

# Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Tuesday, 25th October, 2016

## MINUTES

### Present:

Councillor Jane Potter (Chair), Councillor Gay Hopkins (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Tom Baker-Price, Natalie Brookes, Matthew Dormer, Andrew Fry, Paul Swansborough and Jennifer Wheeler

### Also Present:

Councillors Yvonne Smith and Pat Witherspoon.

Mr A Bywater (Economic Development Unit) and Mr D Campbell (Department of Work and Pensions)

### Officers:

Jayne Pickering

### Democratic Services Officers:

Jess Bayley and Amanda Scarce

### 30. APOLOGIES AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Joe Baker and Nina Wood-Ford with Councillor Natalie Brookes attending as a substitute for Councillor Wood-Ford.

### 31. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND OF PARTY WHIP

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

### 32. MINUTES

#### RESOLVED that

**the minutes of the meeting held on 12<sup>th</sup> September be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.**

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Chair

### 33. EMPLOYMENT AND SKILLS, SPECIFICALLY FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES - PRESENTATIONS

The Chair reminded Members that this matter had arisen following the work planning exercise which had taken place earlier in the year. She welcomed Andy Bywater, Employment and Skills Officer for North Worcestershire Economic Development and Regeneration, together with Duncan Campbell, the Employer and Partnership Manager, Worcestershire Department of Works and Pensions (DWP), who each gave a presentation in respect of employment opportunities for people with disabilities (see Appendices 1 and 2 attached).

Following the presentations Mr Bywater and Mr Campbell responded to a number of questions and observations made by Members in respect of the following:

- How the cutbacks affected the DWP and the delivery of its services. The DWP's services had been streamlined with staff receiving training in order to be able to deal with a number of different areas, rather than specialising in one area. They also worked more closely with partner organisations.
- The shortage of people working within the construction industry. Information had been provided by the Greater Birmingham and Solihull LEP and was not specific to Redditch.
- The shortage of appropriate premises both for those businesses wishing to start up and expand and across all areas of business. This was not problem specific to Redditch as there was a similar situation in the Bromsgrove district.
- European funding; this was guaranteed for two years by the Treasury, though there was uncertainty about the position after that period.
- Whether it was more difficult for a smaller business to employ someone with a disability. Members were advised that this was the perception, but that there were a number of funding streams available to support any specialist equipment for example that may be needed. It was acknowledged that the availability of such funding needed to be promoted to businesses.
- Whether the unemployment figures included those with a disability. The figures related to those who were in receipt of Job Seekers Allowance (JSA) and did not differentiate between those with a disability.
- Communicating all the services available to those that were eligible. There needed to be improvements made within Worcestershire. It was important that the households that

could access all the services available were aware of them at the earliest stage.

- The introduction of Universal Credit. This new system gave people much more flexibility in being able to work without having a negative impact on benefits which they were in receipt of, as these could be adjusted dependent upon the number of hours being worked.
- Difficulties for some people with a disability being able to access suitable transport to get to work. Members were informed that with the new scheme there was an opportunity for both the employer and claimant to access funding which could be used for transport to and from work.
- The assessments which were carried out to see whether someone was able to work. The aim was to work with the claimant to ensure that the decision reached was right for all those concerned. This would include assessing what type of work and the number of hours would be most suitable. The DWP actively encouraged either support workers or family members to attend with claimants, as it was important that the right outcome was reached. A re-assessment would be carried out if it became apparent that the original decision was not working for either the employer or the claimant.

The Chair thanked Mr Bywater and Mr Campbell for their presentations and agreed that it was encouraging to see that there was a lot of support and opportunities available for those with a disability.

## **RESOLVED that**

**the presentations in respect of employment opportunities for people with disabilities be noted.**

### **34. JOINT SCRUTINY TASK GROUP PROPOSAL - STAFF SURVEY**

The Chair welcomed the representatives from the Bromsgrove District Council's Overview and Scrutiny Board and invited the Chairman, Councillor Luke Mallett, to introduce the item.

