

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Tuesday, 13th January, 2015

MINUTES

Present:

Councillor Jane Potter (Chair), Councillor Gay Hopkins (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Joe Baker, Michael Braley, Andrew Fry, Carole Gandy, Alan Mason, David Thain and Pat Witherspoon

Officers:

Jayne Pickering and Sam Morgan

Democratic Services Officers:

J Bayley and A Scarce

61. APOLOGIES AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors David Bush and Paul Swansborough with Councillors David Thain and Michael Braley attending as substitutes respectively.

62. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND OF PARTY WHIP

Councillor Jane Potter declared an other discloseable interest in respect of Minute No. 67 Proposals for Change by Tudor Grange Academy Short, Sharp Review – Response to the Group's Recommendations. She left the room and took no part in the discussions in respect of this item.

63. MINUTES

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting held on 10th November 2014, be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting held on 24th November 2014, be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

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Chair

64. 10TH NOVEMBER 2014 MEETING - ACTIONS

The report had been prepared following the meeting on 10th November when a large amount of additional information had been requested by Members. Members had received a number of updates on separate items by email, but it was felt that it would be more useful to collate all the information into an action list and to present to Committee.

Officers acknowledged that the budget scrutiny process had not been as successful as anticipated and that a review would be carried out of the how the information was provided together with comparative data as requested for the previous three years. Whilst going through the report the data around the Shopmobility scheme was highlighted along with the detailed information in respect of the IT licences.

There had been a late response which was tabled at the meeting, which Officers brought to the attention of Members, in respect of the number of enquiries received from the Housing Options Team and the effectiveness of the work it carried out. It was highlighted that as part of the front line service the Council was recording demand (what the customer asked for) and the demand in context (understanding the wider context of the customer's enquiry) and trialling different ways of working.

Members who were not present at the meeting on 10th November questioned the need for and value of some of the information that had been requested, particularly as there was no further action that the Committee could take on these matters. The format of a number of the responses was also questioned and concerns were raised about inconsistency in terms of the presentation of data. Members suggested that in future where financial information was provided this would be better presented in a table format.

From the information received Members considered in detail the update provided in respect of the use of the Shopmobility facility and questioned whether this service should be investigated further. In particular it was questioned whether provision of the service after 3.00 pm should be reviewed as from the information it was clear that the majority of usage was in the mornings. Officers confirmed that this was the sort of area of detail which would be produced in order to see how further savings could be made.

65. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN 2015/16 TO 2017/18 - PRE-SCRUTINY

Officers presented the Medium Term Financial Plan 2015/16 to 2017/18 and highlighted the following areas:

- A balanced budget would be presented at the February meeting of the Committee.
- The government settlement was slightly less than anticipated.
- A Council Tax increase of 1.9% per annum had been included and any new build properties had also been factored in for Council Tax purposes.
- The new localised regime on Business Rates, which took effect from April 2013, and the pooling arrangements.
- The transformation work being carried out and the savings made from the different ways the Council was working.

Following presentation of the report Members raised the following points:

- The use of reserves and monies expected to be received in respect of the sale of Threadneedle House. (Officers agreed to provide Members with an update on the sale of the property outside of the meeting.)
- The Shopmobility scheme and the contribution received from the Kingfisher Shopping Centre, which it was noted had been reduced over recent years, and the increased footfall within the Centre which had recently been reported.
- The costs of IER and any contribution received from central Government.

Officers confirmed that the report received at the February meeting would contain more detail in respect of both unavoidable pressures and savings to be made, together with a sustainable three year plan. It was confirmed that the predicted savings included within that plan would be carefully monitored and details provided to Members in order that Heads of Services could be held to account if necessary.

The Chair commented that she was disappointed with the number of formatting and typographic errors within the report. This was acknowledged by Officers and would be taken up with the relevant teams after the meeting.

The Chair commented that it was very difficult for the Committee to carry out constructive pre-scrutiny work when the reports were not received until the day prior to the meeting and questioned whether

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there was anyway that this could be changed. Whilst accepting the difficulty this caused, Officers informed Members that it was a Constitutional issue. Officers highlighted that the budget report due to be considered at the Committee's February meeting would allow more time for Members to consider the budget and any comments would be reported directly into the Council meeting when the final decision on the Council's budget would be made. Officers also acknowledged that the budget scrutiny process had not run as smoothly as expected and this would be reviewed and a lesson learned exercise carried out in order for improvements to be made in future years. It was suggested that a report should be brought to the Committee in September so that Members could have a more structured and detailed input into the budget setting process in future years.

RECOMMENDED that

Officers approach the Kingfisher Shopping Centre in respect of contributing further funding for the Shopmobility scheme; and

RESOLVED that

the Medium Turn Financial plan 2015/16 to 2017/18 be noted.

66. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT RENT AND CAPITAL 2015 - 16 - PRE-SCRUTINY

Officers introduced the report and in doing so highlighted to Members that it included the draft estimates for the Housing Revenue Account and the proposed dwelling rents for 2015/16. Members were reminded of the changes to the system from March 2012 when the housing revenue account subsidy was replaced with a devolved system of Council housing finance called self-financing, which resulted in the Council borrowing £98.9m from the PWLB. The report also recommended a rent increase of 2.2% and examples of how this would affect residents were discussed.

The Committee considered the Right to Buy Scheme in detail and officers confirmed that they would provide Members with further details. Members also discussed the effect of rent being paid over a 48 week period on the cash flow and it was noted that this would also refer to those who paid Council Tax over 10 rather than 12 months.

RESOLVED that

the recommendations within the Housing Revenue Account Initial Estimate 2015/16 Report be noted.

