT OF HOUSING STOCK

The Chair of the review, Councillor Graham Vickery, referred Members to the updated details contained within the report. This included the provision of information regarding the pebbledash façade on houses on Ombersley Close and Rushock Close; road surfaces on Rushock Close; and garages in Wishaw Close.

It was suggested that the proposed re-painting of the pebbledash façade on houses on Ombersley Close and Rushock Close could be made available to owner occupiers as well as Council tenants.

RECOMMENDED that the following additional recommendations be incorporated into the report for presentation to the Executive Committee on 12th January 2011:

- 1) Worcestershire County Council Highways Officers be contacted to require them to repair the road surface entrance to Rushock Close;
- 2) the Portfolio Holder for Housing, the Local Environment and Health be urged to consider the abolition of the garages in Wishaw Close as a priority case due to their bad state of repair; and
- 3) consultation be undertaken with Council tenants and owner occupiers to find out whether they would support repainting of the pebbledash properties on Ombersley Close and Rushock Close using lighter colours and if so what colours; and

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Wednesday, 8th December, 2010

RESOLVED that

- 1) **the recommendations previously agreed at a meeting of the Committee on 17th November 2010 be noted;**
- 2) **the updated details contained within the report in paragraphs 4.7.5; 4.11 - 4.13.2; 19.2; and Appendix 3 be noted; and**
- 3) **the report be noted.**

154. PORTFOLIO HOLDER ANNUAL REPORT - PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR CORPORATE MANAGEMENT

Councillor Michael Braley provided Members with responses to the Committee's list of questions that had been agreed at the previous meeting of the Committee, as detailed below:

1) What is the current role in respect of sickness absence?

Councillor Braley advised that the Council was currently within its sickness absence target for the year of 9.02 days, although it was acknowledged that the sickness absence level might rise during the winter period. He commented that although the Council's absence record was better than average for a local authority, it was worse compared to that of other district councils. He also commented that, with regards to sickness absence rates, the public sector had performed poorly historically compared to the private sector.

The 'return to work' interview process was identified as a useful method to lower sickness absence rates.

2) ICT Shared Services – how successful has Phase 1 been and how is Phase 2 proceeding?

Councillor Braley advised that Phase 1 of the ICT shared services programme had been delivered successfully. Delivery of Phase 2 of the project was dependent on the approval of budget bids that had been submitted as part of the budget setting process. Councillor Braley commented that it was essential to have contingency funds in place to deal with any significant IT issues that might emerge during the course of the year.

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Members raised concern that a number of IT problems did not appear to have been resolved. However, Officers responded that the Shared Services project had uncovered rather than caused a number of existing IT problems and these were being addressed

3) What are the options for the former covered market area?

Councillor Braley advised that Officers were considering a number of short-term options. This included letting out the area to local business for car parking. Emphasis was being placed on ensuring that short-term options would not negatively affect the long-term plans included within the Council's Town Centre Strategy which focused on creating an area with a community focus.

4) What effect have the Shared Services arrangements for the Senior Management Team had on the lower levels of management at the Council?

Councillor Braley advised that the transition to Shared Services had proceeded relatively smoothly. It was acknowledged, however, that the move to Shared Services had created a testing working environment for some staff.

5) How can we improve Customer Services when the Council is beholden to the Worcestershire Hub which does not perform well and over which we have no control?

Councillor Braley advised that an action plan drawn up by the Head of Customer Services to improve the performance of the Hub had begun to take effect. He added that Redditch Borough Council was able to feed in any concerns regarding the Hub to the County based Hub Strategic Management Group.

Members were informed that reducing call queues was a priority for Worcestershire County Council and Redditch Borough Council to help improve the overall quality of service. Managing resources to meet public demand and improving the efficiency of responses to enquiries were seen as essential to achieving this.

6) What has been done to sort out recent ICT and phone system failures?

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Councillor Braley advised of the measures taken to rectify recent ICT and phone system failures and to prevent these failures from re-occurring. In particular, the Committee were informed that additional heat and humidity sensors had been installed in the Town Hall's server room to alert ICT to any re-occurrence of overheating.

