



Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Thursday, 4th July, 2019

MINUTES

Present:

Councillor Joe Baker (Chair), Councillor Debbie Chance (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Joanne Beecham, Michael Chalk, Andrew Fry, Anthony Lovell, Nyear Nazir, Mark Shurmer and Jennifer Wheeler

Officers:

Jayne Baylis, Sue Hanley, Guy Revans and Judith Willis

Democratic Services Officers:

J Bayley and F Mughal

13. APOLOGIES AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors Salman Akbar and Peter Fleming. It was confirmed that Councillors Anthony Lovell and Nyear Nazir were attending as their respective substitutes.

14. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND OF PARTY WHIP

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

15. MINUTES

The minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 6th June, 2019 were submitted for Members' consideration.

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 6th June, 2019 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

.....
Chair

16. PUBLIC SPEAKING

Members noted that on this occasion there were no public speakers registered.

17. PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY - TENANCY CONDITIONS FOR COUNCIL HOUSING TENANTS AND TENANTS HANDBOOK

Members considered a report providing an update in respect of proposed changes to the Council's Housing Tenancy Agreement and Conditions. The Housing Services Manager and Head of Community Services highlighted the key areas in the report.

The Conditions of Tenancy detailed the tenant's rights and responsibilities as well as the Council's rights and responsibilities as a landlord. The Committee was informed that the Tenants' Handbook was also being revised which contained more detailed information on managing a tenancy.

The revised agreement and conditions would go out for consultation with tenants and a final report would be presented to the Executive Committee at a later date.

During consideration of this matter the following points were noted:

- The draft document proposed that the landlord would replace any faulty toilet seats. However, Members noted that at Birmingham City Council this was the responsibility of the tenant and it was suggested that this could be a requirement in Redditch too.
- The handbook would provide information to enable tenants to understand the difference between damp and condensation. Members noted that they often received complaints about damp but sometimes this was due to condensation that could be managed before it caused any problems.
- With regards to dealing with tenants who suffered from mental health issues, the Council's Housing Officers worked with Mental Health teams to provide support. The Council's Housing Allocations Policy also took the needs of those with mental health illnesses into account.
- Concerns were raised that it was important for tenants to be informed not just about their rights but also of the need to take their responsibility as tenants seriously and with this in mind Members suggested that the 'Your Rights' section should be renamed 'your rights and responsibilities' Officers explained that the agreement and handbook both stressed both the rights and the responsibilities of the tenant.

- Members expressed the view that it was important for the Council's housing Officers to participate in more community engagement as this would enable them to identify problems in the wards.
- Questions were raised about how the Council would enforce compliance with the conditions detailed in the agreement and handbook. Officers advised that training had recently been received on the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act which provided landlords with a range of enforcement tools and powers.
- Members noted that they had observed untidy gardens and rubbish in gardens whilst in their wards and concerns were raised about the extent to which the Council currently undertook effective enforcement action to resolve these types of issue.
- The proposed agreement stipulated that the tenant had no right to sub-let their property, or rooms in their property, without prior permission from the Council.
- Members suggested that when circulated the handbook should include information about waste and recycling services.
- The Committee thanked officers for their hard work and noted that Officers in the Locality Teams were working hard to support local communities.

RECOMMENDED that

- a) the tenancy agreement should be amended at paragraph 9.20, to read "park vehicles in areas set aside for emergency vehicles and allocated disable bays";**
- b) the Council be more pro-active with enforcement, in particular, with regard to rubbish deposited in gardens, to ensure that gardens are kept tidy; and**
- c) the 'your rights' section be retitled 'your rights and responsibilities'.**

18. PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY - HOUSING / HOUSING REVENUE IMPROVEMENT PLAN - PROGRESS REPORT

The Deputy Chief Executive presented the Housing Strategic Improvement/Action Plan – Progress Report and in so doing the following matters were highlighted for Members' consideration:

- The report outlined the progress that had been made in relation to the Housing Improvement Action Plan, which was endorsed in September 2018.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Thursday, 4th July, 2019

-
- With regard Leadership/Management Development Programme, a revised timescale was proposed for October 2019.
 - The Gas Business Case would be presented to the Executive Committee for consideration in October 2019.
 - All information in relation to governance, performance and measures for the Housing Service was updated on a monthly basis and available for Members to view on the Council's dashboard.
 - Officers were aiming to complete the stock condition survey by the end of November 2019.