67. PROPOSALS FOR CHANGE BY TUDOR GRANGE ACADEMY SHORT, SHARP REVIEW - RESPONSE TO THE GROUP'S RECOMMENDATIONS

Officers explained that the report provided the Committee with the opportunity to consider the responses received from both the Executive Committee and Worcestershire County Council (WCC). The Executive Committee had, at its meeting on 16th December, endorsed all the recommendations proposed by the Proposals for Change by Tudor Grange Academy Short, Sharp Review Group and approved recommendation 1. It was understood that the letter referred to was in the process of being drafted.

WCC had in principle agreed to the group's second recommendation, subject to a few amendments. Unfortunately, WCC had rejected recommendation 3 and an explanation had been provided within the report.

Councillor Pat Witherspoon, as Chair of the Short, Sharp Review, explained she was delighted to hear of WCC's approval of this recommendation and that dialogue between the County and the Borough would be taking place in Spring 2015 to look at the change in school selection. Councillor Witherspoon had been disappointed at the rejection of recommendation 3 as this was an area where all involved in the process, including parents had found the language used difficult to follow and it was not unreasonable for the review to have asked for these to be written in plain English.

RESOLVED that

the proposals for Change by Tudor Grange Academy Short, Sharp Review – Response to the Group's Recommendations Report be noted.

(Prior to the consideration of the Proposals for Change by Tudor Grange Academy Short, Sharp Review – response to the Group's Recommendations Councillor Potter declared an other discloseable interest in the subject as a school governor at Tudor Grange Academy. She left the room during consideration of this item and did not take part in the discussions.)

68. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY RECOMMENDATION TRACKER - QUARTERLY UPDATE REPORT

Officers explained that, as requested the last meeting of the Committee when the Tracker had been presented, the Chair had considered and amended the document prior to publication. The recommendations were recorded in chronological order and included an estimated completion date where available. The updates in respect of the Market Task Group Report had not been included as the Committee had received a full update on these at its last meeting.

Members discussed the following in more detail:

- Access for Disabled People Recommendation 2. Members were concerned that earlier in the meeting they had been asking the Kingfisher Centre to provide more money for the Shopmobility scheme yet under this recommendation they had agreed to provide the canopy which would require funding. Officers agreed to discuss this with the relevant Head of Service.
- Voluntary and Community Sector Recommendation 1c The new grant application form templates were noted. However Members continued to be concerned about the length and detail requested in respect of the smaller, £500 grants and how this could potentially be off putting for small groups. Officers agreed to discuss this with the relevant Head of Service, as there was also an implication as to the amount of resources needed to process these forms.
- Voluntary and Community Sector Recommendation 8 – Staff Volunteering Award. The Chair of the review group, Councillor Witherspoon, whilst accepting that there were difficulties around this, was keen for the work of volunteers to be promoted throughout the Council through a communications campaign.
- Voluntary and Community Sector Recommendation 9 – the “Redditch Hour” on Twitter. Officers were asked to follow up the initial contact made with BARN in the hope that a response would be received.

RESOLVED that

- 1) **Landscaping Recommendation 6 be removed from the Tracker with no further action being taken; and**
- 2) **the report be noted.**

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69. EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MINUTES AND SCRUTINY OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE'S WORK PROGRAMME

Members considered the Executive Committee's Minutes from 16th December the latest edition of the Work Programme. Officers confirmed that there were no further updates.

The Chair once again, with support from the Committee, raised the issue of receiving reports at such short notice when carrying out pre-scrutiny work and the restrictions this placed on the potential for scrutiny to make a constructive contribution to the decision making process. Members therefore requested that this matter be brought to the attention of the Constitutional Review Working Group.

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the Executive Committee held on 16th December and the latest edition of the Executive Committee's Work Programme be noted.

70. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

Members considered the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's Work Programme. Officers highlighted that the Market Consultation Report, which had been referred to at the previous meeting, had been due to be considered at the shared services Client Management Group in January. Subject to the outcome of this meeting the report would then be then considered by the Executive Committee, though had not yet been added to Executive Committee Work Programme. Once a date had been set for the consideration of the Executive Committee Officers would add the report to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's Work Programme.

The Chair suggested to Members, who were in agreement, that due to there being no business for the meeting scheduled for 7th April, this be cancelled.

RESOLVED that

- 1) the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting arranged for 7th April 2015 be cancelled; and**
- 2) the Committee's Work Programme be noted.**

71. TASK GROUPS - PROGRESS REPORTS

Provision of Support Networks for the LGBT Community- Chair, Councillor Joe Baker

Councillor Baker informed Members that whilst the group had only held two meetings they had gathered a lot of information and had been concerned at the apparent lack of support provided within the Borough to the LGBT community. The Group had set questions for future witnesses including representatives of West Mercia Police and the Community Safety team who had been carrying out work on both hate crime and within schools. Members also hoped to consult with Stonewall an organisation which had carried out a lot of research around LGBT awareness within schools. It appeared that Birmingham City Council were forward thinking within the Council and the community and the group were planning on visiting a number of venues.

Tackling Obesity Task Group – Chair, Councillor Jane Potter

Councillor Potter informed Members that since the last Committee meeting the group had looked at the findings from the Worcestershire Viewpoint survey for residents 65% of which had said they were worried about obesity and its effects. The group had also met with Officers to discuss the use of social media. The next meeting would include interviews with representatives from Public Health at WCC. The group then had a meeting planned where they would interview the Leader and Chief Executive of the Council before considering recommendations and the content of its final report.

Councillor Potter highlighted that the group had been disappointed with the response received from the Redditch and Bromsgrove Clinical Commissioning Group, who after protracted discussions, had been unable to attend. It was hoped, however that they would provide written responses to a number of questions.

72. HEALTH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Councillor Pat Witherspoon, the Council's representative on the Worcestershire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC) informed Members that the next meeting of HOSC would take place on 21st January 2015.