

# Overview and Scrutiny Committee

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Tuesday, 5th March, 2013

## MINUTES

### Present:

Councillor Juliet Brunner (Chair), Councillor Simon Chalk (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Joe Baker, David Bush, John Fisher, Andrew Fry, Pattie Hill, Gay Hopkins and Joe Baker

### Officers:

G Lavery, H Mole, D Poole, S Singleton and J Staniland

### Democratic Services Officers:

J Bayley and M Craggs

### 151. APOLOGIES AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors Brazier and Witherspoon. Councillor Baker was confirmed as the substitute for Councillor Witherspoon.

### 152. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND OF PARTY WHIP

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

### 153. MINUTES

Members were advised that the recommendations from the Market Scrutiny Task Group, which had been discussed at the previous meeting of the Committee, were due to be considered by the Executive Committee on 12th March.

### RESOLVED that

**the minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on Tuesday 5th February be approved as a true and correct record of the meeting and signed by the Chair.**

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Chair

## 154. TRANSFORMATION BRIEFING

The Committee received a presentation on the subject of systems thinking and transformation (Appendix 1).

A couple of Councillors had attended transformation orientation sessions. These sessions provided participants with an opportunity to check current services as well as to listen to customer demands as they were reported to frontline services. The feedback received from these Councillors had been generally positive. These Members suggested that transformation should be regarded as an evidence-based, practical approach to improving services.

The potential impact of service transformation on staff morale was debated. On the one hand Members noted that the improvements that could be made to service delivery from a customer's perspective could lead to an increase in customer satisfaction. Positive feedback received from customers in this context might have a beneficial impact on staff morale.

On the other hand concerns were expressed that the changes required through transformation could be unsettling for staff, as the process challenged existing assumptions and required employees to adapt working practices. In many departments transformation was being piloted by a small number of members of a team. Members suggested that there was a risk that employees who were not engaged in pilot transformation processes might feel particularly uncertain about the intended outcomes.

Officers had recognised the potential impact that service transformation might have on staff. From the start of the process, therefore, attempts had been made to engage with and to inform staff about systems thinking and transformation. This had included arranging for staff to participate in a series of orientation sessions as well as the delivery of a number of staff briefings on the subject.

The Committee welcomed the focus on the customer required by systems thinking and the potential to improve service performance whilst making financial savings in service delivery. However, Members noted that it would not be possible for Councillors to appreciate the full implications of the systems thinking process without observing service transformation in practice.

To address this concern it was suggested that members of the Committee and other elected Councillors should have an opportunity to participate in transformation orientation sessions and

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to meet with relevant Officers in order to learn more about transformation and systems thinking. Knowledge of transformation amongst Councillors was considered to be increasingly important as this would enable Members to make informed decisions about any proposed future changes to service delivery.

The Committee commented that whilst the majority of Council services were in the process of going through transformation, there were a number of key services that had been using the systems thinking approach to reviewing service delivery for a significant amount of time. Members agreed that these services should be the focus of further scrutiny by the Committee in the first instance.

## **RESOLVED that**

- 1) Officers consult with members of the Committee regarding their availability to participate in Transformation Orientation Sessions;**
- 2) a list of services that have been going through transformation for some time be circulated for Members' consideration to enable Members to identify areas suitable for further scrutiny; and**
- 3) the report be noted.**

## **155. REDDITCH BOROUGH COUNCIL BUSINESS CENTRES**

The Committee considered a report on the subject of vacant units in the Council's Business Centres. This report had been requested by Members at a meeting of the Committee on 11th December 2012 following consideration of the Quarter 2 Finance Monitoring Report which had recorded a lower than expected income for this service.

Members were advised that the Council managed three Business Centres: the Greenlands Business Centre; the Rubicon Business Centre; and the Hemming Road Enterprise Centre. The Council offered attractive license fees and terms which were regularly advertised, though a large proportion of business was generated through personal recommendations.

