

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Tuesday, 6th November, 2012

MINUTES

Present:

Councillor Simon Chalk (Vice Chair in the Chair), and Councillors David Bush, John Fisher, Andrew Fry, Roger Hill, Gay Hopkins, Yvonne Smith and Pat Witherspoon.

Also Present:

Councillor Debbie Taylor

Ms T Buckley and Mr R Colebrook (Co-opted Members, Unison).

Officers:

T Beech, H Broughton, C Felton, D Poole, G Revans, I Roberts, J Staniland, M Stanley and J Willis

Democratic Services Officers:

J Bayley and M Craggs

91. APOLOGIES AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES

Apologies were received on behalf of Councillors Brunner, Brazier and P Hill.

Councillors R Hill and Smith were confirmed as substituting for Councillors Brunner and P Hill respectively.

92. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND OF PARTY WHIP

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

93. MINUTES

The Committee considered the minutes of the previous meeting, held on Tuesday 9th October 2012.

Concerns were expressed by some Members that minute 78 did not reflect the full detail of the responses that had been provided during

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the annual report for the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Regeneration, Economic Development and Transport, in response to a number of subsidiary questions that had been proposed by Members. It was suggested that additional information should be added for this item, particularly on the subject of the Eastern Gateway, and more detailed minutes should be produced for future meetings.

However, other Members commented that a detailed account had been provided in the minutes, both through the attachment of a written version of the answers provided by the Portfolio Holder as an appendix, and in the rest of the minutes. Concerns were also expressed that if additional detail was added the minutes would become too lengthy.

It was noted that Officers did not produce a verbatim record of proceedings but rather summarised points raised during a meeting. The minutes reflected the hand written record taken by Officers during the meeting, and it was suggested that this record should be reviewed to identify whether any additional content could be added to the minutes.

RESOLVED that

subject to the content of minute 78 being reviewed, the minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 9th October 2012 be approved as a correct record of the meeting and signed by the Chair.

94. PROPOSED REVISED ARRANGEMENTS FOR PERFORMANCE REPORTING

The Committee received a presentation on the future of performance reporting at Redditch Borough Council.

Members were advised that performance monitoring arrangements had been reviewed as part of the ongoing transformation process. The performance framework would differ in many respects from the previous quarterly reporting system. The focus would no longer be on meeting performance targets. Instead, the aim would be to use the data provided in the reports to improve the performance of services.

The Council was currently in a transitional period for the transformation of services. A number of teams had been involved in the transformation process for some time, though other teams had only recently started to become involved in transformation.

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Through transformation residents were consulted directly, their demands were identified and services were then adapted to meet their needs accordingly.

The needs of residents identified through consultation had formed the basis of the Council's key strategic purposes. Nine strategic purposes had been identified and would be used to measure the performance of Council services. These measures would not remain static. Instead, the strategic purposes would continue to be reviewed as the transformation process progressed to ensure that Council services could adapt to meet changing needs and circumstances.

The performance monitoring reports would be presented in a new format using graphs and charts, which would enable Members and Officers to interpret performance data. In the long-term the performance reports would be made available for all Members and staff to view on the Council's intranet.

The Council's process for managing complaints about service performance was discussed by the Committee. Officers advised that many of the complaints received by the Council related to practices that had not been in place prior to transformation and it was anticipated that transformation would help to resolve some of the problems identified by customers. However, the Council took all complaints seriously and liaised with residents in order to try to resolve the issues that caused the complaints.

Concerns were expressed that some residents might be reluctant to make complaints about service performance. In particular, Members commented that some residents might feel anxious about the potential impact that a complaint about a service might have on the quality of the services they received from the Council in future. Further information was therefore requested about how the Council reassured residents in these circumstances.

The Committee was informed that the new reporting framework was not due to be introduced until spring 2013. Prior to this date Officers would be delivering member development sessions focusing on the new reporting framework.

RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

95. PORTFOLIO HOLDER ANNUAL REPORT - ENVIRONMENT AND HEALTH - COUNCILLOR DEBBIE TAYLOR

Further to consideration of the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Health's written report at the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 9th October 2012 Councillor Taylor provided a response to Members' questions as detailed in Appendix 1. Additional information was provided in relation to the following subjects:

a) Allotments

The Committee was advised that there was 98 per cent occupancy of the Council's allotments. The exact number of allotments available within the town, the number of vacant allotments and the distribution of allotments across the Borough could not be confirmed at the date of the meeting. However, Members discussed the potential value of introducing more allotments within the Borough. Some Members suggested that more allotments could be provided to meet increasing demand. On Other Members expressed concerns that the high occupancy rates reflected the need for residents to grow their own food in difficult economic circumstances and there was a risk that these levels would not necessarily be sustained once the economy recovered.

