

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Thursday, 30 April 2009

MINUTES

Present:

Councillor Phil Mould (Chair), Councillor David Smith (Vice-Chair) and Councillors K Banks, M Chalk, R King, W Norton, D Thomas and D Hunt

Non-Member:

Councillor Hunt (Substitute)

Also Present:

Councillors M Braley, A Clayton, J Cookson, W King, C MacMillan, J Pearce, B Quinney and M Collins

Officers:

A Baldwin, S Mullins, J Smith, J Smith and J Staniland

Committee Services Officer:

J Bayley and H Saunders

209. APOLOGIES AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors Brunner, Hartnett and Taylor.

210. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND OF PARTY WHIP

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

211. MINUTES

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on Wednesday 8 April be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

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Chair

212. ACTIONS LIST

Officers reported, in relation to item 4 on the Committee's Actions List, that IT Services would attempt to purchase the website domain name for the National Angling Museum on behalf of the Council. Members agreed that Officers should, if possible, purchase the four available options for this domain name:

www.nationalanglingmuseum.com;

www.nationalanglingmuseum.co.uk;

www.nationalanglingmuseum.org; and

www.nationalanglingmuseum.org.uk. Officers explained that the collective cost of purchasing these domain names would be £80.00.

RESOLVED that

1. **the four available options for a National Angling Museum website domain name be purchased by Officers; and**
2. **the Actions List be noted.**

213. CALL-IN AND PRE-SCRUTINY

There were no call-ins or suggestions for pre-scrutiny.

214. TASK & FINISH REVIEWS - DRAFT SCOPING DOCUMENTS

There were no draft scoping documents for pre-scrutiny.

215. TASK AND FINISH GROUPS - PROGRESS REPORTS

The Committee received reports in relation to current reviews.

- a) Council Flat Communal Cleaning – Chair, Councillor P Mould

Councillor Mould explained that the Council Flat Communal Cleaning Task and Finish Group had hosted a consultation event to which leaseholder tenants had been invited. This consultation event had been poorly attended. However, those people who had attended the event had been broadly in favour of the Group's draft proposals.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Thursday, 30 April 2009

Councillor Mould informed Members that the Group would be meeting again in May. He explained that it was likely that the Group would be recommending that the terms of the cleaning contract be extended to ensure that all Council residential properties received a cleansing service in communal areas.

b) Dial-A-Ride – Chair, Councillor R King

Councillor King informed the Committee that, as agreed at the previous meeting of the Committee, he had met with relevant Officers to discuss the terms of reference for the review. As a consequence of this meeting the objectives had been altered to extend the scope of the exercise. He informed Members that every effort had been taken to ensure that this exercise would not duplicate the review of the Dial-A-Ride service that was being undertaken by Officers. The scrutiny review would focus on the Council's long-term vision for the service from 2010/11 whilst the Officer review would focus on more immediate considerations for 2009/10.

Members were informed that the other Members of the Group would be Councillors Chance, A Clayton and Norton. The review was scheduled to be completed within six months.

c) Housing Mutual Exchange – Chair, Councillor Smith

Councillor Smith reported that the Group had convened for a second meeting on Wednesday 29 April. They had concluded that the Council's Housing Mutual Exchange procedures were satisfactory and that there was therefore no need for the Task and Finish review to continue.

The Group had approved one recommendation for the consideration of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The Chair explained that the Group had felt that the procedures that were followed by Officers during a mutual exchange needed to be more explicitly stated in the Council's Housing Mutual Exchange Policy and Procedure documentation. Members were informed that there were no financial implications attached to this recommendation as the recommendation referred to current practice by Officers.

d) National Angling Museum – Chair, Councillor P Mould

Councillor Mould informed Members that the other Members who had been appointed to the Group were Councillors Enderby, Hopkins, Hunt and Norton. He explained that

Councillor Quinney had expressed an interest in the review and would be attending meetings of the Group.

RECOMMENDED that

subject to suitable rewording by Officers the following details should be incorporated into the Council's Housing Mutual Exchange Policy and Procedure:

“The Repair and Maintenance Officers should be employed to make the initial checks on each property to establish that no unauthorised alterations have been made to the properties and whether any rechargeable works need to be undertaken.

