

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Wednesday, 16 January
2008

MINUTES

Present:

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

Officers:

S Skinner and J Smith

Committee Services Officer:

J Bayley and H Saunders

100. APOLOGIES AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES

There were no apologies for absence.

101. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND OF PARTY WHIP

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

102. MINUTES

The Chair explained that he wished to raise an additional issue under this item. The Chair informed Members that he had asked Officers to produce a list of actions that had been requested at recent meetings of the Committee. Members agreed the need to note the actions that had been completed as well as actions that remained to be completed on a regular basis.

Members agreed that consideration of the 'Overview and Scrutiny Actions List' should be added as a standard item on the Committee's Agenda.

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Chair

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RESOLVED that

- 1) **the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on the 19th of December 2007 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.**
- 2) **The Overview and Scrutiny Actions List be added as a standard item on the Committee's Agenda.**

103. CALL-IN AND PRE-SCRUTINY

Members received the Decision Notice from the meeting of the Executive Committee held on Wednesday, the 9th of January 2007, with a view to considering the need for any Call-ins.

RESOLVED that

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

104. TASK & FINISH REVIEWS - DRAFT SCOPING DOCUMENTS

The Chair explained that he had produced a draft scoping for a piece of review work that would examine methods for scrutinising the Council's Service Plans and the Council's priorities. Members were informed that this draft scoping document was being circulated among senior officers for comment.

Officers explained that this draft scoping document would be made available for consideration at the following meeting of the Committee.

RESOLVED that

the draft scoping document be made available for consideration at the following meeting of the Committee.

105. TASK AND FINISH GROUPS - PROGRESS REPORTS

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

The following oral reports were given:

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

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Members agreed that no update was necessary as the Group had presented the Stage One findings at an informal session preceding the Committee meeting.

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

The Chair of the Task and Finish Group explained that the Group would be meeting on Thursday the 31st of January. Members were informed that the Group was working towards making final recommendations.

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

The Chair explained that the Group had held a number of meetings investigating the fees and charges levied by Planning Services, Land Charges and the Council's Fitness Suites. Members were informed that a short report had been prepared by Officers detailing recommendations relating to these three areas. The Chair explained that Members had not identified opportunities to change fees and charges in these areas because they were either set at a statutory level or appeared to have been set in accordance with an affective pricing strategy. Members approved the recommendations detailed in the report and recommended that they be considered by the Executive Committee.

Members were also informed that the members of the Group had investigated local authority powers to trade. The Chair explained that upon consideration of the evidence Members had agreed that use of these powers would not be suitable for Redditch Borough Council.

RESOLVED that

the Committee note the reports and agree the proposed action, all as detailed in the preamble above.

RECOMMENDED that

the Executive Committee be asked to consider the recommendations made by the Fees and Charges Task and Finish Group (Appendix A).

106. JOINT SCRUTINY EXERCISE ON FLOODING

Officers explained to Members that Redditch was the first Council to agree arrangements for the joint scrutiny exercise and that this process had not been completed by all Worcestershire authorities. Members were informed that for this reason a second meeting of the Group had not yet taken place.

Members were informed that Officers from Worcestershire County Council had provided a draft scoping document for the Committee to consider. Members discussed and approved the draft scoping document.

Members requested that more information be made available to them regarding the impact of the July 2007 flooding in Redditch. Officers explained that another Member had made a similar request to which the relevant Officer had responded. Officers agreed to make this information available to Members of the Committee.

RESOLVED that

- 1) **the Committee approve the draft joint scrutiny on flooding scoping document.**
- 2) **Officers to circulate information regarding the July 2007 floods in Redditch for consideration of Members of the Committee.**

107. HOUSING PRIORITY PERFORMANCE DATA – SUMMARY REPORT

Officers presented information on the Housing Priority performance figures. Members were informed that that it was standard practice to set performance targets three years in advance and to review them on a yearly basis. Officers explained that they had failed to review these figures for the current year but were intending to do so in future years. Officers explained that action plans for Officers had been put in place to help address performance issues.

Officers explained, in relation to indicator BV183b, that the number of families in bed and breakfast accommodation had fallen by 50 per cent. Members were informed that this reduction in numbers corresponded with the Government's target to reduce use of bed and breakfast accommodation for families. However, Officers explained that consequently the number of families placed in hostel accommodation had risen, which was reflected in the figures presented to Members. Members were informed that a first stage

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report regarding the issue of temporary living accommodation had been produced for the consideration of the Executive Committee.

Members discussed indicator BV212, relating to average re-let times for dwellings in the financial year. Officers clarified the performance data for this indicator, explaining that the third quarter outturns totalled 28.39 days with an accumulative total of 36 days. Officers informed Members that this figure was below target.

Members queried the reasons for the increase in eviction rates. Officers explained that this was due to the previous period where fewer evictions had taken place due to the impact of tolerated trespass regulations. Members queried whether evictees were charged for repairs to their properties. Officers confirmed that evictees were charged. Officers explained there had been a recent problem with tenants leaving properties in a poor state of repair. Members questioned whether it would be possible to carry out spot checks on tenants' homes to counteract this problem. Officers explained that this action would be difficult to undertake due to the large size of the Council housing stock.

Members discussed the low take up of sheltered housing and questioned whether it would be possible to sell this type of accommodation. Officers noted that the issue was being considered and that a sheltered housing strategy was being produced by Officers.

Officers explained that the loss of data referred to in relation to LIB231 was not caused by the loss of personal details but was rather due to the computerised system crashing and the data needing to be re-loaded. Members were informed that the work and time needed to recover this system had a knock on effect on the performance for the year 2006/07 which had then impacted on the performance for the beginning of 2007/08. Therefore, the target for this indicator had not been met.

Officers reported that the Council had exceeded its target performance for indicators HH13, HH17 and HH18 relating to the care and repair service and repairs and maintenance services. Officers explained that there have been problems with customers not keeping to their appointments for repairs. Members were informed that in order to tackle this problem, repair workers will be phoning customers on the morning they are due to visit to confirm their availability for the appointment. Members were also informed that Officers will make contact to follow up if no response. Officers commented that these actions had improved the situation.

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The Chair thanked Officers for attending the Committee to explain the Housing Priority performance figures further and commended the Housing Team for their hard work.

RESOLVED that

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

108. REFERRALS

There were no referrals.

109. WORK PROGRAMME

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

Officers informed Members that the following meeting of the Committee would take place on Thursday the 7th of February 2008.

RESOLVED that

the Committee Work Programme be noted.

The Meeting commenced at 8.00 pm
and closed at 9.00 pm