

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Wednesday, 26 September
2007

MINUTES

Present:

Councillor Colin MacMillan (Chair), Councillor Andrew Fry (Vice-Chair)
and Councillors J Brunner, K Banks, B Passingham and D Taylor

Officers:

A Heighway, S Skinner

Committee Services Officer:

J Bayley and H Saunders

46. APOLOGIES AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors
Cookson and Thomas.

47. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND OF PARTY WHIP

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

48. MINUTES

RESOLVED that

**the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on the 12th
of September 2007 be confirmed as a correct record and
signed by the Chair.**

49. CALL-IN AND PRE-SCRUTINY

Members received the Decision Notice from the meeting of the
Executive Committee held on Wednesday, the 19th of September
2007, with a view to considering the need for any Call-ins.

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RESOLVED that

no action be taken to initiate call-in procedures on any of the Key Decisions contained in the Executive Committee Decision Notice.

50. TASK & FINISH REVIEWS - DRAFT SCOPING DOCUMENTS

There were no draft scoping reports for consideration.

51. TASK AND FINISH GROUPS - PROGRESS REPORTS

The Committee considered update reports in relation to current and pending reviews.

The Chair stressed that, so as not to make this matter too cumbersome, it was important to stick to a time limit of two minutes for each report.

The following oral reports were given:

a) Communications Task and Finish Group (Stage One) – Chair Councillor J. Brunner.

The Chair of this Group reported that the Members had made good progress.

The Group had recently undertaken interviews with expert witnesses. Members were also informed that there had been some responses to the questionnaires that had been sent to Members, Officers and external organisations. The Chair reminded Members that they had all been sent copies of the questionnaire and asked that they return their copies to Officers as soon as possible.

The Committee agreed that, in view of delays occasioned by forthcoming Officer leave and the postponement of a visit to Stevenage Borough Council, the initial findings of Stage One of the Communications exercise could be postponed. The Chair agreed to consult with Members of the Group and to report a new date for the presentation of these findings at the next meeting of the Committee.

b) District Centres Task and Finish Group – Chair Councillor A. Fry

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The Chair of the District Centres Task and Finish Group explained that he was due to meet the relevant Lead Officer to discuss the progress of the exercise.

c) Fees and Charges Task and Finish Group – Chair Councillor C. MacMillan

The Chair reported that the second meeting of the Task and Finish Group took place on Tuesday the 25th September. Members were informed that the Group had discussed a list of fees and charges that had been provided by Officers for Member consideration. The Chair noted that in view of the late receipt of this information Members had agreed to analyse the content of this document at the next meeting of the Group.

The Chair informed the Committee that the Group had decided to scrutinise the Council's fees and charges on a service by service basis and that Planning Services had been selected as the first area for analysis. The Group had agreed to identify questions that they would like to address to the Head of Planning Services who has been invited to the next meeting of the Group on the 10th of October 2007.

Members were also informed that an academic representative from The Institute of Local government Studies (INLOGOV) at the University of Birmingham had been identified as an expert witness who could be invited to provide further information about fees and charges. The Group had agreed that the Chair would liaise with Officers to produce a proposal for this presentation and that this would be circulated amongst Members of the Group.

d) Housing Priority Task and Finish Group – Chair Councillor B. Passingham

The Chair of the Group informed Members that the first meeting of the Group took place on Monday the 24th September 2007. Members had discussed who they would like to invite to participate in the exercise as external witnesses.

The Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee reported that he had been informed by some Members that the content of the scoping document for this exercise was too complex. Members were informed that it was intended that this exercise should be completed in two stages. The Chair of the Committee suggested that Stage One was not specifically concerned with Housing but rather with investigating the implications arising from the Council determining and setting priorities. At issue was the way that once a

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priority is set how it would impact on the allocation and use of resources and how it affects the Council's behaviour.

The Chair of the Committee and the Chair of the Task and Finish Group agreed to meet, together with relevant Officers, to clarify the scope of the exercise further.

e) Gypsies and Travellers Task and Finish Group – Chair Councillor P. Hill

Officers reported that they had only received one nomination to date for membership of this Group from outside the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Members were informed that the deadline for nominations would be the end of September.

Officers noted that an issue had arisen in relation to this exercise during Councillor Thomas's consultation with Officers over Member remuneration. It was noted that the original intention had been that members of the O&S Committee would Chair Task and Finish Groups and, based on this additional responsibility, an approach would be made to the Council about awarding Special Responsibility Allowances to Members of the Committee, in line with payments to Executive members.