Any defects should be photographed and the details placed on file together with written reports concerning both properties.

Electrical tests for both properties should be arranged by Repairs and Maintenance.

The Tenancy Officer who is responsible for the mutual exchange together with the tenants involved should be advised in writing of any works required to be undertaken by them or the Council.

Normal Housing Mutual Exchange and Home Swap procedures should commence after the actions listed above have been completed satisfactorily. (i.e. the Tenancy Officer responsible for the exchange should visit both properties with both tenants).”

RESOLVED that

- 1) the revised terms of reference for the Dial-A-Ride review be approved; and**
- 2) the Task and Finish Group update reports be noted.**

216. EMERGENCY PLANNING

The Emergency Planning Officer from Worcestershire County Council delivered a presentation for the consideration of all Members.

The Committee was informed that the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 provided the legislative framework for emergency planning in England and Wales. This legislation had been introduced following the fuel dispute in 2000, the flooding of 2000 and the foot and mouth outbreak in 2001. The Civil Contingencies Act 2004 comprised of two substantive parts. The first part related to roles and responsibilities for local providers, including local authorities. The second part was focused on emergency planning powers and the legislative measures that might be required from central government in such emergencies.

The Emergency Planning Officer explained that there were two categories of status for bodies that were involved in responding to emergencies. Category One responders were organisations at the core of an emergency response which included: local authorities; emergency services; the Health Protection Agency; the Environment Agency; and the local Primary Care Trust (PCT). Category Two responders were bodies that might be required to take some action in response to the emergency though they would not necessarily be involved in planning the response. Category Two responders included bodies such as utilities companies.

The Civil Contingencies Act 2004 placed a number of statutory duties on Category One responders. Organisations within this category were required to: assess local risks; develop a local risk register; and agree emergency plans. As part of this process local authorities were obliged to ensure business continuity. This included business continuity in the delivery of statutory Council services.

The Committee discussed local arrangements for responding to emergencies. They noted that the Local Resilience Forum which applied to Redditch involved Category One responders based in Herefordshire, Shropshire and Worcestershire. Members expressed concerns that operating in such a wide geographic area could create barriers to efficient emergency planning. Officers explained that Local Resilience Forum areas were organised in accordance with the areas covered by local police forces. West Mercia Police, which operated in Redditch, were based in each of these three Counties and therefore the geographical spread for this Local Resilience Forum could not be altered.

The Committee also noted that the Worcestershire Joint Scrutiny into Flooding Task and Finish Group had concluded that problems with communications had negatively impacted on responses to the floods in July 2007. Worcestershire County Council had worked to

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Thursday, 30 April 2009

address these problems by purchasing a new generator which could be used by the Emergency Response Centre in the event of a power failure during an emergency. The Council had also entered into discussions with West Mercia Police concerning the possible use of police radio coverage in the event of an emergency.

Members discussed the differences between Gold, Silver and Bronze organisations during an emergency. Officers explained that Gold responders were organisations which were involved at the strategic level in co-ordinating responses to an emergency. Silver responders were organisations which were involved in planning responses at the tactical level. Finally, Bronze responders were organisations that provided front line responses to emergencies.

Officers confirmed that they were in the process of updating the Council's Emergency Plan. The contents of this document would be reported for the consideration of the Executive Committee in due course as this was the Committee which had been designated with responsibility for co-ordinating the Council's emergency planning measures.

Members discussed emergency planning arrangements and noted that a number of emergency services and utilities companies organised annual emergency planning exercises. They suggested that it might be useful to implement a similar measure at Redditch Borough Council and that this should be considered in further detail by the Executive Committee.

The Emergency Planning Officer informed Members that following the floods in 2007 Worcestershire County Council had established a number of temporary 'hubs' in areas that had been particularly badly affected. These had been attended by representatives of the police service, local insurance companies and other relevant organisations who had provided relevant advice where required to members of the public.

Members concluded by noting that a number of key lessons had been learned following the floods in 2007. These had been identified by both the Worcestershire Joint Scrutiny into Flooding Task and Finish Group and in the Pitt Review into the floods. Members expressed their hopes that many of these lessons would inform an improvement in the performance of Category One responders to future emergencies.

The Chair thanked the Emergency Planning Officer for attending the meeting.

RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

217. COUNCILLOR CALLS FOR ACTION (CCFA)

Officers explained that following recent legislation a new Councillor Calls for Action (CCfA) process had been introduced. This process had come into force on 1 April 2009. The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 had introduced a new power which covered the referral of CCfAs to Overview and Scrutiny Committees.

Members were informed that CCfAs would provide local Councillors with an opportunity to resolve issues at the local neighbourhood and ward levels. As part of this process Councillors would need to work closely with Council Officers, residents and representatives of partner organisations to address particular issues. Any Councillor, including Members who were not involved in the scrutiny process, could pursue a CCfA.

Officers clarified that CCfAs would not generally encompass individual complaints which had not been resolved through existing complaints processes. These complaints would continue to be referred to the Local Government Ombudsman for further consideration. There would also be other exclusions from the process, including calls for action that were considered 'vexatious'.

The CCfA was designed to act as a 'long stop' where other attempts to resolve a situation had failed. It was envisaged that a CCfA would only be referred to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in cases where all other possible action had been exhausted. Members were informed that in some cases it would not be possible to achieve a satisfactory solution to the issue though the CCfA might be resolved.

Officers explained that the Council had the discretion to specify how CCfAs would work in the area and to set its own procedure. The Committee agreed that Members should consider and make recommendations about the appropriate procedural arrangements for CCfAs at Redditch Borough Council. To facilitate this process Members requested that further information about the CCfA processes adopted at other local authorities be made available for the further consideration of the Committee.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Thursday, 30 April 2009

Members were informed that both Birmingham City Council and Worcestershire County Council had introduced CCfA forms as part of their scrutiny processes. These forms would be completed by a Councillor and submitted for the consideration of their Overview and Scrutiny Committees. The contents of the forms were designed to inform scrutiny Members about whether all alternative forms of action had been exhausted before the matter was referred for the consideration of the Committee. Officers suggested that it might be useful to introduce a similar form for Redditch Borough Council to ensure that an interim measure could be put in place to respond to CCfAs until a final process had been approved by Members.

RESOLVED that

- 1) Officers provide details about Councillor Calls for Action processes adopted at other local authorities at a following meeting of the Committee;**
- 2) Officers produce a form for Councillor Calls for Action in consultation with the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Committee; and**
- 3) subject to the comments above the report be noted.**

218. REDDITCH ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

The Portfolio Holder for the Local Environment, Planning and Transport, Councillor MacMillan, introduced the item. He explained that the Council's Economic Development Strategy was in a draft format. During the course of developing the strategy it had become clear that the Council would need to work closely with partner organisations to ensure that economic development of the Borough was achieved effectively.

Councillor MacMillan cautioned that the Council also had to be realistic about what could be achieved in terms of encouraging economic development within the Borough. The Council had limited access to resources and was operating in a difficult economic climate. Under these circumstances the Economic Development Strategy had been designed to focus on the Council's potential to facilitate long-term developments.

Officers explained that the draft Economic Development Strategy had been divided into four separate sections. Each section had been subdivided into priorities. The Strategy provided a justification

for each of these priorities. The Strategy also contained an action plan outlining how the Council intended to achieve those priorities.

Members were informed that the purpose of the Economic Development Strategy was to encourage diversification in the local economy. The Economic Advisory Panel had considered various options including potential developments in the green collar industry, which would involve the delivery of environmentally friendly services and products. The Panel was also reviewing options for raising the wages available to people working in Redditch.

Councillor MacMillan explained that there had been two meetings between representatives of Redditch Borough Council and the Regional Development Agency Advantage West Midlands. Unfortunately, many of the actions proposed by Redditch for implementation within the Borough were already being addressed at other locations situated within the Midlands. However, these meetings had raised the profile of Redditch and Officers had obtained relevant contact details for personnel working at the Regional Development Agency who might be able to help the Council to develop some of the long-term plans detailed within the Strategy.

Members also discussed the business units that were located in the Greenlands Business Centre; the Hemming Road Business Centre and in the Rubicon Centre. They noted that the Council had originally intended to make these units available to businesses that had just been set up, though they questioned whether this intention continued to shape current practice. Officers explained that the Economic Advisory Panel was scheduled to undertake a review of the business centres. As part of this review the Panel would assess whether the business units were being utilised to their full potential. Members requested further details about the return on the number of businesses utilising these units and a copy of the report on the subject of the business units which had been considered at a recent meeting of the Economic Advisory Panel.

