

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

14th October 2009

MINUTES

Present:

Councillor Phil Mould (Chair), Councillor David Smith (Vice-Chair) and Councillors K Banks, G Chance, R King, W Norton, J Pearce and D Taylor

Also Present:

Councillors M Braley, M Chalk and M Collins (Vice Chair – Standards Committee).

Officers:

A Heighway and T Buckley

Committee Services Officer:

J Bayley and H Saunders

88. APOLOGIES AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillor Thomas.

89. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND OF PARTY WHIP

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

90. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 23rd September 2009 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

91. ACTIONS LIST

The Committee considered the latest version of the Actions List. Specific mention was made of the following matters:

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a) Local Area Agreement Scoping Document

Officers explained that at the previous meeting of the Committee no decision had been made as to how to proceed with the proposed review of the Local Area Agreement (LAA). Members agreed that it would be best to reconsider this proposal after the completion of the Local Strategic Partnership review.

b) Shopping, Investing and Giving Policy

At the previous meeting, there had been some confusion as to whether the Policy for Funding Voluntary and Community Sector organisations had been approved by full Council. Officers confirmed that this policy had been approved by full Council in June.

RESOLVED that

- 1) **the proposal to review the Local Area Agreement be scheduled for consideration following the completion of the Local Strategic Partnership review; and**
- 2) **the Actions List be noted.**

92. CALL-IN AND PRE-SCRUTINY

The Committee considered the Decision Notice of the Executive Committee meeting held on Wednesday 7th October. It was noted that a referral had been made to the Committee by the Vice Chair of the Executive Committee, Councillor Braley. He had suggested that with regards to Disabled Facilities and Lifetime Grants a piece of work could be undertaken by the Committee to investigate the possible actions that could be taken to reduce the length of time individuals remained on the Priority Waiting Lists. The Chair suggested that a scoping document on this topic be prepared for the Committee's consideration.

There were no call-ins or proposed items for pre-scrutiny.

RESOLVED that

- 1) **Councillor Braley work with relevant Officers to prepare a draft scoping document on the subject of Priority Waiting Lists for Disabled Facilities and Lifetime Grants; and**

2) the report be noted.

93. TASK & FINISH REVIEWS - DRAFT SCOPING DOCUMENTS

There were no draft scoping documents.

94. TASK AND FINISH GROUPS - PROGRESS REPORTS

The Committee received reports in relation to current reviews.

a) Dial-A-Ride - Chair, Councillor R King

Councillor King informed the Committee that the Task and Finish Group had been examining issues regarding: the downtime of vehicles; potential capacity needs of the service; and the possibility of alternative providers delivering the service. However, the Group felt that they could not progress much further until the Council had received news regarding the £20,000 funding bid that had been submitted to the WRVS (formerly the Women's Royal Voluntary Service) to contribute to funding for the service.

Councillor King explained that the Officer report proposing actions to overcome the shortfall in funding for the current year which had been scheduled to be considered at the Executive Committee on 28th October, had been rescheduled for consideration at a meeting in December. Councillor King commented that until this report had been considered by the Executive Committee, the Group would be unable to continue looking at long term strategic funding and capacity issues. Under these circumstances the Group would need to postpone delivering their final report until the following year.

Councillor King suggested that the Group meet less frequently until a clearer idea emerged with regards to the current funding situation and the proposed actions that Officers could take to remedy short term funding problems.

b) Neighbourhood Groups – Chair, Councillor K Banks

The Chair informed the Committee that good progress had been made. Officers and Members were in the process of attending Neighbourhood Group meetings to inform members about the public of the work of the Task and Finish

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Group and to consult with them over their proposals. Once consultation had taken place with all of the Neighbourhood Groups, the Councillors would collate and analyse the feedback received from residents.

c) Local Strategic Partnership (LSP)

The Chair explained that the membership of this Group had yet to be confirmed. Officers informed Members that they had received confirmation that Councillor Norton would chair the review and that Councillors Fry and Hopkins would also be members. There was still one Member to be confirmed from the Labour Group.

Members agreed that, due to capacity reasons, the launch of this review should not take place until the Neighbourhood Groups Task and Finish Review had concluded.

RESOLVED that

- 1) **presentation of the Dial-A-Ride Task and Finish Group's final report be postponed;**
- 2) **Councillors Fry, Hopkins and Norton be confirmed as Members of the Local Strategic Partnership review; and**
- 3) **the progress reports be noted.**

95. PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR CORPORATE MANAGEMENT - ANNUAL REPORT

The Chair welcomed Councillor Braley, the Portfolio Holder for Corporate Management to the meeting. Councillor Braley presented his report in accordance with the questions set by the Committee.

a) What in your view is the future of the Business Centres?

Councillor Braley informed the Committee that he felt the purpose of and any future arrangements for the centres needed to be considered by the Council. He explained that the Council owned the Business Centres which consisted of approximately 80 units varying from light industrial units to office space. He felt that any review of the Business Centres would need to examine the current lettings pattern of the

units and the rent structure. A review could also consider what motivated businesses to move into units like this and whether the provision of additional facilities or reduced rents was a determining factor.

b) How do you rank the different elements of your portfolio?

