

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Wednesday, 25 February
2009

MINUTES

Present:

Councillors D Smith, K Banks, M Chalk, W Hartnett, R King, W Norton,
D Taylor and D Thomas

Also Present:

Councillor J Brunner

Officers:

R Griffin, A Heighway, T Kristunas, G Revans and J Staniland

Committee Services Officer:

J Bayley and H Saunders

170. APOLOGIES AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES

An apology for absence was received on behalf of Councillor
Mould.

171. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND OF PARTY WHIP

There were no declarations of interest or of any party whip.

172. MINUTES

RESOLVED that

**the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on Monday
16 February be confirmed as a correct record and signed by
the Chair.**

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Chair

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Wednesday, 25 February 2009

173. ACTIONS LIST

The Committee considered its agreed list of actions and specific mention was made of the following matters:

a) Pitcher Oak Golf Course – Potential Savings

Officers informed the Committee under action nine of the Actions List that the information requested by the Committee regarding the potential savings from the closure of Pitcher Oak Golf course had been circulated amongst Members.

b) Review of Overview and Scrutiny Structures - Scoping Document

Officers informed Members that they had met with Councillor R King to complete this scoping document and this would be presented to the Committee at the meeting due to be held on Wednesday 18 March.

RESOLVED that

subject to the comments above, the contents of the Action List be noted.

174. CALL-IN AND PRE-SCRUTINY

There were no call-ins or suggestions for pre-scrutiny.

175. TASK & FINISH REVIEWS - DRAFT SCOPING DOCUMENTS

There were no draft scoping documents for consideration.

176. TASK AND FINISH GROUPS - PROGRESS REPORTS

The Committee received reports in relation to current reviews.

a) Council Flat Communal Cleaning – Chair, Councillor P Mould

Councillor Taylor provided an update on the Council Flat Communal Cleaning Review. She explained that she was due to meet with Officers to discuss the re-arrangement of the Consultation Event for local leaseholders and Council flat tenants.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Wednesday, 25 February 2009

b) Housing Mutual Exchange – Chair, Councillor D Smith

Councillor Smith informed the Committee that for medical reasons he had had to postpone the Task and Finish Group meeting that had been due to take place on Thursday 5 March. Members of the Group would be informed of a new date for this meeting as soon as possible.

c) Role of the Mayor – Chair, Councillor M Chalk

Councillor Chalk confirmed that the Executive Committee had considered the final report of this Task and Finish Group.

RESOLVED that

the reports be noted.

177. PORTFOLIO HOLDER ANNUAL REPORT - COMMUNITY SAFETY (COUNCILLOR JULIET BRUNNER)

The Chair welcomed the Portfolio Holder for Community Safety, Councillor Brunner, to the meeting. Councillor Brunner presented her Portfolio Holder Annual Report in accordance with the questions set by the Committee. Appendix A to the minutes details Councillor Brunner's responses to these questions.

Members asked several questions regarding the content of Councillor Brunner's presentation. Some Members expressed concern that the consensus reached amongst Members and external partners during the "Dare to Dream" event, regarding the prioritisation of Community Safety by the Council, had been disregarded. Councillor Brunner informed the Committee that this was an aspiration and had never been approved by full Council. However, Community Safety continued to be a priority for the Council and she was committed to tackling crime and the causes of crime.

Members asked Councillor Brunner if she understood the decision to cut four fire-fighters from the Hereford and Worcester fire service and whether this would have an impact on safety in the town. Councillor Brunner explained that she did not feel in a position to comment on this issue. However, she offered to request a written response from Hereford and Worcester Fire Brigade explaining the reasons behind these cuts and the impact these might have on safety in the town.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Wednesday, 25 February 2009

The Committee commented that it was apparent a large amount of work had been undertaken with young people in relation to Community Safety issues. Members questioned if any work had been undertaken by the Council to target parents on such issues. Officers informed the Committee that the Anti-Social Behaviour Team could offer direct support to parents and families known to the Team. The Council had not utilised Parenting Orders but was in the process of establishing a parenting intervention scheme to address issues of anti-social behaviour and crime through the targeting of parents.

