



# Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Tuesday, 1st March, 2016

## MINUTES

**Present:**

Councillor Jane Potter (Chair), Councillor Gay Hopkins (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Natalie Brookes, David Bush, Andrew Fry, Gareth Prosser, Jennifer Wheeler and Nina Wood-Ford

**Officers:**

Helen Broughton, Rachel Dobson, Jayne Pickering and Amanda Singleton

**Democratic Services Officers:**

J Bayley and A Scarce

**81. APOLOGIES AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Joe Baker and Paul Swansborough and it was confirmed that Councillor Natalie Brookes was attending as substitute for Councillor Baker.

**82. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND OF PARTY WHIP**

There were no declarations of interest nor of any party whip.

**83. MINUTES**

**RESOLVED that**

**the minutes of the meeting held on 16th February be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.**

**84. LOCAL STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP - MONITORING UPDATE REPORT**

The Chair reminded Members that following a recommendation made a number of years ago the Committee was responsible for holding the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) to account and received this report on an annual basis.

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Chair

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Officers introduced the report and provided background information in respect of the Redditch Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS) and the recent mini refresh of the SCS's priorities which had been undertaken during 2015. During the presentation of the report the following areas were highlighted:

- There were various groups and bodies that formed the LSP or contributed to the work of the partnership.
- The Redditch Partnership Executive Group (RPEG) was chaired by the Chief Officer from the YMCA. This would assist with the Connecting Families Project moving away from being Council led as the programme developed.
- Connecting Families was a new way of working, which was being rolled out across Worcestershire with a pilot scheme in Redditch.
- The Redditch Economic Development Theme Group (REDTG) was chaired by the Portfolio Holder, Councillor Greg Chance and involved a number of other elected Members and local business representatives.
- Redditch Community Wellbeing Trust (RCWT) was supported by a dedicated officer from Worcestershire County Council (WCC). A significant number of projects were commissioned by this group.

The Wellbeing in Partnership Newsletter had been produced following a number of requests for the production of a directory of local groups and projects. Members were advised it was not practicable to produce such a directory due to the resources needed to set up and maintain such a document. The newsletter was a simple and quick format in which to highlight what was currently available.

Following presentation of the report Members raised a number of points and discussed these in detail:

- The action that could be taken to monitor the impact of the work of the LSP.
- The difficulty for Members knowing where to refer residents as there were so many different projects and voluntary organisations.
- The option for a "high level" directory to be produced in order for Members to have some contact details for specific projects.
- The measures in place to ensure projects did not overlap or duplicate work, with particular reference being made to the Connecting Families project and the work of Early Help.

- The role of the Locality Teams and how the officers assessed what support would be most appropriate for a family to in the first instance.

**RESOLVED that  
the Redditch Sustainable Community Strategy Monitoring  
Update Report March 2016 be noted.**

## **85. HOUSING BENEFITS - PRESENTATION**

The Chair reminded Members that this item had been brought before the Committee as a result of discussions at the training event held at the beginning of the municipal year whilst Members were considering topics for further scrutiny. Officers proceeded to deliver a detailed presentation which covered the impact of changes to welfare support; (the presentation is attached at Appendix 1 to these Minutes).

Following presentation of the report Members discussed a number of points including the allocation of the Spare Room Subsidy in respect of families with shared child care arrangements. It was confirmed that ordinarily the subsidy would be allocated to the parent in receipt of the Child Benefit, in accordance with specific guidelines. Members also questioned whether people with severe health problems, which necessitated use of the spare room of their home, were required to pay the Spare Room Subsidy. Officers confirmed that whilst there were strict guidelines which needed to be adhered to, in exceptional circumstances officers could work with the individuals and / or their family to identify possible support.

The Committee noted that there would be further significant changes taking place in the coming months, which had been announced in July 2015, and asked that an update report be received when those changes were in place.

**RESOLVED that**

- 1) a further presentation be delivered on the subject of welfare reforms and housing benefit changes in due course; and**
- 2) the report be noted.**

## **86. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT 2015/16**

The Chair introduced the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's draft Annual Report 2015/16. In so doing she thanked Members of the Committee and the Democratic Services Officers with lead

responsibility for scrutiny for their hard work and support over the past 12 months.

During her presentation of the report, the Chair highlighted the following areas:

- The success of the LGBT Task Group and the production of a leaflet by LGB&T Support Services Redditch, which would make a difference to the lives of so many people in the Borough.
- The improved Budget Scrutiny process and the detailed work which had been carried out. Officers in the Financial Services department were thanked for their hard work on this process.
- The disappointing response from the Committee in respect of the Leisure Services Short, Sharp Review.
- The work of the Crime and Disorder Scrutiny Panel.
- The regular updates received from the Council's representative on the Worcestershire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC), Councillor Nina Wood-Ford.
- The attendance by Portfolio Holders on two occasions which had been most useful and a positive step forward.