b) Footpaths

There were a number of footpaths in the town. Whilst some of the footpaths were the responsibility of Redditch Borough Council other footpaths were the responsibility of Worcestershire County Council. The Council's GIS system was used to maintain an accurate record of the footpaths that were the property of Redditch Borough Council.

c) Renewable Energy

Members were advised that there had been an under spend of approximately £90,000 on the budget that had been allocated to the installation of solar panels. The remaining budget would need to be allocated to renewable energy projects involving the Council's Housing stock as the funds had been derived from the Council's Housing Revenue Account (HRA). There were a number of options that could be explored for the use of this budget including the installation of biomass boilers in some properties, though a variety of options were currently in the process of being reviewed.

d) Landscaping

There was the potential for transformation to contribute to improvements to the landscaping services provided by the Council. As part of this process the timescales that the Council had traditionally followed when maintaining hedgerows and cutting grass on Council land would be reviewed to ensure that the works were completed in a timely fashion that minimised disruption to residents and businesses.

e) Trees

Each year a number of trees were felled for a variety of reasons. The Council's policy was to replace the trees that were felled. Increasingly, Officers were ensuring that the trees planted in a particular location were suitable for the environment in which they would grow.

The potential for Ash Dieback Tree Fungal Disease to impact on trees situated in the Borough was discussed in detail. By the date of the meeting no confirmed cases of the disease had been identified in trees located in the Borough. However, the Council was aware of the potential risks, particularly due to the large number of trees and woodland areas in the Borough.

There was the potential that lessons could be learned from the way that local authorities had responded to outbreaks of Dutch Elm Disease. There was also the possibility that a number of trees would develop resistance to the disease. To ensure that the Council responded appropriately to any outbreaks Officers were continuing to monitor the situation.

RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

96. REDDITCH SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY STRATEGY

The Committee was advised that the report contained the six month review of the progress that had been made in meeting the key priorities for the Borough outlined in the Redditch Sustainable Community Strategy.

The strategy had been developed by the Redditch Partnership, the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) in the Borough. The core work of the partnership was co-ordinated by a central partnership board,

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comprising representatives from the public sector, private sector, voluntary and community sector. The LSP was not a statutory body. However, the local authority had a legal requirement to produce a Sustainable Community Strategy, which reflected the needs and priorities of the local community.

There were four key priorities in the strategy: health inequalities; education attainment; employment; and areas of deprivation. Sub-Groups had been established to address two of these priorities: the Health and Well Being Group and the Education Sub-Group. Action Plans had been provided for three of the priority areas for Members' consideration.

The Redditch and Bromsgrove Commissioning Group had awarded Redditch and Bromsgrove approximately £250,000 for health projects in both areas. The Health and Well Being Action Plan provided further information about these projects and the expenditure required. Officers were anticipating that additional funding would be secured in 2013/14, though the amount of funding that would be provided remained to be confirmed.

The Education Action Plan was designed to focus on early intervention. However, Worcestershire County Council was in the process of restructuring their early intervention and children's centre teams, a process which would not be completed until April 2013. At that stage the Education Action Plan would be reviewed and updated.

An Action Plan had also been produced for the "Winning Winyates" Area of Highest Needs Project. The project was designed to address the needs of residents living and working in Winyates, one of the areas of deprivation in the Borough. A variety of actions had been taken or were in the process of being delivered as part of this project including: the installation of a secure access system for the flats in Winyates district centre; healthy eating initiatives; and a traders group project.

Members commented that a limited number of the projects were targeted at elderly residents. This had occurred because traditionally Redditch had had a youthful population. However, the census in 2011 had demonstrated that the number of older residents had increased. This demographic data would be considered as part of any future reviews of the Sustainable Community Strategy.

RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

97. INCREASING RATES OF RECYCLING - MONITORING REPORT UPDATE

A monitoring update report on the implementation of recommendations that had been made by the Increasing Rates of Recycling Review Group in March 2012 was presented for the Committee's consideration. Additional information was provided in relation to the following matters:

a) Grey bins

The Council's priority was to promote recycling and reuse of resources to residents. Extra grey bins were only provided to residents as a last resort. Media campaigns were increasingly being used to raise awareness of the benefits of recycling in order to discourage requests for grey bins.

b) Transformation

A Transformation Project Team had been established in Environmental Services. Two service operatives were involved in the project and they were helping the team to identify improvements that could be made in the delivery of collection services. The team had already concluded that improvements could be made to the way bins were returned to residents on collection days.

c) 100 per cent Project

Progress had been made in extending recycling services to properties that had not previously been in receipt of the service. However, a number of areas, such as Winyates district centre, were not yet in receipt of the service. Officers were working to address the barriers, which varied between areas, to extending recycling services across the Borough.

