

Executive Committee

2nd December 2009

MINUTES

Present:

Councillor Carole Gandy (Chair), Councillor Michael Braley (Vice-Chair) and Councillors P Anderson, B Clayton, W Hartnett, N Hicks, C MacMillan and M Shurmer

Also Present:

Councillors Banks, Enderby, R King, Pearce, M Collins (Vice-Chairman, Standards Committee) and Inspector Joseph (West Mercia Police)

Officers:

J Bayley, D Riley, S Hanley, S Mullins, A Marklew, A Baldwin and T Kristunas

Committee Services Officer:

I Westmore

186. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillor Brunner.

187. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

188. LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair advised that the following item of business, attached as Item 5 to the agenda for that evening's meeting, be deferred and re-scheduled to a later meeting:

- Single Equalities Scheme.

She also advised that she had accepted the following matters as Urgent Business:

Item 4 – Neighbourhood Groups Task and Finish Group Recommendations;

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Item 6 – Annual Monitoring Report 2008/09;

Item 7 - Council Tax and Business Rate Recovery Policy; and

Item 8 – Procurement Strategy and Corporate Procedure Rules.

189. NEIGHBOURHOOD GROUPS TASK AND FINISH GROUP RECOMMENDATIONS

Councillor Banks and other members of the Neighbourhood Groups Task and Finish Group attended the meeting to present their report. Councillor Banks stated that the Group had come to the conclusion that the Neighbourhood Groups should be discontinued because all the evidence that had been gathered indicated that they were no longer fit for purpose. Instead, it was suggested that the actions being recommended would enhance the Council's ability to communicate and consult with residents effectively both today and into the future.

The low attendance figures and high costs of the Neighbourhood Groups, as well as feedback indicating the Neighbourhood Groups were not effective, had convinced the Group that they should be discontinued. The Group proposed that re-launched Police and Community Together (PACT) meetings would ensure that the Council continued to provide an opportunity for face to face contact at public meetings. It was stressed, however, that PACT involved other face to face contact such as Street Briefings. Importantly, residents expressed support for PACT because they felt it was a constructive process.

The meeting was informed that increasingly there were developments which offered new consultation opportunities. The Council was encouraged to take advantage of new opportunities as and when they arose. A number were highlighted, including Facebook, FixMyStreet, Councillor Calls for Action, Citizens Panels, road shows and Environment Visual Audits

In conclusion, the Group stated that its recommendations would help to improve the Council's ability to inform, engage and consult with local residents and demonstrate the Council's commitment to partnership working.

Inspector Ian Joseph of West Mercia Police advised the Committee of the views of his service on the strengths of the PACT process and the advantages of bringing all Partners together under that banner. The Police were quite clear that PACT was the method by which they could most effectively communicate with the community. It was acknowledged that the Council and Police might have slightly different aims for their interactions with the community but the

benefit of being able to respond positively to the needs of local residents was emphasised. Several challenges still existed and the PACT process was in a continual state of evolution. Inspector Joseph added that his role now was as much about increasing levels of satisfaction and confidence across the community as about crime levels and the solving of crimes.

The Committee asked questions of the Group and Inspector Joseph. A number of minor amendments to the recommendations were proposed and accepted. It was agreed that the re-launched PACT meetings should not be provided with budgets to be spent at the discretion of the Groups as, previously, the Neighbourhood Groups were not considered to have been an effective means of disbursing Council funds. Instead, it was agreed that suitable funds be provided to allow for the organisation of ad hoc meetings in localities as considered appropriate.

Councillor Banks stated that the present recommendations represented the start of a number of processes and that any savings or re-allocation of funds would be dependent on the outcomes of further detailed discussion over what was to replace the Neighbourhood Groups in their current form.

RECOMMENDED that

- 1) the Neighbourhood Groups are not now fit for purpose and should be discontinued in their present form;**
- 2) following consultation with the Police, the Partners and Communities Together (PACT) group meetings should be re-launched and delivered as an equal partnership arrangement;**
 - a) Redditch Borough Council should work with the Police and other local agencies participating in Partners and communities Together (PACT) to agree funding and administration for PACT meetings;**
 - b) a protocol should be jointly developed outlining the roles and responsibilities of all agencies in the re-launched Partners and Communities Together Groups;**
 - c) the Chairs of all Partners and Communities Together meetings should be independent members of the community;**

- d) **promotion of the re-launched Partners and Communities Together (PACT) meetings should be appropriately targeted towards clarifying the meaning of the new arrangements for residents living in areas where PACT and Neighbourhood Group meetings currently only take place on the same night;**
 - e) **the existing Neighbourhood Groups Hire of Premises budget (0630 3551) be retained and made available for the re-launched Partners and Communities Together groups to be spent as considered appropriate for the arrangement of ad hoc meetings;**
- 3) **to supplement the new arrangements a further variety of methods that will enable Redditch Borough Council to inform and consult more effectively with local residents should be considered;**

these alternative methods should include the following:

- a) **subject to a successful revenue bid, the Council should publish quarterly editions of Redditch Matters during the year to inform residents about local public services, activities and Council business;**
- b) **Redditch Borough Council should continue to host road shows throughout the Borough;**
- c) **Redditch Borough Council should embrace the Worcestershire Viewpoint Citizens Panel and use every opportunity to work with the Panel to consult with residents over local issues;**
- d) **the Council should promote web based systems, such as the Worcestershire Hub and FixMyStreet, that can be utilised to resolve residents' individual issues;**
- e) **social networking should be used by the Council to inform and consult with residents in appropriate circumstances;**
- f) **the use of Councillor Calls for Action be promoted in order to be used to resolve local neighbourhood issues;**

- g) more effort should be made by the Council to advertise the fact that residents should resolve individual issues through direct contact with Councillors, Officers and the One-Stop-Shops;
 - h) the Council should work in equal partnership with the Police and other local agencies to advertise Street Briefings and Environment Visual Audits to local residents;
- 4) Redditch Borough Council should continue to seek ways to better engage and consult with a more diverse range of residents;
 - 5) the Council should have a robust monitoring system in place to assess the effectiveness of each of the mechanisms used to inform, engage and consult with local residents;
 - 6) the Community Forum and similar groups which engage and consult with local residents should report to the Executive Committee;
 - 7) the Council should have a central electronic database which would be used for the purposes of consultation with key partners in the Borough; and
 - 8) the February round of Neighbourhood Groups be the last in their current format; and that the intention is to re-launch the revised Partners and Communities Together (PACT) meetings from the beginning of the new municipal year.

190. SINGLE EQUALITIES SCHEME

This item was deferred.

191. ANNUAL MONITORING REPORT (AMR) - APRIL 2008 TO MARCH 2009

The Committee received the fifth Annual Monitoring Report (AMR) which, when endorsed, was to be submitted to the Government Office for the West Midlands (GOWM). Officers explained that the document was a factual report produced for monitoring purposes. Members were asked to agree that future AMRs be submitted to GOWM by Officers subject to their being no policy implications arising from the report.

It was reported that the AMR met all three of the requirements as set out in Regulation 48 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Development) (England) Regulations 2004.

Officers informed the Committee that the delay in the preparation of the Core Strategy had been as a result of an extended period of public consultation imposed externally and that this had been noted and accepted by GOWM.

RESOLVED that

- 1) **the Annual Monitoring Report 2008/90 (as attached at Appendix A to the report to the Committee) be approved for submission to the Government Office for the West Midlands and for subsequent publication; and**
- 2) **from the 2009/10 Annual Monitoring Report period onwards, Officers submit the Annual Monitoring Report subject to there being no indications that policies need to be reviewed.**

192. COUNCIL TAX AND BUSINESS RATE RECOVERY POLICY

A report was considered that set out a proposed policy and procedures for the recovery of Council Tax and Non-Domestic Rates. A second matter that Members were asked to consider was approval of the use of "second referral" bailiffs in appropriate cases.

Members were reassured that consultation had been undertaken with groups representing the views of debtors and that the second referral bailiffs that the Council were looking to engage complied with the authority's standards in the same way as the Council's existing contractor. It was explained that the second referral bailiff would operate in essentially the same manner as the first but that the engagement of a second firm was considered worthwhile inasmuch as it focussed the main contractor on their performance.

RECOMMENDED that

- 1) **the Council Tax and Non-Domestic Rates Recovery Policy attached at Appendix 1 to the report to the Committee be approved; and**

RESOLVED that

- 2) **the use of a second referral bailiff company to take action in the cases determined in accordance with the Council Tax and Non-Domestic Rates Recovery Policy be approved.**

193. PROCUREMENT STRATEGY AND CORPORATE PROCEDURE RULES

The Committee considered a draft Procurement Strategy. Members were informed that the Strategy would set out a clear framework for procurement and increase the effectiveness of the whole procurement process. The main aims were:

- to allow the Council to pay less for what it currently bought;
- to allow the Council to buy more for the same price or a lower price; and
- to improve the Council's procurement practices.

There was some discussion as to the importance placed upon whole life costs within the Strategy. Officers confirmed that an appropriate amount of weight would be given to whole life costs but the point was made that it was just one tool amongst others that allowed the correct procurement decisions to be made.

The impact of the shared services agenda on the Strategy was also considered. Officers stated that the Strategy under consideration was a Redditch Borough Council document but that consultation over harmonisation with Bromsgrove District Council would take place at some point in the future.

RECOMMENDED that

- 1) **the draft Procurement Strategy for 2009-2012 attached at Appendix 1 to the report to the Committee be adopted; and**
- 2) **the draft Contract Procedure Rules attached at Appendix 2 to the report to the Committee be adopted.**

194. MINUTES / REFERRALS - OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE, EXECUTIVE PANELS, NEIGHBOURHOOD GROUPS ETC.

There were no minutes or referrals under this item.

The Meeting commenced at 7.00 pm
and closed at 8.52 pm

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Chair