Following presentation of the annual report Members discussed the Committee's relationship with the Executive Committee and the role of being a critical friend. Members also considered future plans and ideas for short, sharp reviews and task groups together with specific training needs for the following year.

## **RESOLVED that**

**the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's Annual Report 2015/16 be approved.**

### **87. EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MINUTES AND SCRUTINY OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE'S WORK PROGRAMME**

Officers confirmed that there were no updates in relation to Overview and Scrutiny within the Executive Committee minutes from 22nd February 2016. In respect of the Work Programme Officers confirmed that the latest version, which had been tabled at the meeting, contained a number of updates and new items, which Officers highlighted to Members, whilst reminding them that there was an opportunity for pre-scrutiny of any items which they felt were suitable. Members discussed the Leisure Intervention Update which was due to be considered by the Executive Committee at its meeting on 19th April. Officers agreed to confirm whether the

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report would be available in time for the Committee to pre-scrutinise in April.

## **RESOLVED that**

**the Leisure Intervention Update be included within the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's Work Programme for pre-scrutiny in April 2016.**

### **88. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME**

Officers confirmed that there were no updates to the Work Programme; however Members were reminded that there would be a presentation in respect S106 Funding and the Corporate Dashboard, to which all Members had been invited.

## **RESOLVED that**

**the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's Work Programme be noted.**

### **89. TASK GROUPS - PROGRESS REPORTS**

#### Improving Disabled People's Access to Redditch's Taxi Fleet Short, Sharp Review – Chair Councillor Gay Hopkins

Councillor Hopkins informed Members that the Short, Sharp Review was moving at a fast pace and had already held two meetings and begun to interview relevant witnesses. The Members had formulated some ideas for the final report, which would be presented at the Committee meeting due to be held on 12th April 2016.

#### Joint Worcestershire Increasing Physical Activity Task Group – Redditch Borough Council Representative, Councillor Gareth Prosser

Councillor Prosser informed Members that progress continued to be slow and a date was yet to be set for an interview with the relevant Cabinet Member as there had been difficulties in finding a convenient date for all Members.



# IMPACT OF CHANGES TO WELFARE SUPPORT

Amanda Singleton

Head of Customer Access and Financial Support

Rachael Dobson

Assistant Financial Support Manager



## Impact of changes to Welfare Support

- Background
  - Changes to welfare support in April 2013
    - Benefit cap
    - Spare Room Subsidy
    - Changes to Council Tax Benefits
    - Universal Credit
    - Delegation of local welfare assistance (ELF)

## Benefit Cap

- The cap applies to the total amount that the people in a household get from the following benefits: Bereavement Allowance, Carer's Allowance, Child Benefit, Child Tax Credit, Employment and Support Allowance, Guardian's Allowance, Housing Benefit, Incapacity Benefit, Income Support, Jobseeker's Allowance, Maternity Allowance, Severe Disablement Allowance, Universal Credit, Widowed Parent's Allowance (or Widowed Mother's Allowance or Widows Pension if received before 9 April 2001)
- The level of the cap is:
  - £500 a week for couples (with or without children living with them)
  - £500 a week for single parents whose children live with them
  - £350 a week for single adults who don't have children, or whose children don't live with them
- The cap is applied via Housing Benefits

## Benefit Cap

- Impacted on 40 households to date
- Current live cases 28
- Impact relatively low
  - Most stayed in homes and found ways of meeting the financial gap