Councillor Braley explained that there were two areas of his portfolio which he felt were especially significant. Personnel and staffing issues were important and he emphasised that what made an organisation were the people working within it. He expressed the view that the number of people who were absent from work through sickness and the impact this had on remaining staff was concerning.

The management of the Council's assets was an aspect of his portfolio that he felt was important. He advocated the need for the Council to invest continuously in its assets to ensure their upkeep and proper functioning.

c) What are you doing to modernise the Council's IT systems, and in particular, improve IT access for Members?

Councillor Braley informed the Committee that he felt there were a number of actions that could be taken to modernise the Council's IT systems. He explained that it was important that the Council invested in the Town Hall to ensure it became a WiFi building. This could help to improve the business functioning of the Town Hall and to make Civic Suite more marketable to business users.

Furthermore, he felt it was imperative for the Council to make the intranet system readily available for Members and to generally improve email access for Members. Good access to the intranet was important for Members as it enabled them to easily obtain copies of Council reports. Councillor Braley had found establishing email access at home to be difficult and he was aware that other Members had experienced similar problems. He also acknowledged that Members required training on using the new printers that had been installed in the Town Hall and also to enable them to use new social networking systems and technology.

Councillor Braley informed Members that he was planning to convene meetings with the Head of Customer and IT Services and the Head of IT to discuss these issues. He also proposed discussing the issue with the Member Development Steering Group.

- d) How robust are the Council's disaster and emergency recovery plans? When were the plans last checked and what were the results of assessments?

Councillor Braley informed Members that the Council had a generic emergency plan in place which was based on the County Council's emergency plan procedures. Revisions of this plan had been undertaken. A recent business continuity exercise had looked at the way in which the Council would deal with the swine flu pandemic. He commented that Member involvement in the emergency planning process had traditionally been quite minimal. However, it was recognised that in an emergency situation affecting the Borough Members should act as spokespersons to the community by ensuring that reassurance and information was provided to their constituents.

- e) What are your views on the amount of money the Council writes off in debt? Do you have any suggestions for improving the processes currently used by the Council?

The Committee was informed that the Council had recently agreed to write off debt totalling approximately £48,000. The debt was a combination of overpaid housing benefit, tenancy arrears, voids, and unpaid commercial rents. He commented that a clearer idea of how much the Council writes off in debt per year was needed and he had asked to be provided with this information. Councillor Braley explained that he felt very strongly that the level of debt that the Council was willing to write off was unacceptable and that more needed to be done to reduce the current levels.

The Chair thanked Councillor Braley for attending the meeting.

RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

96. CORPORATE PLAN PHASE 1 - PRE-SCRUTINY

The Committee received a PowerPoint presentation from Officers setting out key information that had been used to underpin the Corporate Plan and the priorities for the Council. Officers explained that this information detailed a profile of Redditch with reference to the six key themes contained within the Sustainable Community

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Strategy. Officers informed the Committee that they would be recommending to the Executive Committee that the current priorities relating to achieving an enterprising, safe, clean and green town remain in place.

Officers went on to explain that initial findings from the Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) had revealed that within Redditch key geographical differences and inequalities existed especially with regards to health and education issues. These issues urgently needed to be tackled if Redditch was to perform in future CAA assessments. While the Council should be working to help address these issues, Officers stressed that the Local Strategic Partnership had an important role to play in tackling these problems.

Members were informed that according to information released from the national Indices of Multiple Deprivation in 2007, parts of several wards including Batchley, Abbey, Lodge Park, Church Hill, Winyates and Greensands were classed within the top 20% of deprived areas in the country. Officers noted that Redditch had the highest unemployment rate within Worcestershire. While other districts in the county had experienced a net fall in migrant workers, Redditch had experienced a net gain with a specific increase in migrants from Poland and the Ukraine. With regards to community safety issues, Redditch had demonstrated poor performance on alcohol related crime and sexual offences. It was noted that with regards to the clean and green agenda, improvements had been made. However, Officers commented that there was still a lot of work to be done.

The Committee was provided with some background regarding the Place Survey. This was a survey that could be used to gauge people's perceptions about the area they lived in. The Place Survey had demonstrated that people in Redditch generally had quite a low satisfaction with their area. Again, Officers highlighted the need for not only the Council to act on issues highlighted by this survey but also the Local Strategic Partnership.

RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

97. BUDGET BIDS AND PREPARATION GUIDELINES

The Committee considered the budget preparation timetable for 2010/11.

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This timetable set out the key dates for the submission of budget bids and budget preparation. Officers explained that there would be opportunities in the timetable for the Committee to undertake pre-scrutiny of key reports relating to this process. The consideration of the budget bids by the Executive Committee was scheduled to take place on 18th November. It was suggested that pre-scrutiny of this item could take place at a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 4th November. Pre-scrutiny of the Fees and Charges report, which was due to be considered by the Executive Committee on 9th December, could take place at a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 25th November.