Members discussed the proportion of dwellings in each Council Tax band that were situated in Redditch, as detailed on page 81 of the draft Economic Development Strategy. They noted that there were fewer Band F, G and H properties in Redditch than in other parts of Worcestershire. This had implications for the level of revenue that the Council could expect to receive from Council Tax. Under these circumstances, Members suggested that there might be a need to ensure that a proportion of the new homes that would need to be built in the Borough over forthcoming years were Band F, G and H

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Thursday, 30 April 2009

properties. However, Members noted that a balance needed to be achieved to ensure that more affordable homes and good quality accommodation in the rental market could be made available to people.

The Committee also referred specifically to the section of the strategy which focused on people (pages 27-32 of the draft report). Members commented favourably on the inclusion of references to young people in the document and noted that many of the points that had been highlighted within the report had also been identified by Councillors when undertaking the Jobs, Employment and Economy scrutiny review in 2005. Officers explained that they had consulted with representatives of the Redditch Student Council to identify young people's views about their career prospects within Redditch. Their responses had helped to inform the draft strategy.

The work experience opportunities that were available to young people living in Redditch were discussed by Members. They noted that placements needed to be made available which were suitable to the needs of each young person. Members suggested that this situation could be improved if the Council worked with other local authorities to develop a pool of work experience opportunities for young people.

The Committee commented that they had a number of concerns about the town which needed to be addressed. They expressed the view that the town needed to attract more highly skilled workers into Redditch. Members suggested that this could be achieved through further development of locations such as Ravensbank Business Park.

There were also a number of concerns about the number of redundancies that had been announced in recent months and the impact that this would have on local people and the local economy. Officers suggested that these more immediate concerns would be difficult for the Council to address. However, there were local organisations which could help people who had been made redundant, including Jobcentre Plus. There were also agencies that could work with people who were already employed to help them to further develop their skills.

Members praised the Planning Assistant and other Officers who had been working on economic development issues at the Council and thanked them for their excellent work.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Thursday, 30 April 2009

RESOLVED that

- 1) **Officers provide further information about the return on the number of businesses utilising the business units at the Greenlands Business Centre; Hemming Road Business Centre and the Rubicon Centre;**
- 2) **Officers circulate copies of the report on the subject of the business centres that was considered at a recent meeting of the Economic Advisory Panel;**
- 3) **Officers circulate information about the actions which the Council is proposing to take to tackle both perceived and real problems with career opportunities for young people in Redditch;**
- 4) **Officers consider the Committee's suggestion that the Council work with other local authorities to develop a pool of work experience opportunities for young people; and**
- 5) **subject to the comments above the report be noted.**

219. REFERRALS

There were no referrals.

220. WORK PROGRAMME

Officers informed Members that a request had been made to present information about the Worcestershire Land Drainage Partnership before the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 17 June. The Committee were being invited to pre-scrutinise the contents of a draft report into this subject before consideration of the item by the Executive Committee.

Members noted that numerous items were scheduled for consideration at the meeting of the Committee on 17 June. They agreed that the brainstorming session for proposing questions that could be addressed to the Worcestershire Primary Care Trust (PCT) regarding public transport access to the Alexandra Hospital should be rescheduled for consideration at a meeting of the Committee on 27 May.

The Committee also discussed the proposed discussion of the budget strategy and budget deficit which were due to be considered

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Thursday, 30 April 2009

at the 17 June meeting. Copies of the documentation that had been provided when the budget strategy had been considered at a meeting of full Council on 6 April could be made available for this item. Members requested that these details be circulated for the consideration of Members of the Committee prior to the meeting on 17 June. Members would request further details about the budget strategy and deficit based on analysis of the contents of this documentation.

RESOLVED that

- 1) Officers circulate copies of reports on the subject of the budget strategy and budget deficit that were considered at a meeting of full Council on 6 April;**
- 2) the Work Programme be noted.**

The Meeting commenced at 7.00 pm
and closed at 8.50 pm