Members questioned whether the interactive CCTV cameras had had a positive impact on Community Safety. The Committee heard that the CCTV cameras had been successful although statistical data was still being collected to confirm this. However, Officers reported that operators had kept details of incidents where the use of CCTV cameras had had a positive impact on crime and anti-social behaviour in the town centre. Officers offered to provide written details of these incidents to Members.

The Chair thanked Councillor Brunner for attending the meeting and proposed that the Committee should recommend that the Council continue to support effective partnership working for the delivery of Community Safety in the town.

Accordingly it was

RECOMMENDED that

the Council continue to support effective partnership working for the delivery of Community Safety in the Borough; and

RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

178. CORPORATE PLAN PART II - PRE-SCRUTINY

Officers introduced this item and explained that the Corporate Plan had been refreshed in line with guidance and best practice issued through the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007. This Act had removed the requirement for authorities to produce Best Value Performance Plans but had advised that instead they should provide a business plan.

Previous versions of the Council's Corporate Plan had been criticised by the Audit Commission. In order to overcome these

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Wednesday, 25 February 2009

criticisms, Officers had asked the Audit Commission for guidance on their expectations for a high-quality Corporate Plan. This advice had informed the development of the new Corporate Plan. Members were informed that the new Plan was in a draft format and would be subject to professional formatting once approved by the Council. It was also noted that the document would be available to Officers, Members, partners and the general public and so needed to be fully understandable to all of these audiences. Officers invited Members to provide comments and suggestions on how the document could be improved.

Members questioned the description of the provision of public transport in the town, recorded on page 7 of the report. It was agreed that this description was quite subjective and, as written, did not reflect the true state of public transport in the town.

On the same page of the report, Members argued that they disagreed with the statement that “In 2008 unemployment rose steadily until July, and much more rapidly after this time as economic conditions deteriorated”.

Members discussed the audience of the document and stressed that the target audience for the document should be carefully considered when writing the plan. The language used was also an important consideration as this could influence the audience’s perception of the Council. Officers confirmed that the document had to be written in a factual style, clearly highlighted where performance could be improved and the strategies the Council were employing to achieve this improvement.

The Committee discussed page 8 of the report, in particular the profiles for the Portfolio Holders. Members felt that further information should be provided regarding the Portfolio Holders.

Members considered page 9 of the document which detailed the management staffing structure. The Committee agreed that the diagram used to demonstrate the levels of management was confusing as it did not clearly show the equal precedence of all of the Heads of Service.

Members considered page 10 of the document which detailed the Council’s Priorities and Vision. The Committee agreed that this page did not clearly differentiate between the two.

Members also made a recommendation regarding the whole document suggesting that a glossary and a list of the Council’s key partners should be provided.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Wednesday, 25 February 2009

The Committee discussed the content of pages 20 to 29 which demonstrated how the Council would deliver its new Priorities. Members commented that, as the budget was still in the process of being set, some of the indicators and targets might change. Officers explained it was anticipated that by the time the document was published, budgetary implications for these indicators would be known and could be included in the document.

On page 21, Members requested further information in relation to the sentence reading “expand existing Children’s Centres in Redditch and explore opportunities for new Centres across Bromsgrove.”

Finally, Members considered page 29 which detailed information about equalities and diversity at the Council. The Committee noted that insufficient information was currently provided about the diverse communities living within the Borough.