The financial costs involved in managing the centres had been influenced by two principal factors. Firstly, many of the business centres were approximately 20 years old and required continuous repair and maintenance work which was delivered at a financial cost to the Council. Secondly, Members were advised that the

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threshold on which vacant commercial properties were exempt from paying business rates had been lowered in April 2011 from £18,000 to £2,600 rateable value. The Council was therefore paying business rates for some vacant units that would have been exempt in previous years.

Members noted that the Rubicon Business Centre was leased from a private landlord. The centre had been leased as premises which had been converted into separate units. The Council would be required to convert the property back to the state in which it had originally been leased if this arrangement was not renewed. Officers had estimated in 2010 that it would cost approximately £100,000 to convert the property.

There were a number of competitor business centres in Redditch and the surrounding area. A number of these competitors managed modern buildings. However, whilst the Council run business Centres were not based in modern premises there were a number of customers who remained satisfied and had leased units over a series of years. The units also provided useful bases in which local entrepreneurs could launch new businesses.

Members welcomed reports that occupancy rates at all of the centres had increased between 2009/10 and 2012/13. In particular, Members were pleased to learn that occupancy levels at the Greenlands Business Centre had increased from 41.11 per cent to 80.51 per cent during this period.

## **RESOLVED that**

**the report be noted.**

### **156. DRAFT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT 2012/13**

The Committee considered the draft content of the Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report for 2012/13. Members noted that the Chair of the Committee would be invited to present the report for Members' consideration at a meeting of Council on 25th March 2013.

Members requested that the following matters should be added to the report:

- Information about the Promoting Sporting Participation Task Group Review, which was completed in May 2012.
- A picture of the Increasing Rates of Recycling Task Group.

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- A number of monitoring update reports had been received by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee during the year. Out of courtesy Members agreed that the membership of the Task Groups which had completed the original reviews should be recorded in this section.
- Active performance scrutiny should be recorded as an important element for the Committee to address in future years.
- A targeted approach to scrutiny and focused forward planning should be recorded as objectives for improving scrutiny at the Council.
- A commitment to Member Development in Overview and Scrutiny should be incorporated into the report.
- Additional emphasis on senior Officers' attendance at meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Members concluded that Overview and Scrutiny should continue to be regarded as an important part of the democratic process at Redditch Borough Council.

## **RESOLVED that**

**subject to the amendments detailed in the preamble above, the report be noted.**

### **157. ACTIONS LIST**

As requested at the previous meeting of the Committee Officers were in the process of investigating the financial costs involved in completing a Task Group review. Members were advised that it was likely that this investigation would take some time as the costs would vary according to the length and subject of the review.

## **RESOLVED that**

**the Actions List be noted.**

### **158. EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MINUTES AND SCRUTINY OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE'S WORK PROGRAMME**

Officers were asked to note that for the minutes of the Executive Committee on 18th February 2013 a number of Members who had attended the meeting had been recorded twice under the categories of 'Present' and 'Also Present'.

**RESOLVED that**

**the minutes of the meetings of the Executive Committee held on Tuesday 12th March and Monday 18th February and the latest edition of the Executive Committee Work Programme be noted.**

**159. TASK & FINISH REVIEWS - DRAFT SCOPING DOCUMENTS**

There were no draft scoping documents.

**160. TASK AND FINISH GROUPS - PROGRESS REPORTS**

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

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

Members were advised that the group had agreed a number of recommendations and a draft report was in the process of being produced.

b) Housing Density – Chair, Councillor David Bush

The Committee was informed that no meetings of the group had taken place, as it had not been possible to identify a date when Members and relevant Officers would both be available in February. Two meetings were, however, scheduled to take place on 20th March and 27th March 2013.

**RESOLVED that**

**the update reports be noted.**

**161. HEALTH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

There were no updates from the Worcestershire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC).

**162. REFERRALS**

There were no referrals.

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## **163. WORK PROGRAMME**

**RESOLVED that**

**the Committee's Work Programme be noted.**

The Meeting commenced at 7.00 pm  
and closed at 8.05 pm