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

- Members noted that there were two vacant posts detailed in the report and questioned whether these would be filled. Officers advised that these vacant posts were due to be advertised by the end of July 2019.
- The Committee requested clarification in terms of the percentage of rent that was collected from tenants by the Council per month. Members were informed that the data in relation to arrears was reported on the dashboard; however, the percentage of rent collected was not monitored. Members requested a further update in respect of this matter for consideration at the following meeting of the Committee.
- Members questioned when the last stock condition survey had been undertaken by the Council. Officers explained that a stock condition survey had previously been undertaken in 2001; however, this had only covered 10% of the Council's housing stock.
- With regard to the Gas Maintenance a business case would be presented to the Executive Committee for consideration in due course which would outline the various options available to the Council in terms of future service delivery.
- Members welcomed news that all gas inspections of the council's properties were up to date.
- The Council's new Housing Management IT system was briefly discussed and Members questioned how this would operate alongside the new Enterprise finance system. Officers advised that the two systems would be integrated.
- Members noted that in previous years new kitchens and bathrooms had been installed at properties even when they were not necessarily needed. The stock condition survey would enable the Council to identify where there was a need for these to be replaced.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Thursday, 4th July, 2019

In conclusion, Members thanked officers for all their hard work.

RESOLVED that

the Housing Strategic Improvement/Action Plan – Progress report be noted.

19. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY SELECT COMMITTEE FINDINGS AND NEW GOVERNANCE GUIDANCE - PRESENTATION

Members were reminded that at the previous meeting of the Committee on 6th June, 2019 the Committee had considered the Overview and Scrutiny Statutory Guidance that had been published by the Department of Housing, Communities and Local Government in May 2019. As requested during that meeting a report had been produced which highlighted the areas in the guidance that diverged from local scrutiny practice. Members were invited to consider whether to make any amendments to local practice based on the content of the report.

During consideration of the report the following points were highlighted:

- The guidance stressed the need for early and regular engagement between the Executive and Scrutiny. Although the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee discussed scrutiny matters with the Leader of the Council when necessary, the Committee suggested that this arrangement should be formalised as it was at other Councils. To ensure that these meetings were useful Members proposed that the Leader of the Council should meet with the Chair and Vice Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee as well as the leader of the opposition to discuss scrutiny matters. In line with practice at other Councils Members suggested that these meetings should take place on a quarterly basis, though additional meetings could be arranged if required.
- Communicating Scrutiny's Role and Purpose to the Wider Authority and Communicating Scrutiny's Role to the Public was another section of the guidance that was discussed. Members noted that the local press were not always able to attend scrutiny meetings, though could help to disseminate information about scrutiny activities to the public. The Committee agreed that the Council's Communications Team should be invited to attend a future meeting to help discuss action that could be taken to help raise awareness of the work of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee with the public.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Thursday, 4th July, 2019

- Conflicts of interest, including familial links was a future point in the guidance that was considered by the Committee. Members noted that it was important to avoid any perception that a Member's approach to scrutiny was shaped by their familial links to a Member of the Executive committee. However, Members also agreed that in a small authority such as Redditch Borough Council there was always the possibility that scrutiny Members would have family links members of the Executive Committee. It was agreed that where Members were scrutinising the work of a particular Portfolio Holder any scrutiny Members related to that Portfolio Holder should declare an interest.

RECOMMENDED to the Constitutional Review Working Party that

the Chair and Vice Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee should meet on a quarterly basis with the Leader of the Council and the leader of the opposition to discuss scrutiny matters.

20. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY TRAINING EVENT - MEMBERS TO CONSIDER POTENTIAL ITEMS TO REVIEW

Members considered a report which detailed the potential items for scrutiny that had been identified by Members during Overview and Scrutiny training in May 2019. The potential topics for scrutiny that had been suggested by the Councils Corporate Management Team (CMT) were also considered by the Committee. The Chair reminded the Committee that there were two task group reviews being undertaken and any further reviews that Members identified for investigation would not be able to take place until these reviews had been completed. Members were also asked to note that the Committee had successfully undertaken a lot of pre-scrutiny of items on the Executive Committee's work Programme and it was suggested that this approach to scrutiny at Committee meetings needed to continue.

Based on the items detailed in the report Members agreed that the following subjects would be suitable for scrutiny in 2019/20:

- Poverty – Members agreed that this subject might be suitable for a Short Sharp Review or Task Group exercise. Councillor Wheeler agreed to produce a scoping document in respect of this subject for consideration at a future meeting of the Committee.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Thursday, 4th July, 2019

- Mental Health Services, to include loneliness, in particular, with older people. Members agreed to invite officers from Worcestershire County Council to attend a future meeting to provide an update in respect of this matter. As Councillor Debbie Chance advised the Committee that some elements of mental health would be covered by Suicide Prevention Scrutiny Task Group Members agreed that this presentation should take place once that investigation had been completed.
- Skills in the local workforce – Members agreed to invite representatives of the north Worcestershire Economic Development Unit to attend a future meeting of the Committee to deliver a presentation in respect of this matter. The Committee suggested that this presentation should cover training needs for young people entering the workforce, skills and training for adults seeking to move careers and local employees' salaries.
- Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) – Members agreed that the Crime and Disorder Scrutiny Panel should consider the work of the North Worcestershire Community Safety Partnership to address anti-social-behaviour in Redditch. As this had been the subject of a similar report to the Panel in 2018 it was agreed that comparative data for the two years should be provided in this report for Members' consideration.