## Spare Room Subsidy

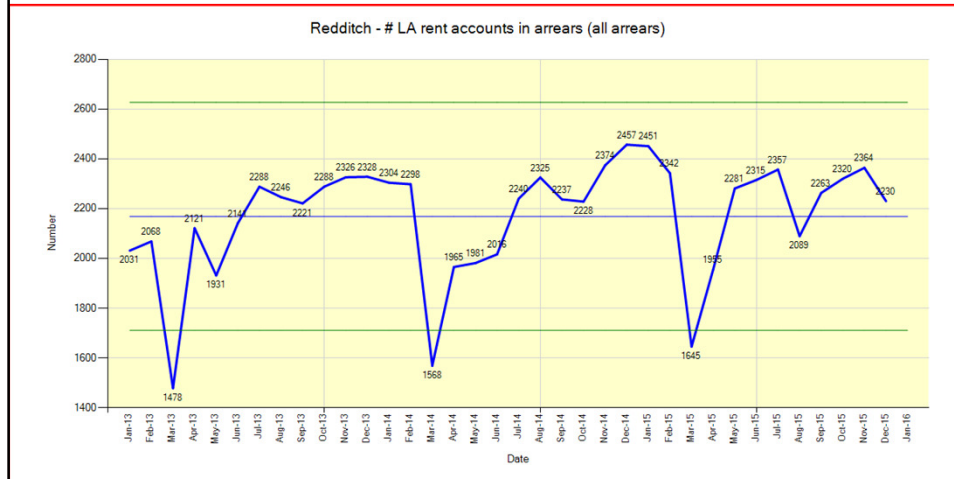
- From April 2013 Housing Benefit is based on the number of people in the household and the size of the accommodation.
- This applies to all working-age tenants renting from a local authority, housing association or other registered social landlord.
- Brings the Housing Benefits payable to tenants of social housing in line with private tenants.

## Spare Room Subsidy

- This means those tenants whose accommodation is larger than they need may lose part of their Housing Benefit. Those with one spare bedroom lose 14% of their eligible rent and those with 2 or more spare bedrooms lose 25%.
- RBC Room Restriction current live cases
  - 14% = 380
  - 25% = 66

## Spare Room Subsidy

- Impact on rent arrears



## Welfare Support Changes

- What did we do to support those affected
  - Worked directly with individuals where possible to identify possible support.
  - Introduced measures to provide up to date information regarding the changes and when they are to be implemented.
  - Through transformed working arrangements families in crisis are identified and a Locality Officer work directly with them to help them find solutions
- Householders generally prefer to find a way of staying in the property and manage their reduce income
- Housing, Locality and Benefits Officers continue to identify families experiencing difficulties and work with them to help them identify lasting solutions

## Discretionary Housing Payments

- Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs)
  - introduced in July 2001
  - used to provide financial assistance to claimants in receipt of housing benefit where it is considered that additional help with housing costs is required.
- Housing costs are generally defined as
  - a rental liability
  - rent deposits
  - rent in advance
  - other lump sum costs (e.g. removal costs).
- DHPs may be awarded as a one-off payment or periodically for an appropriate period.

## Discretionary Housing Payments

- Officers work with applicants to identify other support that may be appropriate.
- DHP awards are not conditional and any decision will be based on a fair assessment of need.
- The wider Housing issue will be considered and discussed, where appropriate, with an appropriate Housing Options Officer before a decision is made.
- Consideration will be given to:-
  - what an award of DHP will achieve;
  - the consequences of not making the award; and
  - whether any alternative support can be provided.

## Council Tax Benefit

- CTB ended March 2013
- LA required to introduce local Council Tax Support Scheme.
- Pensioners protected
- 10% cut in the funding as well as reductions in administration grant
- Default scheme in 2013/14
- 80% support introduced in April 2014
- All working age claimants pay a minimum of 20% towards their Council Tax Liability
- Scheme mostly mirrors existing HB requirements

## Changes to Council Tax Benefit - Impacts

- 3606 households working age which were impacted as of November 2015
- 300 *less* than at start of new scheme in April 2014
- Impact on Council tax collection
  - In 2014/15 - 96.32% collected
  - In 2013/14 - 97.65% collected
  - As at end Jan 16 collected 93.72% for 15/16

## Hardship Scheme

- £25k per annum
- Transitional relief for those facing hardship as a result of changes to Council Tax Support
- Applications and officer identified
- Personal assessment
- Full financial review
- Transitional relief and long term solutions

## Hardship Scheme

- 211 customers
  - 66 direct applications
  - 145 customers were approached because officers identified that some support may be appropriate.
  - 30% were dealt with by Officers in the Locality teams
- Support provided in 2014/15
  - £12,272.68 support to pay Council Tax.
  - £31,294.22 value of other financial support provided.

## Hardship Scheme

- 51% - single persons
- 59% were on Employment Support Allowance.
- 27% not awarded hardship funding but officers identified other financial support that could be provided.

## Universal Credit

- Introduced in Redditch in February 2015
- Single, job seekers making a new claim.
- 460 claims since go live
- 48 current claims at Feb 2016 on our system.
- Delivery Partnership Agreement in Place with RBC
- Support – online claims, personal budgeting, manual council tax support claims

## Essential Living Fund

- Previously operated by DWP (Crisis Support)
- Responsibility passed to WCC
- RBC lobbied for local delegation to ensure could best meet local needs
- Flexible discretionary scheme
- Face to face assessment of need
- No cash

## JOINING UP SUPPORT

