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FOREWORD BY THE CHAIR

Welcome to Redditch Borough Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee's annual report for 2013/14. Although previously a member of the Committee, this has been my first year as Chair. As such I wanted to focus on streamlining the agenda in order for Members to be able to concentrate on areas where they were able to make a contribution to the decision making process and to make better use of both their time and that of Officers during meetings and investigations. As a result of this work two main changes have taken place:

- Items on the agenda which had previously simply been noted were removed.
- A quarterly tracking process of recommendations put forward by the Committee has been put in place in order to ensure that recommendations which were accepted by the Executive Committee are implemented in a timely manner and if not we have increased the level of scrutiny to ensure that action is taken.

I began the year as Chair of a Task Group and have ended it as Chair of a different Task Group. At the beginning of the year I was Chair of the Housing Density Targets Task Group which concentrated on the impact of the Council's existing housing density requirements and helped to shape the content of the final version of Local Plan 4. I have ended the year as Chair of the Football Task Group which, although in its early stages, I believe it will be a constructive and useful investigation.

The Committee is ever mindful of its responsibility and commitment to residents whom it serves in scrutinising, impartially, those services which can impact enormously on their lives. The past year has been both busy and productive with numerous activities and services associated with the Council being examined. I hope that this good work continues as the Committee faces new challenges and changes.

My thanks go to Members and Officers for their continued support, especially those who have faced challenging scrutiny during the year. I'd particularly like to thank members of the Democratic Services team with special thanks due to Jess Bayley for assisting me in my first year as Chair.



**Councillor David Bush
Chair, Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Redditch Borough Council**

INTRODUCTION

There is an annual requirement for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to produce a report outlining its work and achievements during the previous year. The report also contains information about the reviews that have been undertaken by Task Groups, Short Sharp Review Groups, and the work of the Crime and Disorder Scrutiny Panel.

The Annual Report provides an opportunity for Members to consider future work programmes and to determine how the Overview and Scrutiny process could be further strengthened in future years. The report also provides Members with an opportunity to assess developments in scrutiny during the year. This year, in particular, significant changes have been made at the instigation of Members in order to streamline the scrutiny process. The impact of these changes on Overview and Scrutiny during the year is outlined in the report.

This report has been produced by Democratic Services Officers with lead responsibility for Overview and Scrutiny in consultation with the Chair of the Committee and the remaining eight Members.

KEY PRINCIPLES OF SCRUTINY

Members at Redditch Borough Council aim to ensure that the Overview and Scrutiny process complies with the four key principles of scrutiny identified by the Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS), the organisation set up to promote effective scrutiny in local government. The four key principles of effective scrutiny are:

- to provide a critical friend challenge to executive policy-makers and decision-makers;
- to enable the voice and concerns of the public and its communities;
- for scrutiny to be carried out by independent minded governors who lead and own the scrutiny process; and
- to drive improvement in public services.

COMMISSIONING BODY ROLE

Membership 2013/14

Councillor Bush (Chair)

Councillor Hopkins (Vice-Chair)

Councillors Brazier, S Chalk, Fry, Gandy, Mason, Smith and Witherspoon

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee at Redditch Borough Council is designed to act as a commissioning body. The Committee has the power to authorise policy reviews and to scrutinise issues of local interest in depth.

This year the Overview and Scrutiny Committee has commissioned a number of strategic reviews that have been conducted by Task Groups.

There are nine members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The Committee meets approximately every four weeks, convening a week before the meeting of the Executive Committee. This provides Members with an opportunity to pre-scrutinise the work of the Executive and to ensure that decision-making processes remain transparent and accountable.



The Overview and Scrutiny Committee, 2013/14. Featured are (back row from left to right) Councillors Fry, Mason, Bush (Chair) and Brazier and (front row left to right) Councillors Smith, Hopkins (Vice Chair) Witherspoon and Gandy. Councillor S Chalk was not present during the meeting when this photograph was taken.