d) Envirosort Visit

New Members were invited to participate in a visit to the Envirosort facility in Norton. The scrutiny group had visited the centre as part of their review and this visit had contributed to their understanding of the subject.

e) Member Training

The Environmental Services Team were in the process of producing a route optimisation plan. Officers were aiming to deliver Member Briefings on the subject of this plan in 2013. During the briefing information would also be provided about the numbers of grey and green bins in the Borough.

f) Recycling Rates

Some concerns were expressed about the extent to which recycling rates had increased over the previous six months. However, Members were advised that whilst there had only been a relatively small increase in recycling rates in that period it was anticipated that the levels of recycling would improve further over the following 12 months. In particular, specific parts of the Borough where low recycling rates had been identified were being targeted through active media campaigns.

RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

98. CONCESSIONARY RENTS PRE-SCRUTINY SHORT, SHARP REVIEW

The Committee agreed that, due to the absence of the two Members who had undertaken the review, the item should be deferred for consideration at the following meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 11th December 2012.

RESOLVED that

the item be deferred for consideration at the following meeting of the Committee on 11th December 2012.

99. SICKNESS POLICY PRE-SCRUTINY SHORT, SHARP REVIEW

The Committee received the final report of the Sickness Policy Pre-Scrutiny Short, Sharp Review Group, which was presented by the members of the group; Councillors Fisher and Witherspoon.

The Committee was advised that the group had not been permitted to access the new Sickness Absence Policy proposed by Officers during their review. The Councillors had been prevented from

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scrutinising the report because, in accordance with the Council's constitution, Overview and Scrutiny Members were not entitled to access reports in a draft form. Members were advised that the report from Officers was not due to be finalised until Monday 12th November.

During the course of the review the group had, however, received evidence from a wide range of sources. An overview had been provided about the changes that Officers were proposing to the Council's Sickness Absence Policy. The content of the Council's existing Sickness Absence Policy had also been considered alongside policies adopted by other local authorities. A number of expert witnesses had been interviewed during the review including: representatives of the Council's Finance department; representatives of Human Resources; the Portfolio Holder for Corporate Management, Councillor Mould; and union representatives from UCATT and Unison.

The Committee's co-opted members, from the union Unison, welcomed the review and noted that the group's recommendations reflected a common sense approach to managing staff absences due to sickness. Members were advised that Redditch Borough Council had a good track record in managing sickness absences. However, the review was considered to be timely, following the introduction of service transformation and shared services. In particular, it was suggested that the review would help managers to support staff absent due to stress related illnesses.

During the course of the group's interviews with union representatives the subject of a staff survey had been discussed. Members had recognised the potential value of the survey. However, the group had concluded that further work needed to be undertaken to review the potential uses of a survey.

The content of the proposed A5 laminated guide to the Sickness Absence Policy was discussed in detail. The group explained that the aim of this recommendation would be to ensure that employees were provided with simple guidance notes that could be referred to in the event of unexpected sickness. A simple guide was considered to be of more practical assistance to staff in these circumstances than reference to a lengthier policy document. To reassure staff that the guide was intended to be a practical tool it was suggested that consideration should be given as to the most appropriate method to use to communicate the introduction of the guide to staff.

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RECOMMENDED that

- 1) the Council's Sickness Absence Policy should be updated and reduced in length, in order to clarify the structure and process for managing both short-term and long-term sickness absences;**
- 2) the terminology used in the policy be sensitive to the needs of staff experiencing sickness;**
- 3) an A5 laminated guide to the Council's Sickness Absence Policy should be provided for the use of managers and staff;**
- 4) all changes to the Council's Sickness Absence Policy should be communicated to managers and staff;**
- 5) the Sickness Absence Policy should be included in the induction process for new staff and managers employed by the Council;**
 - a) staff and managers should also receive regular refresher training;**
- 6) the Sickness Absence Policy should be applied consistently to staff across all service areas, but managers should be encouraged, recognising individual circumstances and different working environments to apply the policy appropriately;**
- 7) the occupational health service available to staff experiencing sickness should be reviewed;**
- 8) communication should form an integral part of the transformation process to ensure that staff understand the reasons for changes made to services as part of the transformation process and how transformation may impact on them; and**

RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

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100. PORTFOLIO HOLDER ANNUAL REPORT - WRITTEN REPORT - COMMUNITY SAFETY & REGULATORY SERVICES

The Committee received a written report outlining the performance of services within the remit of the Portfolio Holder for Community Safety and Regulatory Services, Councillor Blake. Members noted that they were due to propose questions for the consideration of the Portfolio Holder, and to invite her to address these questions at the following meeting of the Committee.