Councillor Mallett provided Members with a brief summary of the background to this topic proposal and explained that the Overview and Scrutiny Board had first considered the staff survey as far back as 2013. This had been the first time a survey had taken place across both Councils and the data analysis was not made available for nearly 12 months after the survey had taken place. The Board had a number of concerns around the results particularly in respect of bullying, mental health and basic HR functions such as team and

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one-to-one meetings, appraisals and around organisational change and the support given to staff. A working group had been set up to address the issues which had been raised and an update report was received by the Board at its meeting in February 2015. At that meeting it was also confirmed that a further survey would be sent out, with similar questions in order to maintain some consistency. Councillor Mallett went on to explain what had triggered the completion of a topic proposal was the results of that second survey, when Members had been disappointed to see that few people had completed the survey and many of the concerns raised in the first survey continued to be an issue. However, Councillor Mallett did pay tribute to the work which had been undertaken by officers, in conjunction with trades unions, in respect of the time for change initiative, around mental health in the work place.

A brief overview of the results from the second survey was provided in order to highlight the key areas which would be covered within the work of the Task Group. Councillor Mallett also explained that a strategy board had now been set up to address those issues. One of the key areas of investigation would be to ensure that those issues were addressed and to investigate the low response rates and implications of this. Councillor Steve Colella, the author of the topic proposal, added that he hoped to get behind the real issues, to find out the implications arising from the results and to ensure that the appropriate actions were taken to address them.

Councillor Potter thanked the Bromsgrove Members for bringing forward the topic proposal and concurred that it was important for staff to be both happy and supported in the workplace. Members went on to discuss a number of issues including:

- Whether the working group initially set up had made any significant changes.
- The need for a clear action plan to ensure that the issues which had arisen were addressed in an appropriate and timely manner.
- What value Redditch Borough Council's participation could add to the task group's investigation. It was highlighted that as the majority of staff were shared between both Councils any recommendations would impact on each Council.
- Whether there would be a cost to Redditch Borough Council if Members were to take part in the joint Task Group. Officers confirmed that there would not be a cost.
- Possible reasons as to why staff were not completing the survey and ways in which they could be encouraged to do so.
- The importance of regular appraisals and one-to-one meetings for both staff and managers.

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- The role of Councillors in supporting staff and ensuring that the working environment met the needs of all concerned.

## **RESOLVED that**

- 1) **the proposed terms of reference from the Joint Staff Survey Scrutiny Task Group be agreed; and**
- 2) **Councillors Jane Potter, Tom Baker-Price and Jenny Wheeler be appointed Members of the Joint Staff Survey Scrutiny Task Group.**

## **35. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN - BUDGET ASSUMPTIONS - PRE-SCRUTINY**

Officers gave a short presentation which highlighted the salient points within the Medium Term Financial Plan 2017/18 to 2020/21 Budget Assumptions report, which would be considered by the Executive Committee at its meeting due to be held on 1<sup>st</sup> November 2016. This included the following:

- Four Year budget projections.
- An increase in Council Tax of 1.9% (any increase in excess of 1.95% would need to be the subject of a local referendum).
- A utilities increase of 6%.
- Fees and charges increases of 3% with any variance being put forward with supporting evidence.

Officers also provided Members with detailed information in respect of the superannuation rates. The three year valuation had been received in mid-October, which reflected the current revaluation of the pension liabilities. Detail was provided in respect both of back funding and forward funding rates which would provide a total net saving over a three year period of £327,000, due to the reduction in the back funding contribution. Officers were negotiating with the Actuary and Worcestershire County Council in respect of how this would be paid to the County to fund the pension fund liabilities.

Following the presentation Members debated a number of areas in more detail:

- The implementation and monitoring of the savings that needed to be made following submission of the Efficiency Plan.
- The need for Heads of Service to provide realistic budget savings for the next four years.

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- Alternative models of providing services which would need to be considered in order to achieve the necessary savings to produce a balanced budget.
- The assumption of 0% inflation across the majority of the Council's non-pay expenditure budgets.
- The percentage increase in Council Tax that would be needed to cover the authority's budget deficit and the cost of a referendum. Members also questioned whether this had been considered. Officers estimated that this would be in the region of 18-20% and further details could be provided in terms of the costs of a referendum outside of the meeting.

## **RECOMMENDED that**

**the Executive Committee recommends to Council that the revenue assumptions detailed in 3.4 of the report be incorporated into the budget setting process.**

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

Officers reported that there were no issues in relation to Overview and Scrutiny other than the Executive Committee had acknowledged that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had pre-scrutinised the Efficiency Plan. It was also highlighted within the Executive Committee's Work Programme that the Council Plan had now been put back to the January 2017 meeting.