DEVELOPMENTS IN SCRUTINY 2013/14

During the year a number of changes were made to streamline the Overview and Scrutiny process at the instigation of Members. This included:

- Reducing the number of items on the agenda for each meeting to enable Members to dedicate sufficient time to scrutinize topics effectively.
- Removal of standard items from the agenda which had been noted and had not resulted in any constructive action.
- Changes to the recommendation tracking process.
- A wholesale redesign of the Crime and Disorder Scrutiny Panel.
- Amendments to the template for final scrutiny reports and the annual report.

These changes were made to the Overview and Scrutiny process at a time when transformation was initiated for Democratic Services. As part of this process two service measures were introduced, which were designed to help assess the reduction of waste in the Committee system. The two measures focus on:

- The number of reports that are submitted for noting (rather than resulting in any constructive action).
- The number of reports that are submitted late for publication, as this then requires additional time and resources to produce further paperwork for Members' consideration.

The early work initiated by Members to streamline the Overview and Scrutiny process at the Council has ensured that the Committee and Officers reporting to the Committee have performed well in relation to both of these measures.

PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY AND BUDGET SCRUTINY

During 2013/14, the Committee was selective regarding the topics that it chose for pre-decision scrutiny. In recognition of the difficult economic situation for local government Members have chosen to focus on pre-scrutinising budget items prior to any decisions being taken by the Executive Committee.

As part of this process the following items were presented for the Committee's consideration during the year:

- Two presentations focusing on the anticipated budget position for Council services in the following three year period (presented in December 2013 and January 2014 respectively).
- The Medium Term Financial Plan for the period 2014/15 – 2016/17.
- The Fees and Charges Review 2014/15.
- The Housing Revenue Account Initial Estimate 2014/15.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee has been consulted regarding Officers' plans to initiate the Council's budget setting process at an earlier date in future years. The Committee expects to be fully engaged in these budget preparations and has already arranged to pre-scrutinise the Future Years Financial Plan, which will outline potential savings that could be made in 2016/17, in the new municipal year.

MONITORING RESPONSES – SCRUTINY RECOMENDATIONS

As part of the streamlining of Overview and Scrutiny processes this year the Committee altered their approach to monitoring the implementation of scrutiny recommendations. In previous years a monitoring update report focusing on action taken in response to Task Group recommendations would be presented for the Committee's consideration 12 months after the completion of the review. The Committee also received biannual updates on action taken to implement recommendations made directly by the Committee.

Members increasingly felt that this form of monitoring did not encourage a timely approach to enacting the recommendations. There was also a considerable amount of text in these reports, due to the length of time covered, which made it difficult for Members to identify areas of concern or outcomes that could be highlighted as examples of good practice.

For these reasons Members agreed that in future update reports should be provided on a quarterly basis for the Committee's consideration. Enacted recommendations are now reported back to the Committee once and after this promoted on the Council's website. Unimplemented recommendations continue to be reported to the Committee until they have been resolved.

CRIME AND DISORDER SCRUTINY

Membership: Councillors Brazier (Chair), Fry, Griffin, P Hill and R Hill.

The Police and Justice Act 2006 required every local authority in England and Wales from April 2009 to have a designated Committee with the responsibility for scrutinising the work of the local Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership (CRDP). The North Worcestershire Community Safety Partnership is the CDRP in Redditch.

The Crime and Disorder Scrutiny Panel, established in 2010 as a sub-committee of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, was allocated responsibility for scrutinising the work of the North Worcestershire Community Safety Partnership on behalf of Redditch Borough Council.

As part of the streamlined approach to scrutiny this year a decision was taken to reduce the standard number of meetings of this panel from four to one meeting per annum. Whilst the panel will retain the power to convene additional meetings as and when required this frequency will bring the panel in line with standard practice amongst local authorities across Worcestershire. The frequency of meetings was also established at this level in recognition of the fact that the panel had only made three recommendations in the previous three years.

HEALTH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

Councillor Witherspoon continued to act as the Council's representative on the Worcestershire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC) in 2013/14. District Councils are invited to appoint representatives to the HOSC to ensure that the interests of the district in relation to health are taken into account.