RESOLVED that:

the items suggested by Members during the discussion be incorporated onto the Committee's Work Programme.

21. EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MINUTES AND SCRUTINY OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE'S WORK PROGRAMME - SELECTING ITEMS FOR SCRUTINY

Members considered the minutes of the Executive Committee meeting held on 11th June, 2019 and the Executive Committee's Work Programme for the period 1st August to 30th November, 2019.

Officers advised that the recommendation the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had made in June 2019 to the Executive Committee in relation disabled facilities grants had been approved.

RESOLVED that

- 1) the minutes of the Executive Committee meeting held on 11th June 2019 be noted; and**

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Thursday, 4th July, 2019

- 2) the content of the Executive Committee's Work Programme for the period 1st August to 30th November, 2019 be noted.

22. TASK GROUPS, SHORT SHARP REVIEWS AND WORKING GROUPS - UPDATE REPORTS

- a) Budget Scrutiny Working Group – Chair, Councillor Wheeler

Councillor Wheeler informed the Committee that the Budget Scrutiny Working Group met on 1st July, 2019 and welcomed Councillor Akbar to the group. Members were informed that the model of this working group worked well last year and therefore a similar approach had been agreed for 2019/20.

The Financial Services Manager had attended the meeting to provide an update in relation to the Medium Term Financial Plan which outlined the potential budget gap for 2020/21 – 2023/24.

Relevant senior Officers had been invited to attend a future meeting of the group to provide an update in respect of the work of the Commercialism Programme Board.

- b) Parking Enforcement Task Group – Chair, Councillor Mark Shurmer

Members were informed that the first meeting had been arranged to take place on 11th July, 2019.

- c) Performance Scrutiny Working Group – Chair, Andrew Fry

Members were informed that the first meeting of this municipal year took place on 21st June, 2019. During this meeting Members had considered the corporate performance report in respect of one of the strategic purposes 'Help me be Financially Independent'. Members would consider the performance report for 'Help run a successful business' at the following meeting of the working group.

- d) Suicide Prevention Scrutiny Task Group – Chair, Debbie Chance

Members were advised that five members had been appointed to the Task Group but a sixth Member was also now interested in participating in the review. It was confirmed that Councillor Baker should be appointed to sit on the group.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Thursday, 4th July, 2019

Councillor Debbie Chance informed the Committee that the first meeting of the Task Group took place on 27th June, 2019 and a work programme had been produced. A series of meetings had been scheduled and key witnesses had been identified to attend future meetings of the group.

RESOLVED that

Councillor Joe Baker be appointed to sit on the Suicide Prevention Task Group.

23. EXTERNAL SCRUTINY BODIES - UPDATE REPORTS

- a) West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) Overview and Scrutiny Committee – Council Representative, Councillor Michael Chalk

Members considered the content of the WMCA Overview and Scrutiny Committee's Annual Report for 2018/19. Members were informed that the next meeting of the Committee was due to be held on 15th July, 2019.

- b) Worcestershire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC) – Council Representative, Councillor Michael Chalk

Councillor Chalk provided a written update in respect of the Worcestershire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting that had been held on 27th June, 2019. During this meeting an update had been provided in respect of acute stroke services. Members had been advised that there was a national shortage of consultants for stroke services. In Worcestershire the service was provided at the Worcester Royal hospital, though sometimes the consultant provided advice from Herefordshire via skype.

Members discussed stroke service provision in the county. Some personal examples were provided by Members in respect of their experiences when suffering with a stroke and concerns were raised that residents from Redditch might struggle to access the service when needed due to the distance that they had to travel to Worcester. Members also commented that if consultants were providing advice via skype to Worcester Royal Hospital a similar service should be made available at the Alexandra Hospital to serve the needs of local residents.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Thursday, 4th July, 2019

Concerns were raised that increasingly younger people were having strokes. Many younger people lived in the Borough of Redditch and it was important to ensure that local health services met their needs.

Members concurred that the subject required further investigation and Members therefore agreed to invite representatives of Worcestershire Acute Hospital NHS Trust to attend a future meeting of the Committee to discuss the matter further.

RESOLVED that

- 1) **the content of the WMCA Overview and Scrutiny Committee's Annual Report 2018/19 be noted; and**
- 2) **representatives of Worcestershire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust be invited to attend a future meeting of the Committee to deliver a presentation in respect of stroke services.**

24. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

The Senior Democratic Services Officer (Redditch) presented the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's Work Programme and in doing so informed the Committee that the items that had been identified earlier for scrutiny would be incorporated into the work programme.

Members were advised that the Service Delivery Options – HRA Gas Maintenance report would now be considered by the Executive Committee in October, 2019 and therefore this item would be moved back to October on the Overview and Scrutiny's Work Programme for Pre-Decision Scrutiny.

RESOLVED that

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

The Meeting commenced at 6.30 pm
and closed at 8.07 pm