The Committee was also informed that a budget bid had been submitted for the implementation of a new Council phone system to remove current phone issues. Councillor Braley stressed the importance of having contingency plans in place to help rectify future problems as they arose.

7) Please explain the “systems thinking” method introduced for fourth tier managers.

Councillor Braley explained that the “systems thinking” method was a change management method that looked at how all parts of the organisation influenced one another. Central to the method was an emphasis on improving value for the Council's customers.

8) What problems does he foresee in respect of services within his Portfolio and how will he deal with them?

Councillor Braley suggested that managing the financial risk associated with the grant settlement represented a considerable challenge for the Council. Other significant challenges identified included: managing additional benefit claims in the Borough following an increase in unemployment; monitoring the Worcestershire Enhanced Two-Tier (WETT) shared services to ensure they were delivered in line with the Business Case; implementing new ways of working to address the reduced government grant; and eliminating existing ICT issues.

9) How much has Bromsgrove District Council benefited from Shared Services arrangements?

Councillor Braley advised that the shared service arrangement had delivered £450,000 of savings to Bromsgrove District Council and £514,000 to Redditch Borough Council. He added that the arrangements promised to deliver further substantial savings to both Councils in the long-term.

On behalf of the Committee, the Chair thanked Councillor Braley for his annual report.

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RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

155. QUARTERLY BUDGET MONITORING REPORT - SECOND QUARTER - APRIL TO SEPTEMBER 2010

The Committee received the budget report for the second quarter of 2010/11.

RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

156. QUARTERLY PERFORMANCE MONITORING - QUARTER 2 - APRIL TO SEPTEMBER 2010

Members received the performance monitoring report for the second quarter 2010/11.

Officers explained that over half of the total number of National Indicators (NIs) had shown improvement compared to the same period for the previous year. It was understood that a new set of indicators were to be introduced in the New Year which would allow further opportunity for scrutiny.

Members were supportive of the Council's performance although concern was raised with the decline of the Council's recycling figures.

RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

157. FEEDBACK FROM THE BUDGET SCRUTINY WORKSHOP

The Committee received a summary of feedback provided by Members and Officers on the Budget Scrutiny Workshop held on 22nd November 2010. Members were informed that the feedback received was largely constructive, with the following suggestions given for improving the workshop should it be held in future years:

- (a) the workshop represented an improvement on budget scrutiny in previous years and would be worth revisiting in the future;

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- (b) the workshop was held too early and if a similar event occurs in future it should be held once more detailed information about budget proposals are available;
- (c) the workshop provided a useful opportunity to challenge senior Officers in a constructive manner;
- (d) pre-set questions should not be required in future years;
- (e) the answers provided by Officers during the speed dating sessions should be recorded (consideration would need to be given as to how to record this information and share the ideas discussed during the speed dating sessions);
- (f) the use of a presentation to start the workshop was considered to be a useful introduction; and
- (g) more time should be provided to allow Members to speak to Officers during the speed dating sessions.

RESOLVED that

the points raised regarding the budget scrutiny workshop be noted.

158. PERFORMANCE REPORT FOR THE SERVICES WITHIN THE COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP AND PARTNERSHIPS PORTFOLIO

The Committee received a written report which detailed the performance of services within the remit of the Portfolio Holder for Community Leadership and Partnership, Councillor Carole Gandy. On the basis of the information contained within the report Members requested that the following questions be addressed by the Portfolio Holder in her Annual Report to the Committee, which was scheduled to be delivered on 9th February 2011.

- 1) What did the Educational Attainment Conference achieve? What further action is planned on this by the Council?
- 2) Please clarify what further information will be coming through about tackling Health Inequalities in Redditch?
- 3) What changes to the lives of Redditch people has been achieved by identifying red flag issues?
- 4) What problems do you foresee for the future in relation to the areas for which you have Portfolio Holder responsibility?

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- 5) How have partnerships:
 - (a) improved the delivery of services to Redditch?
 - (b) enhanced the accountability of Officers and Councillors?
- 6) Do you feel that Shopping, Investing and Giving (SIG) has been effectively implemented?
- 7) Are we gathering any evidence from the roadshows? What added value has been achieved by holding the roadshows?