During the year Councillor Witherspoon advised Members that a range of issues had been discussed by HOSC including the following topics:

- The future of services at the Alexandra Hospital in Redditch.
- Relocation of the West Midlands Ambulance Service hubs.
- End of life and palliative care in Worcestershire.
- The reintroduction of the 111 NHS contact service.
- The Worcestershire Health and Wellbeing Board's Mental Wellbeing and Suicide Prevention Plan.
- Care for elderly residents living independently.
- The Well Connected Programme for the co-ordination of health and social care for local people.

WORK PROGRAMME PLANNING 2013/14

On 12th June 2013 a Scrutiny Work Programme Planning Event took place. This event, which was attended by 14 Members, was delivered as an Overview and Scrutiny training session. The aim of this session was:

- To provide Members with an overview of the powers available to scrutiny.
- To consider the strategic direction of the Council and the role that Overview and Scrutiny could play in this process.
- To provide Members with an opportunity to identify topics that might be suitable for further scrutiny during the year.

During the course of the event Members also received information about the Council's performance dashboard. Members were advised that the performance measures that had been developed for various Council services as part of the transformation programme would be monitored and the data made available for Members' consideration on the dashboard. This would help to support the Committee's role monitoring the performance Of services at the Council.

Unfortunately, at the time of writing the dashboard has not been finalised. Consequently, the Committee has not been able to dedicate as much time to performance monitoring as had been requested by Members the previous year. It is anticipated that this situation will be addressed in future years once the dashboard has been finalised.

However, following the training event a number of Task Group reviews were launched by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. By the end of the year Members were participating in five Task Group exercises, including a joint review hosted by another local authority. The majority of Task Groups commissioned by the Committee are due to be completed in the next few months.



Councillor David Bush, Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, presenting feedback during the Overview and Scrutiny training event in June 2013.

HOUSING DENSITY TARGETS TASK GROUP

Membership: Councillors Bush (Chair), Bennett and Gandy (Councillor Gandy replaced Councillor Clayton in May 2013 following his appointment to the Executive Committee).

Completed: July 2013

The Housing Density Targets Task Group was established in February 2013 to review the impact of the Council's existing housing density requirements on the range of housing provision in the Borough. It was intended that the findings of the review would then be included as part of the Council's consultation into Local Plan No 4 which ran concurrently.

The Local Plan 4 outlines the vision and policies regarding what Redditch will aim to be like in 2030. It states that any housing development should take density limits into account, though each potential new housing site would be assessed on its own individual merits.

In particular the review focused on the contents of Policy 5, part of the Local Plan 4 which detailed the suggested densities of dwelling in proposed residential developments. At the end of the review Members brought forward a recommendation which focused specifically on the content of that policy with regard to housing density levels on: sites of less than 0.16 hectares, sites of more than 0.16 hectares and bungalow developments on sites of more than 0.16 hectares.

This recommendation was approved and helped to shape the content of the final version of Local Plan 4.



ABBEY STADIUM TASK GROUP

Membership: Councillors Gandy (Chair), Fry, Mason and Derek Taylor
Deadline: The review is due to be completed in June 2014.

The Abbey Stadium Task Group review was launched in September 2013. The group was tasked primarily with investigating actions that could be taken to enhance the services available to customers at the venue. Early in the review process Members were advised that Officers were undertaking a separate review of the gym and dance facilities available at the stadium, the findings from which are due to form the basis for a business case that will be presented to the Executive Committee in due course. For this reason, the group has not been focusing on those facilities, though they are intending to pre-scrutinise the business case prior to a decision being made on this subject.

During the course of the review Members have gathered evidence from a variety of sources. A number of expert witnesses have been interviewed, including Officers representing the Council's Leisure Service, Human Resources and Finance teams as well as the Portfolio Holder for Leisure and Tourism. The group has also visited the Abbey Stadium and visited Evesham Leisure Centre and Stratford Leisure Centre to learn about the methods of service delivery adopted at other leisure venues in the region.