RECOMMENDED that

- 1) **the sentence “Public transport is also well provided for through a regular train service to Birmingham and Lichfield and a network of local bus services” in paragraph 5 on page 7 be amended to read “public transport is provided for via a train and bus network”;**
- 2) **the reference to unemployment be removed from paragraph 8 on page 7;**
- 3) **further details be provided about each Portfolio Holder’s role and responsibilities on page 8 of the document;**
- 4) **the staffing structure diagram on page 9 be redesigned;**
- 5) **a clear distinction be made between the Priorities and the statement of intent for each Priority on page 10;**
- 6) **a glossary be provided in the document; and a list of the Council’s key partners also be incorporated within the document;**
- 7) **an explanation be written into the Delivery and Key outcomes Section beginning on page 20 that, as budgets were still under review, some of this information was liable to change;**

- 8) further information about the different ethnic groups and proportion of young people living in Redditch be included in the first paragraph on page 29; and

RESOLVED that

- 9) Officers provide the Committee with clarification on the final bullet point on page 21 regarding the possibility for exploring opportunities for new Children's Centres across Bromsgrove.

179. QUARTERLY BUDGET REPORT

The Committee considered the third quarterly budget monitoring report for 2008/09.

Particular reference was made to the following matters:

a) Budget 0437: Market

Members discussed the target for the Customer and Client Receipts for the Market. They questioned the meaning of a comment appended to the document reading "unrealistic balancing figure income expected to be £105,000" as well as the accuracy of the negative total figure of 75.94% for the Market. Officers explained that the figures for the Market were supposed to be budgeted to break even but unfortunately income had been lower than expected and so the Council did not expect to meet the target. Officers agreed with Members that the actual total figure was likely to be different to the 75.94% quoted in the document.

b) Budget 0707: Dial-A-Ride

Members discussed the figures for Dial-A-Ride and questioned why the transport costs had been lower than anticipated. Officers confirmed that this had been due to a reduction in the cost of petrol.

c) Budget 0733: Contaminated Land

Members discussed the data provided relating to contaminated land and queried the 2.89% total figure quoted in the document. Officers suggested that this figure would require further consideration by Officers.

RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

180. QUARTERLY PERFORMANCE REPORT

The Committee considered the third quarterly performance monitoring report.

Introducing this report, Officers explained that a summary page had been included that demonstrated the total number of indicators reported for the third quarter, classified according to a red, amber and green colour code system. Red reflected poor performance, green equalled good performance and amber represented average performance or an indicator where no data was available.

Members discussed indicator BV084a “kilogrammes of household waste collected per head”, and media reports that recyclable waste was being taken to landfill sites. They asked if Officers could clarify where recyclable waste from the Borough was being taken. Officers confirmed that, although the current market was difficult, as far as they were aware all recyclable waste was processed in the intended manner and that Officers had received assurances that it was not being deposited in landfill sites.

Members discussed indicator WMHO5 “Switchboards and Contact Centre: percentage of calls answered within 20 seconds”. Members requested clarification from Officers as to whether this referred to calls answered by an automated response machine or by a person. Officers agreed to provide further information regarding this issue for Members.

RESOLVED that

- 1) further clarification be provided regarding indicator WMHO5 as recorded in the preamble above; and**
- 2) the report be noted.**

181. PORTFOLIO HOLDER ANNUAL REPORT - QUESTIONS

Questions for the Portfolio Holder for Community Leadership and Partnership Portfolio’s Annual Report were considered by the Committee.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Wednesday, 25 February 2009

RESOLVED that

members of the Committee individually contact O&S Officers with questions for the Portfolio Holder's Annual Report.

182. REFERRALS

There were no referrals.

183. WORK PROGRAMME

Officers informed the Committee that the Head of Financial, Revenue and Benefits Services was due to attend the Committee on Wednesday 18 March to present the position statement on the Capital Programme.

Officers reminded Members that on Thursday 19 March some Members were due to travel to London to participate in the Centre for Public Scrutiny's (CfPS) training in scrutiny of partnerships and partnership working in scrutiny. It was also noted that a Member training event on the scrutiny of performance was due to take place on Monday 23 March.

RESOLVED that

the Committee's Work Programme be noted.

The Meeting commenced at 7.00 pm
and closed at 9.30 pm