RESOLVED that

- 1) **the Portfolio Holder for Community Leadership and Partnership be invited to answer the questions detailed in the preamble above when delivering her Annual Report before the Committee; and**
- 2) **the report be noted.**

159. REVIEW INTO PUBLIC SPEAKING AT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MEETINGS

Members received a written report which summarised research into the public engagement arrangements at a number of other local authorities across the nation.

Members felt that the Committee already possessed sufficient arrangements for engaging the public in its scrutiny process and that the necessary public guidance was readily accessible on the Council's website. Despite the absence of a formal process for public speaking at meetings of the Committee, Members were satisfied that the Chair could exercise her discretion to allow public speaking at meetings as set out in the Constitution.

It was suggested that the Committee could consider occasionally holding meetings in Council premises away from the Town Hall in order to engage further with the community.

RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

160. FEEDBACK FROM THE WORCESTERSHIRE SCRUTINY CHAIRS AND VICE CHAIRS NETWORK MEETING

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The Chair gave a summary of the Worcestershire Scrutiny Chairs and Vice Chairs Network meeting held on 29th November 2010 in Redditch. In particular, Members heard that no items had been selected for joint scrutiny, and that the possibility of establishing a shared services scrutiny board had been declined. The next meeting was due to be held in Malvern Hills in early March 2011.

Members questioned the need for the Network's continuation. It was felt that the three meetings held so far had failed to yield any significant outcomes. However, Members expressed support for undertaking joint scrutiny on an ad hoc basis as and when required.

Officers informed Members that the draft Joint Scrutiny Protocol would be received for consideration at the next Committee meeting on 19th January 2011.

RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

161. REFERRALS

There were no referrals.

162. WORK PROGRAMME

Officers informed Members that the Sustainable Communities Strategy was scheduled to be received for consideration at the Committee meeting on 2nd March 2011.

Officers advised Members that they had the capacity to commission further Task and Finish reviews. Furthermore, it was argued that the recent short-sharp review into the external refurbishment of housing stock demonstrated the value of undertaking more short-sharp reviews as part of the scrutiny process.

RESOLVED that

the Committee's Work Programme be noted.

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL AND REDDITCH BOROUGH COUNCIL**SHARED SERVICES BOARD****9th December 2010 at 5.30pm****THE TOWN HALL, REDDITCH****Present:**

Councillors Carole Gandy (Chair), Michael Braley, Bill Hartnett and Malcolm Hall (Redditch Borough Council)
Councillors Roger Hollingworth, Steve Colella, Geoff Denaro and Stephen Peters (Bromsgrove District Council).

Also in attendance (Observers):

Cllrs Andrew Brazier, Adam Griffin (end of meeting only) and Jinny Pearce (RBC)

Officers: Hugh Bennett, Sue Hanley and John Staniland.

Notes: Steve Skinner.

1. APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was received on behalf of Chief Executive, Mr Dicks.

2. MINUTES

The minutes of the previous meeting of the Board held on 14th October 2010 were agreed as a correct record.

3. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

There were no matters arising, other than as recorded under the separate agenda items below.

4. PROGRESS REPORT

Mrs Hanley presented the Progress report and took questions / provided clarifications on matters as they arose. Mr Staniland also spoke on several of the items.

During discussion, specific mention was made of the following key matters:

a) IT Services

Members noted the progress as reported and mentioned particularly the imminent implementation of the new '*bromsgroveandredditch.gov.uk*' domain name and e.mail address. In response to questions, Officers confirmed though that Members' e.mail addresses would remain separate for Bromsgrove and Redditch, at very little additional cost, and that websites would remain their entirely separate identities.

b) CCTV / Lifeline

Members asked about the opportunity to further expand the CCTV / Lifeline service, noting the current relationship with the County Council. Officers agreed that reports would be brought back before the Board if any such opportunities arose.

c) Future Programme

Members noted that there was a potential to accelerate some services through the Shared Services and/or Transformation process as more became known about the developing economic pressures on local government, but always subject to Members' further decision.

d) North Worcestershire Economic Development (NWED) project

Mr Staniland advised that preparatory work was near to completion on this proposal and it had originally been hoped to bring a report to this meeting of the Board. A special meeting of the Board for the 4th January 2011 had recently been agreed to go through the Business Case in order to avoid slippage re a projected commencement date.