The Task Group visited the Abbey Stadium in September 2013. The Members featured in this picture are (from left to right) Councillors Mason, Fry, Taylor and Gandy.

FOOTBALL TASK GROUP

Membership: Councillors Bush (Chair), Brazier, Fry, Gandy, P Hill and Witherspoon.

Deadline: The review is due to be completed in April 2014.

The Football Task Group was established in January 2014 to review football provision generally within the Borough of Redditch including that which is delivered by Redditch United Football Club. It is also reviewing the relationship between the Borough Council and Redditch United Football Club following the Executive's consideration of the Club's proposals for relocation in November 2013.

The review is at its very early stages, but has already interviewed a number of Council Officers, the Chairman of Redditch United Football Club and volunteers involved with community football delivered by the club. It has also considered a Football Participation Report for Redditch prepared by the FA which has highlighted a number of interesting points which will be investigated further as the Task Group progresses. Representatives of the FA will be invited to attend a future meeting. The Task Group are planning a meeting to which local stakeholders will be invited to discuss current/future football provision and needs within the Borough.



JOINT WRS TASK GROUP

Redditch Borough Council representatives: Councillors Mason (lead) and Hopkins (substitute).

Deadline: The review is due to be completed in June 2014.

The Joint WRS Scrutiny Task Group was established in 2013 to review the shared Worcestershire Regulatory Services (WRS). Elected Members from each of the Councils in Worcestershire, including Redditch Borough Council, have been appointed to the review which is being hosted by Bromsgrove District Council as the host authority for the shared service.

The key objectives of the review were for the group: to review the final business case for the shared service; to compare previous service levels at individual local authorities with current service levels in the shared service; to assess the performance of the services compared to previous performance levels; to investigate levels of customer satisfaction; and to review the governance arrangements for the shared service.

The group has gathered a large amount of evidence about WRS since their first meeting in September 2013 including performance data and customer feedback, in the form of compliments and complaints about the service. Members have interviewed a number of expert witnesses including representatives of the WRS Management Board, representatives of the Worcestershire Shared Services Joint Committee, staff employed in WRS including the Head of Regulatory Services and the Chief Executive, Section 151 Officer and Legal Services Manager from the host authority. The group has also visited Wyatt House in Worcester, the base for WRS, and attended meetings of the Joint Committee to observe the decision making process.

During the review Members have become increasingly concerned about the potential implications of the budget cuts proposed by partners for the future of shared regulatory services. It is likely that financial considerations will therefore feature significantly in the group's final report.

A variety of services are delivered by WRS including Licensing, Trading Standards and Environmental Health services.



LANDSCAPING TASK GROUP

Membership: Councillors Hopkins (Chair), Baker, Braley, M Chalk and Smith.

Deadline: The review is due to be completed in April 2014.

The Landscaping Task Group review was launched in October 2013. The Committee agreed to launch the review due to the fact that Members were reporting a significant number of enquiries from local residents about landscaping services.

The group was tasked with: exploring the Council's current approaches to delivering landscaping services; identifying actions that could be taken by elected Members to influence the delivery of services in their wards; proposing actions that could be taken to improve communications about landscaping services to elected Councillors, clarifying the Council's responsibilities in relation to tree roots impacting on pavements; and finding out about the legislative position for disputes about landscaping matters involving private properties.

The group has gathered evidence in a variety of ways throughout the review. This has included a visit to the Landscaping team based in Crossgates, and field trips to observe the trees intervention team and place intervention teams in action. Members have also interviewed representatives of the Environmental Services team to learn more about current developments in the delivery of landscaping services and potential opportunities to increase revenue for the Council through different practices in the Environmental Services team.



VOLUNTARY SECTOR TASK GROUP

**Membership: Councillors Witherspoon (Chair), Brazier and R Hill.
(Councillor Baker resigned from this group in November 2013).**

Deadline: The review is due to conclude in July 2014.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee launched the Voluntary Sector Task Group review in October 2013. The review was established to provide Members with an opportunity to investigate the support provided to local Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) organisations by both the Council and partner organisations and to identify whether additional support could be provided in a difficult economic climate.