The Committee agreed that the Draft Initial Estimates and Forecasts report would be considered at their meeting scheduled for 3rd February before finalisation by the Executive Committee and full Council on 22 February 2010.

RESOLVED that

- 1) **the Committee's Work Programme be amended to reflect the addition of items as detailed in the preamble above; and**
- 2) **the report be noted.**

98. ROLE OF THE MAYOR TASK AND FINISH GROUP - MONITORING OF RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee was informed that the purpose of this item was to monitor the outcomes of the recommendations proposed by the Role of the Mayor Task and Finish Group. Officers provided an update on the recommendations that had been approved by the Executive Committee. The Committee was informed that where recommendations had involved applying for funding, they had been agreed in principle but with a view for implementation when the financial climate had improved.

Officers explained that, in accordance with the Group's first recommendation, a picture of the current mayor was in the process of being placed in a prominent position within the Town Hall. Officers also explained that, in accordance with the group's third recommendation, the Mayor's Induction booklet was being updated and developed. In response to recommendation five, Officers explained that they were in the process of updating and adding new

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pages to the Mayor's pages on the Council's website. Members were invited to put forward any ideas for content for these pages.

Councillor Chalk, the Chair of the original Task and Finish Group, commented that the Group had originally requested that pages be dedicated to providing coverage of Mayoral engagements with commentary from the Mayor and photographs from any events the Mayor or Deputy Mayor had attended. He also commented that the web pages could be used to promote Redditch. The Chair suggested that the Member Services' Officer, Councillor Chalk and Officers from IT Services meet to discuss this issue further.

Officers informed Members that it was unlikely that the Mayor's Parlour would be redecorated as the Group had recommended. The Town Hall was scheduled to be redecorated in 2010/11. Areas judged to be the most in need of redecoration would be prioritised. It was likely that the Mayor's Parlour would not be classed as a high priority and therefore would not be included in this redecoration schedule. However, Members could recommend to the Executive that the Mayor's Parlour be redecorated sooner if they felt that this should be prioritised.

RECOMMENDED that

- 1) Asset Maintenance Officers be asked to prioritise the redecoration of the Mayor's Parlour in the Town Hall redecoration programme scheduled to take place in 2010/11; and**

RESOLVED that

- 1) the Member Services' Officer, Councillor Chalk and Officers from IT services meet to discuss how to enhance the Mayoral web pages on the Council's website; and**
- 2) the report be noted.**

99. HOUSING MUTUAL EXCHANGE TASK AND FINISH GROUP - MONITORING OF RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee was informed that this item provided Members with an opportunity to monitor the outcomes of the recommendations of the Housing Mutual Exchange Task and Finish Group. Officers informed the Committee that the rewording proposed by the Group had been incorporated into the Council's Housing Mutual Exchange

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Policy and Procedure. Members were satisfied with the changes that had been made.

RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

100. CRIME AND DISORDER SCRUTINY PANEL

The Committee considered the draft Terms of Reference that had been prepared by Officers for the Crime and Disorder Scrutiny Panel. Officers explained that the terms proposed that the Panel should consist of either five or seven Members. Officers recommended that, as Member capacity to attend additional meetings was quite limited, the Panel should be limited to five Members. Other interested Members would have an opportunity to undertake crime and disorder related scrutiny by participating in subsidiary Task and Finish reviews.

Officers further explained that there could be a choice of between four and six standard meetings of the Panel per year, though there would always be the opportunity to schedule further meetings throughout the year if considered necessary. Members agreed that it would be suitable to limit the standing number of meetings to four per year.

Officers confirmed that the nominations for the Panel Membership were Councillor Chance as the Chair of the Panel accompanied by Councillors W King, A Clayton and Pearce. Members were advised that the Liberal Democrat Group's nomination remained to be confirmed.

RESOLVED that

- 1) the Crime and Disorder Panel be made up of five Members and meet four times a year;**
- 2) Councillor Chance be confirmed as the Chair of the Panel;**
- 3) Councillors W King, A Clayton and Pearce be confirmed as additional members of the Panel; and**
- 4) the report be noted.**

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101. REFERRALS

Members were informed that Councillor Brunner had raised an item for the consideration of the Crime and Disorder Scrutiny Panel. This item was for the Panel to consider the perceptions of and the fear of crime in Redditch and the ways by which this could be addressed.

RESOLVED that

this item be considered at the first meeting of the Crime and Disorder Scrutiny Panel during discussions of the Panel's Work Programme.

102. WORK PROGRAMME

Members considered the Committee's Work Programme. The Committee was informed that the quarterly budget and performance monitoring items, scheduled for consideration on 4th November, would be rescheduled for consideration on 25th November.

RESOLVED that

the Committee's Work Programme be noted.

The meeting commenced at 7.00 pm
and closed at 9.00 pm

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Chair