However, Members agreed that regardless of these considerations, Councillor Hill remained the most suitable choice as Chair of this exercise due to her expert knowledge of the subject. It was agreed therefore that there be no change to the Chairing of the Group.

RESOLVED that

1) **the Committee note the reports and agree the proposed action; and**

2) **adjustments to reporting deadlines be accepted;**

all as detailed in the preamble above.

52. NEIGHBOURHOOD GROUP / PACT MEETINGS

Members were informed that seven of the thirteen forthcoming Neighbourhood Group meetings in Redditch would be merged with Police PACT meetings. Officers reported that they were working towards amalgamating all the Neighbourhood Groups and PACT meetings within the Borough but that this would not be achieved in full until the following year.

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For comparison purposes, Officers distributed a scrutiny report produced by Wyre Forest District Council on the subject of joint Neighbourhood Groups and PACT meetings in their local authority area. Officers provided further explanation about the contents of the document to Members.

The Committee was advised that Officers would be producing their own report on the merger proposals in due course which would be reported to the Executive Committee for consideration. Members therefore agreed to read their copies of the Wyre Forest report but to postpone any O&S action in relation to the Neighbourhood Groups until after the Executive Committee had considered this report.

RESOLVED that

the proposed his course of action be supported.

53. ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR REPORT – OFFICER UPDATE

The Head of Community Strategy & Partnerships attended the meeting to provide Members with an update on the Council's responses to recommendations contained in the Anti-Social Behaviour report, produced by the Social Overview and Scrutiny Committee in 2006. Members were informed that some changes at the national level, including the introduction of the Respect Agenda, had rendered some of the recommendations invalid since the production of the report. Similarly some local changes had also impacted on recommendations, such as deletion of the Youth Team.

Members were also informed that, due to the scale of the recommendations and their resource implications, Officers had not yet acted in response to four of the original recommendations. Those four recommendations were: the provision of mediation services; the provision of an anti-social behaviour helpline in conjunction with Redditch Community Safety Partnership; the provision of a Seminar for Members and the Council's partners on Anti-Social Behaviour; and the promotion of diversionary activities to young people by both the Council and its partners.

Members agreed that Councillors Brunner, Passingham and Taylor, who had been involved in the original scrutiny exercise, should meet together to consider the Council's response to those four recommendations in more detail. These Members also agreed to analyse the terms of those recommendations and suggest updates to the recommendations where necessary to correspond with

current circumstances. The Chair reminded Members that if the Members decides that further scrutiny work was required they would need to complete a scoping document in accordance with current Overview and Scrutiny Procedures.

RESOLVED that

subject to Members' comments as detailed in the preamble above, the report be noted, and proposed action agreed.

54. PORTFOLIO HOLDER ANNUAL REPORTS - PREPARATION

The Chair informed Members that the Portfolio Holders had been asked to provide a ten minute presentation to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and that this would be followed by up to twenty minutes of questions from the Members of the Committee. Members were asked to suggest additional questions that they would like to address to the Portfolio Holders.

Members suggested a number of additional questions, some focused generally upon the role of a Portfolio Holder, whilst other questions focused upon the subjects of particular portfolios. These suggestions were recorded by Officers. Officers informed Members that the questions would be dispatched to the Portfolio holder for Community Safety, who would be the first Member to present his Annual Report to the Committee. The Members also agreed that Officers should attach written guidance relating to the role of a Portfolio Holder to the agenda for the next meeting.

RESOLVED that

the agreed action be approved.

55. COMMUNITY CALLS FOR ACTION

Officers informed Members that there were currently due to be two forms of "Community Call for Action": a version focusing on Crime and Disorder-related matters (CCA) and a local government version involving community issues that did not relate to the subjects of Crime, Disorder or Health (CCfA). Members were informed that the Crime and Disorder version of the Community Call for Action (CCA) had been postponed, though the local government version was due to be introduced in Spring 2008. Officers noted that many Councils had not yet developed plans about how to respond to the Community Calls for Action because they were awaiting guidance from Central

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Government.

Officers also reported that the Community Calls for Action would require wider action from the Council because it was likely that they would only be reported to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee as a last resort.

RESOLVED that

the Executive Committee be requested to consider:

1) the implications for the Council of the two versions of the Community Call for Action; and

2) associated Member Development needs.

56. REFERRALS

There were no referrals.

57. WORK PROGRAMME

The programme of future work was received and accepted, without comment.

RESOLVED that

the Committee Work Programme be noted.

The Meeting commenced at 7.05 pm
and closed at 8.25 pm