It was noted that staff consultation had finished only the previous week. However, staff were very much on board and participating fully. A report would hopefully be available for issue before Christmas.

e) Emergency Planning

Mr Staniland had met with Wyre Forest DC representatives earlier in the day. Officers would be looking further at the arrangements and at the present contract with Worcestershire County Council, in order to rationalise the levels of support provided by the County. It was noted that the County offered a critical link in circumstances where vulnerable people were involved.

f) Environmental Services

Members noted one unresolved matter in this area – a gap in transport business expertise within the Redditch Transport Section. Given that this was an area of huge spend, Officers would be looking further into what was required here.

g) WETT Regulatory Services

Amongst other matters, current levels of staff turnover were leading to some short-term capacity issues. However, plans were in place to manage this.

h) WETT Phase II

Members noted that a number of areas were presently under consideration, although no Business Cases had as yet been worked up. These areas included, Waste and Street Scene, Planning, Housing Strategy & Policy, and Youth & Community Services.

i) Waste & Street Scene

Members indicated that they did not wish to pursue these areas further at the present time.

ii) Youth & Community Services

Both Councils expressed a preference for taking on these services at District level, if this became possible, rather than considering a WETT solution.

iii) Potential Joint Museums Service

It was additionally noted that Worcester City and the County Council had a Joint Museums services and might be looking at an extension of shared service and trust arrangements over the whole of the County. Redditch had joined in these discussions. However, very little had taken place yet, other than initial exploratory discussions.

i) Financial Implications

The Board noted the ongoing savings delivered through the Single Management Team of £330,000 in 2010/11, rising to £450,000 in 2011/12 .

Some £964,000 was estimated to be in line to be delivered through shared services and joint working in 2010/11, of which some £450,000 accrued to Bromsgrove and £514,000 to Redditch. Officers' current estimates assumed that this would be achieved.

Members were reminded, however, that some Shared Service arrangements, such as the Electoral Shared Services had been set up with resilience, rather than savings, as the prime driver for change.

j) Performance Management

Members noted proposals which would provide the basis for a consistent reporting mechanism, which would enable them to spot exceptions and ensure projects were on track. A 'Red, Amber, Green' traffic light reporting system would be used.

Officers advised that this approach came straight from existing project management process shared by both Councils.

k) Joint Property Services WETT

A separate report on Property Services WETT is detailed below in the confidential section of the notes.

(The reports were deemed confidential in view of the fact that ongoing labour relations matters, and terms of contracts would be revealed, plus matters potentially affecting individual members of staff.)

It was AGREED that

- 1) **subject to Members' comments, the report be noted; and**

RECOMMENDED that

- 2) **the improvements to performance management and monitoring of Shared Services, outlined at Section 15 of the Progress report, be endorsed.**

5. DATE OF FUTURE MEETINGS

It was noted that the next meeting, an additional one, would be held on **Tuesday 4th January 2010 at 5.30 p.m. at Redditch Town Hall.**

It was also noted that the next scheduled meetings of the Board were those of 16th February and 29th March 2011.

By virtue of paragraph(s) 4 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A
of the Local Government Act 1972.

Document is Restricted

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REDDITCH BOROUGH COUNCIL**EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

12th January 2011

ADVISORY PANELS, WORKING GROUPS, ETC - UPDATE REPORT

Relevant Portfolio Holder	Cllr Michael Braley, Portfolio Holder for Corporate Management
Relevant Head of Service	Claire Felton, Head of Legal, Equalities and Democratic Services
Non-Key Decision	

1. SUMMARY OF PROPOSALS

To provide, for monitoring / management purposes, an update on the work of the Executive Committee's Advisory Panels, and similar bodies which report via the Executive Committee.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee is asked to RESOLVE that

subject to Members' comments, the report be noted.