However, Members expressed concerns about retaining the annual report on the agenda for the December meeting of the Committee. The annual reports had been taking a significant amount of time to address during recent meetings of the Committee. As a consequence, Members commented that they were unable to dedicate appropriate time to consider other items on the agenda nor did the Committee have sufficient time to reflect on the information that had already been provided by Portfolio Holders.

RESOLVED that

- 1) the annual report from the Portfolio Holder for Community Safety and Regulatory Services be cancelled; and**
- 2) the Portfolio Holder be advised of these arrangements accordingly.**

101. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - SIX MONTH REVIEW OF THE COMMITTEE FUNCTION

The Committee agreed that, due to the absence of the Chair of the Committee, the item should be deferred for consideration at the following meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 11th December 2012.

RESOLVED that

the item be deferred for consideration at the following meeting of the Committee on 11th December 2012.

102. ACTIONS LIST

Members noted that information about the Education Business Partnership, requested at a meeting of the Committee in June, had now been circulated for Members' consideration. In addition, following publication of the agenda pack Officers had provided further information about the Redditch Development Model.

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RESOLVED that

the Committee's Actions List be noted.

103. EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MINUTES AND SCRUTINY OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE'S WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered the minutes from the meeting of the Executive committee held on 16th October 2012. Members noted that all of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's recommendations on the subject of the Dial a Ride Extended Service Feasibility study had been approved during that meeting.

RESOLVED that

- 1) **the minutes of the Executive Committee meeting held on 16th October 2012 be noted; and**
- 2) **the Executive Committee's Work Programme be noted.**

104. TASK & FINISH REVIEWS - DRAFT SCOPING DOCUMENTS

There were no draft scoping documents.

105. TASK AND FINISH GROUPS - PROGRESS REPORTS

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

- a) Arts and Culture Centre – Chair, Councillor Gay Hopkins

Councillor Hopkins reported that the review was progressing rapidly. Members had visited arts centres in other parts of the country and had interviewed a number of expert witnesses. At forthcoming meetings Members were due to learn more about the sources of funding available to support the arts and current arts provision within the Borough.

- b) Redditch Market – Chair, Councillor Andrew Brazier

Members were advised that the group had recently interviewed the new manager of the Kingfisher Shopping Centre about the potential for joint working. The group had also consulted with local market traders and customers in order to obtain further information about how the market could be improved.

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The group were due to undertake a significant amount of consultation work in December and January. To ensure that the information provided during this consultation could help to inform the group's final recommendations the group were requesting that the deadline for the review be extended by a month.

RESOLVED that

- 1) **the deadline for completion of the Redditch Market review be extended to Tuesday 5th February 2013; and**
- 2) **the update reports be noted.**

106. HEALTH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Councillor Witherspoon advised Members that the latest meeting of the Worcestershire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC) had taken place on Tuesday 6th November 2012.

Representatives of the Joint Services Review (JSR) had attended the meeting to discuss latest progress with the review. Three preferred models had been identified and further information would be provided about each option in December. Further public consultation on the subject was subsequently due to take place in January – March 2013. Financial sustainability of future service delivery had also been discussed. Members of HOSC had been advised that savings of £15 million would need to be made over the following two years.

During the HOSC meeting it had been reported that some of the highest performing GPs in the country worked in Worcestershire. In addition, figures recorded for Worcestershire demonstrated some of the lowest admission rates to hospitals in the country.

Members expressed concerns that the Alexandra Hospital had recently been penalised for admitting too many patients. This had not been discussed at the latest meeting of HOSC. However, members of HOSC had previously been reassured about the outcomes of this issue.

RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

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107. REFERRALS

There were no referrals.

108. WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee's Work Programme was considered and the following subjects were raised for further discussion:

a) Overview and Scrutiny Budget Briefing

Members were advised that a special briefing on the subject of the Council's budget in 2013-14 would be delivered on Thursday 29th November 2012.

b) Call-in Briefing

The Committee noted that a briefing for all Members would take place at 6.30 immediately prior to the following meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 11th December 2012.

c) CfPS Parliamentary Seminar Series

Officers reported that the latest round of Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS) Parliamentary Seminar Series would be taking place on 12th December 2012, 6th February and 6th March 2013 in London. Participation in this training would cost £40 per member and attendance would be subject to the approval of group leaders.

d) West Midlands Regional Scrutiny Network

The Committee noted that the following meeting of the West Midlands Regional Scrutiny Network was due to take place during the day on Thursday 6th December 2012 at Birmingham Council House. Members were invited to advise Officers in advance if they were intending to attend the meeting.

RESOLVED that

the Committee's Work Programme be noted.

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The Meeting commenced at 7.00 pm
and closed at 9.10 pm