The group was aware that the Council's grant funding policy had been reviewed by the Third Sector Task and Finish Group in 2008. Members have considered this previous group's report and are keen to build on their findings. During the review the group has also interviewed a number of expert witnesses about; the Council's grants programme, Council tax rate relief, the links between the Redditch Local Strategic Partnership and the VCS, links between the Area of Highest Needs project and VCS organisations, and the existing partnership working between various Council departments and VCS organisations. Members have also been impressed to learn about the significant value of the contribution made by local volunteers to Council services and it is likely that this will be highlighted in further detail in the group's final report.

In the next few months the group is keen to concentrate on consulting with local representatives of the VCS. This will include visiting some groups to discuss the needs of the sector as well as the circulation of a questionnaire to elicit feedback from a wider cross section of VCS groups that are active in the Borough.



The Task Group have undertaken a small number of field trips during the review including this visit to Community House in March 2014. Featured are (from left to right) Councillors R Hill, Witherspoon (Chair) and Brazier.

SCRUTINY IN THE FUTURE

This year the Overview and Scrutiny Committee has launched a number of reviews and has made some recommendations, many of which have been endorsed by the Executive Committee.

Members are aware that there will be further challenges in the year ahead. In particular, the Council's budget savings programme may impact on scrutiny both in terms of the subjects that Members choose to review and in relation to the resources available to support scrutiny.

Officers have been tasked with securing efficiency savings, particularly in enabling services. Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee acknowledged the need for savings to be made in all areas, particularly to enabling services, when they considered the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan 2013/14 - 2016/17 in February 2014. At this stage Members discussed actions that might need to be taken to achieve savings in the Committee process whilst minimising the impact on their work and the benefits of Members' work to the local community.

The budget proposals included a redesign of Democratic Services which will enable the Council to secure savings of £68,000. The three features of this redesign with direct implications for Overview and Scrutiny are:

- The reduction in the number of Committee meetings from 12 to 9 in the municipal year.
- The deletion of two vacant Democratic Services Officers' posts.
- The proposal for a maximum of two Task Groups to run at any one time, though this would not affect the potential to hold Short, Sharp Reviews as and when required.

In this context Members will need to ensure that the topics that are selected for scrutiny are priority issues for the Council and its customers and lead to constructive outcomes.

MEMBERSHIP GALLERY

The following Councillors have served as members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee this year.



Councillor David Bush
Chair of the Committee



Councillor Gay Hopkins
Vice Chair



Councillor
Andrew Brazier



Councillor
Simon Chalk



Councillor
Andy Fry



Councillor
Carole Gandy



Councillor
Alan Mason



Councillor
Yvonne Smith



Councillor
Pat Witherspoon

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Committee wishes to thank all those who took the time to provide information and advice during the course of the review, and to everyone who participated in any public consultation. The Committee would especially like to thank those listed below for taking the time to provide evidence and attend scrutiny meetings:

- Ray Cooke (Leisure Services Manager)
- Michael Craggs (Democratic Services Officer until October 2013)
- John Godwin (Head of Leisure and Cultural Services)
- Sam Morgan (Financial Services Manager)
- Jayne Pickering (Executive Director of Finance and Corporate Resources)
- Guy Revans (Head of Environmental Services)
- John Staniland (Executive Director of Planning, Regeneration, Regulatory and Housing Services until January 2014)
- Carl Walker (Environmental Services Manager)

Members would also like to thank the Redditch Standard, in particular Harriet Ernstsons, for their regular attendance at meetings of the Committee throughout the year and for helping to publicise its work to a wider audience.

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY CONTACT DETAILS

For additional copies of this report, or to find out more about Overview and Scrutiny at Redditch Borough Council, please contact:

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Further information about the Overview and Scrutiny process at Redditch Borough Council can also be found on the Council's dedicated web pages. To access these web pages please use the web address attached here:

<http://redditch.whub.org.uk/cms/council-and-democracy/councillors-and-committees/overview-and-scrutiny.aspx>