

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Thursday, 7 February 2008

MINUTES

Present:

Councillor Colin MacMillan (Chair), and Councillors K Banks, J Brunner and D Taylor

Also Present:

Mr M Chawner (Borough Tenants' Panel Representative).

Non- Members:

M Hall and D Hunt

Officer:

S Skinner

Committee Services Officer:

J Bayley

110. APOLOGIES AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES

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

111. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND OF PARTY WHIP

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

112. MINUTES

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on the 16th of January 2008 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

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Chair

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113. ACTIONS LIST

The Chair reminded Members that this item had been approved at the last meeting. He explained that Members would be asked to note both actions that had been completed and outstanding actions at following meetings.

RESOLVED that

the contents of the Actions List be noted.

114. CALL-IN

Members received the Decision Notice from the meeting of the Executive Committee held on Wednesday, the 30th of January 2008.

No call-ins were required.

115. TASK & FINISH REVIEWS - DRAFT SCOPING DOCUMENTS

The Chair reminded Members that he had been tasked with completing a scoping document on the subject of the Council's priorities at a previous meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. He noted that a draft copy of this scoping document had been completed and sent to Members for their consideration. The Chair suggested that the contents of this document should be considered further by Members following the completion of the ongoing scrutiny exercises. Members agreed to consider the document at a meeting of the Committee on Wednesday the 9th April 2008.

Members discussed a proposal to scrutinise the Business Centres which had been suggested at a meeting of the Council on Monday the 28th January 2008. The Chair informed Members that Officers would be producing a report on the subject of the Business Centres for the consideration of the Executive Committee. He suggested that a scoping document for the exercise would need to incorporate the contents of this Officer report. Members agreed, therefore, to postpone deliberation of this proposed scrutiny exercise until the Officer report was available for consideration.

RESOLVED that

- a) **the draft scoping document be made available for consideration at a meeting of the Overview and**

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Scrutiny Committee on Wednesday the 9th April 2008;and

- b) **Members consider the proposal for a scrutiny review of the Business Centres following the submission of an Officer report to the Executive Committee on the subject.**

116. TASK AND FINISH GROUP PROGRESS

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 Two)
– Chair Councillor J. Brunner.

The Chair of the Communications Task and Finish Group explained that the Group had completed much of the second stage of the exercise. She informed Members that the Group would be ready to report the majority of their second stage recommendations at a meeting of the Committee on Wednesday the 19th March 2008. She added that the presentation would consist of a simple power point presentation and oral report.

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

In the absence of the Chair, Officers provided an oral update on the progress of the Task and Finish Group. Officers informed Members that the Group had considered issues such as the ground surface at Winyates District Centre and would be considering the presentation of commercial shutters for the shop units at the district centres and signage. Officers confirmed that the Task and Finish Group was due to report final recommendations to the Committee on Wednesday the 19th March 2008.

The Chair noted that there was as yet no scoping document for the District Centres Task and Finish Group exercise and that this made it hard for the parent Committee to assess progress against the aims of the review.

Members therefore asked the Group to agree clear targets and to complete a scoping document for the exercise.

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Members further requested that these proposals should be reported at the following meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

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

The Chair of the Fees and Charges Task and Finish Group explained that the Group was reviewing the presentation of fees and charges data to Councillors. The Chair showed Members a copy of a draft template that he had developed for the presentation of this information and explained that the Group intended to identify ways to ensure that this information was presented in a transparent manner.

The Chair informed Members that the Group had been considering the contents of a report entitled 'Positively Charged' that had been published by the Audit Commission in January 2008. He explained that the Audit Commission had noted that relatively few local authorities had established charging policies. The Chair informed Members that the Group had, therefore, agreed to postpone consideration of the fees and charges levied by each service and instead would be concentrating on developing recommendations for a Redditch Borough Council charging policy.

The Chair explained to Members that the Group would hold a series of meetings to consider the appropriate contents for a charging policy and would be consulting relevant senior Officers. He informed Members that the Group would report recommendations about a charging policy to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on Wednesday the 9th April 2008.

RESOLVED that

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

117. JOINT SCRUTINY EXERCISE ON FLOODING

Officers informed Members that a meeting of the Joint Scrutiny Group had occurred on Monday the 4th February 2008. Officers explained that a report had been produced by Councillor Chalk, the representative for Redditch Borough Council on the Joint Scrutiny exercise, for the consideration of Members. Members noted that the minutes from the meeting of the Joint Scrutiny Group had also

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been provided for their consideration.

RESOLVED that

the Committee note the content of these reports, all as detailed in the preamble above.

118. PORTFOLIO HOLDER ANNUAL REPORTS – COUNCILLOR HALL PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR LEISURE AND TOURISM

Councillor Hall gave his Portfolio Holder report to the Committee, illustrated by a Powerpoint presentation.