3. UPDATES**A. ADVISORY PANELS**

	<u>Meeting :</u>	<u>Lead Members / Officers :</u> (Executive Members shown <u>underlined</u>)	<u>Position :</u> (Oral updates to be provided at the meeting by Lead Members or Officers, if no written update is available.)
1.	Climate Change Advisory Panel (formerly Environment Advisory Panel)	Chair: <u>Cllr B Clayton</u> / Vice-Chair: Cllr Anderson Guy Revans.	Next meeting – 8th February 2011.
2.	Economic Advisory Panel	Chair: <u>Cllr Pearce</u> / Vice-Chair: Cllr Braley John Staniland / Georgina Harris	Next meeting – 31st January 2011.

REDDITCH BOROUGH COUNCIL**EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

12th January 2011

3.	Housing Advisory Panel	Chair <u>Cllr B Clayton</u> / Vice-Chair Cllr Quinney Liz Tompkin	Last meeting – 25th November 2010.
4.	Leisure Contracts Advisory Panel	Chair <u>Cllr Hopkins</u> / Vice-Chair Cllr Anderson Kevin Cook	Last meeting – 16th August 2010.
5.	Planning Advisory Panel	Chair <u>Cllr Pearce</u> / Vice-Chair Cllr M Chalk John Staniland / Ruth Bamford	Next meeting – 26th January 2011.

B. OTHER MEETINGS

6.	Constitutional Review Working Party	Chair <u>Cllr Gandy</u> / Vice Chair Cllr Braley Steve Skinner	Next meeting – 11th January 2011.
7.	Grants Panel	Chair / To be appointed at first meeting Vice Chair Cllr Braley Angie Heighway	Next meeting – 2nd February 2011.
8.	Member Development Steering Group	Chair <u>Brunner</u> / Vice- Chair Cllr Braley Steve Skinner / Trish Buckley	Next meeting – 6th January 2011
9.	Procurement Steering Group	Chair <u>Cllr Braley</u> / Vice- Chair Cllr Hall Sue Hanley	Last meeting – 18th January 2010.

REDDITCH BOROUGH COUNCIL

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

12th January 2011

10.	Church Hill District Centre – Members' Panel	Chair <u>Cllr B Clayton</u> Jim Prendergrast	Last meeting - 24th August 2010
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22. APPENDICES

None.

AUTHOR OF REPORT

Name: Ivor Westmore
E Mail: ivor.westmore@redditchbc.gov.uk
Tel: (01527) 64252 (Extn. 3269)

REDDITCH BOROUGH COUNCIL**EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

12th January 2011

ACTION MONITORING

Portfolio Holder(s) / Responsible Officer	Action requested	Status
13th January 2009		
Cllr Gandy / Executive Committee	Third Sector Task and Finish Group The Executive to consider the further work to be undertaken (detailed in recommendation 5) and come back with suggestions for further work in due course.	Awaiting further consideration by relevant Members.
27th January 2010		
Cllr Gandy / A Heighway	Single Equalities Scheme Members requested that a report/action plan be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee or Council detailing what the Council, as Community Leader, expected to receive in terms of education provision for the Borough and its children and young people.	
16th June 2010		
M Braley / H Bennett /	Quarterly Performance Monitoring – Quarter 4 Officers undertook to provide: Councillor Chance with additional information on One Stop Shop: customer satisfaction (WMO 003)	

REDDITCH BOROUGH COUNCIL**EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

12th January 2011

Portfolio Holder(s) / Responsible Officer	Action requested	Status
8th September 2010		
M Braley L Tompkin / T Kristunas	Irrecoverable Debts Officers undertook to respond to Councillor Braley as to whether the damage inflicted upon void properties constituted criminal damage.	
10th November 2010		
M Braley / Jayne Pickering	Sickness / Absence / Vacancy Reports Officers to re-instate reports to Executive Committee on sickness absence and vacancies.	Vacancies report on present agenda
Note:	<i>No further debate should be held on the above matters or substantive decisions taken, without further report OR unless urgency requirements are met.</i>	Report period: 13/01/09 to 2/12/10