## **RESOLVED that**

**the Executive Committee Minutes of the 13<sup>th</sup> September 2016 together with the latest edition of the Executive Committee's Work Programme be noted.**

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

Members considered the Committee's Work Programme and noted that the pre-scrutiny of the Council Plan would now be considered at its January meeting, together with the LGBT update, which had also originally been scheduled in for the December meeting.

### **38. WORKING GROUPS - UPDATE REPORTS**

Budget Scrutiny Working Group – Chair, Councillor Jane Potter

Councillor Potter informed Members that the Working Group had received a number of reports and a presentation from the Head of

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Community Services in respect of the Shopmobility scheme and had looked at options for funding it together with how to make the management of the Town Hall and other properties more cost effective.

The Working Group were also suggesting that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee receive a presentation from the Place Partnership at a future meeting in order for them to understand its role and the work which it carried out.

Councillor Potter explained that at its most recent meeting the Working Group had considered a report in respect of Section 106 monies which had been most useful and had led to further information being requested.

## Performance Scrutiny Working Group – Chair, Councillor Tom Baker-Price

Councillor Baker-Price explained that the Working Group had held several meetings and formulated a number of recommendations which would come before the Committee in due course. Those meetings had included interviews with the Head of Community Services and had concentrated on the Lifeline Service, and an interview with the Democratic Services Manager. Future meetings would include an interview with the Chief Executive and an update in respect of Gas Safety.

### **RECOMMENDED that**

- 1) the Head of Community Services considers and works through the various options for the future delivery of the Shopmobility service and reports back to Members in due course;**
- 2) the Council considers ways to manage the Town Hall and other property assets in a more cost effective manner; and**

### **RESOLVED that**

- 1) representatives of the Place Partnership be invited to attend a future meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to discuss the repair and maintenance costs for the Council's property assets; and**
- 2) the report be noted.**

## 39. TASK GROUPS - PROGRESS REPORTS

### Mental Health Services for Young People Task Group – Chair, Cllr Nina Wood-Ford

In the absence of Councillor Wood-Ford, Officers provided a brief update of the work of the Task Group to date. This included the following:

- Councillor Thain had attended the Positive Activities meeting, a sub-group of the Redditch Local Strategic Partnership, to consult with Voluntary Sector groups.
- Councillors Thain and Wheeler had attended the CAMHS information session, where CAMHS had provided further information about their work, criteria and the support needs of young people who self-harmed or who had eating disorders.
- Members had interviewed a representative of the Community Safety Team about support in local schools and children and young people with low level mental health problems.
- An interview had also taken place with a representative of the Connecting Families team about the level of demand for mental health service support amongst young people in the Borough.
- Invitations to future meetings had also been sent to the Redditch and Bromsgrove Clinical commissioning Group (CCG), Redditch Mental Health Action Group and a representative from the Worcestershire Health and Care Trust.

Those Members of the Task Group present at the meeting concurred that it was a most interesting and informative Group and raised concerns that many of the services were also being affected by budget cuts at a time when there appeared to be an increase in demand, particularly at the early intervention stages, for the services.

## 40. HEALTH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

As Councillor Wood-Ford, the Council's representative on the Worcestershire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC) had sent her apologies it was agreed that the minutes of the last meeting of the HOSC would be circulated for Members information.



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## 41. WEST MIDLANDS COMBINED AUTHORITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Councillor Jenny Wheeler, the Council's representative on the West Midlands Combined Authority Overview and Scrutiny Committee, provided Members with a brief outline of the first meeting of this Committee, which she had attended in July 2016. This had included the following:

- Appointment of Chair and Vice Chair.
- Quorum of four members.
- Terms of reference.
- The scrutiny process at other Combined Authorities and the aspiration to carry out successful scrutiny.
- The next meeting would include a workshop to look at different models of scrutiny.

Members discussed a number of issues including the lead officer, the need for a dedicated Scrutiny Officer to ensure scrutiny is effective and whether the constitution of the Combined Authority required the Committee to be politically balanced.

Following discussions it was agreed that officers would provide Members with a list of the representatives from each authority taking part in the Committee.

The Meeting commenced at 7.05 pm  
and closed at 8.55 pm