Councillor Hall referred to the four themes that Members of the Committee had asked him to cover in his Annual Report. He informed Members that he felt that the responsibilities of the Portfolio Holders had not been clearly defined. He explained to Members that he did not have explicit control over budgets and resources within the remit of his portfolio. However, he added that the services within the remit of his portfolio were largely discretionary and therefore had significant resource and financial implications for the Council.

Councillor Hall explained that he met regularly with senior Officers who deliver the services within the remit of his portfolio. Councillor Hall informed Members that he had met with Officers to discuss an annual event that would celebrate the Paolozzi mosaics in the Kingfisher Shopping Centre. He explained that this event would be held at a minimal cost to the Council and that a variety of activities would be organised to mark the occasion. He added that he was interested in introducing a calendar of the Paolozzi mosaics, and that any money raised through selling the calendars would be invested in the Arts.

Councillor Hall explained that as Chair of the Leisure Contracts Advisory Panel he had been involved in reviewing the development of the Abbey Stadium. He informed Members that he was enthusiastic about the development of the Stadium and was encouraging Officers to ensure that it had both a “fun pool” and an eight lane pool suitable for competitions. He added that he had been encouraging Officers to investigate options for a “virtual room”, where visitors would be able to use the latest computer equipment.

Councillor Hall advised that he had recently visited the Kingsley, Arrow Vale sports facilities and Hewell Road Pool. He noted that there would be capital investment to improve the facilities. He

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added that Officers had made a bid for funding to invest in an adventure playground at Morton Stanley Park. He explained that the money would also be invested in Play Rangers who would support activities for adolescents based within the town.

Councillor Hall explained that Officers would be introducing improved signage at the Forge Mill Museum. He informed Members that Officers were investigating changes to the displays inside the Mill and that Officers would be introducing a café within the grounds of the museum. He added that the Council was investigating opportunities to enable more performances to take place within the grounds.

Councillor Hall informed Members that he was concerned that the Countryside Centre at Arrow Valley Park was in need of some improvement, particularly the cafeteria and toilet facilities. He explained to Members that Officers would be investigating options for improvement.

Councillor Hall informed Members that he had liaised with the former Head of Economic Development, before she left the Borough Council. He explained that since this Officer had left the Council, she had not been replaced. Members agreed that further work needed to be undertaken by the Council to address the needs of Economic Development.

Councillor Hall was asked to explain what decision-making powers, if any, he believed should be granted to Portfolio Holders. Councillor Hall commented that Portfolio Holders should continue to have no, or limited, influence over spending. He suggested instead that Portfolio Holders could influence budget spending and that senior Officers should be required to liaise with relevant Portfolio Holders more routinely over spending and other decisions.

The Chair thanked Councillor Hall for his presentation.

RESOLVED that

the Committee note the contents of this report, all as detailed in the preamble above.

119. SETTING THE WORK PROGRAMME

Officers advised that they had been asked to investigate examples of best practice in Work Programme setting and to

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contact Officers at Wychavon District Council to discuss the method utilised by that local authority.

Officers explained to Members that at Wychavon District Council Members attended an away-day over the Christmas period to work up Work Programme. Officers further explained that during this away-day Members selected a core number of scrutiny exercises, concentrating on subjects of relevance to the Council's core priorities. Officers added that the content of the Work Programme was regularly reviewed by Members at meetings of the Wychavon Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Officers cautioned that, owing to the election by thirds system operated at Redditch Borough Council, it might be more appropriate for an away-day to take place following the local elections. The Chair noted that planning the Work Programme during an away day in May would be a constructive exercise for Members to undertake. However, he cautioned that both Members and Officers had to recognise that the Council only had the capacity and resources to sustain three major Task and Finish reviews at any one time.

The Chair suggested that effective scrutiny work required the commitment and enthusiasm of the Members involved in the exercise. Members, therefore, agreed that the members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee would consult within their political groups to identify scrutiny topics that would interest Members. Officers were asked to undertake a similar process of consultation with other Council Officers.

The Chair suggested that Members would also need to review approaches to completing scoping documents. He suggested that Members and Officers needed to ensure that completed scoping documents were focused and easy to understand to ensure that Task and Finish Group work was delivered in a timely manner.

RESOLVED that

- 1) Members attend an away day in May 2008 to plan the Work Programme for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee;**
- 2) Members consult with other Members within their political groups to identify potential items for scrutiny; and**

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- 3) **Officers consult with other Officers to identify potential items for scrutiny**

all as detailed in the preamble above.

120. REFERRALS

There were no referrals.

121. WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee noted that two Task and Finish reviews were waiting to be implemented: the Gypsies and Travellers Review; and the Third Sector Review.

Members agreed to consider options for the introduction of these two reviews at the following meeting of the Committee.

RESOLVED that

the Committee Work Programme be noted.

The Meeting commenced at 7.00 pm
and closed at 9.00 pm