

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Monday, 16th December, 2019

MINUTES

Present:

Councillor Joe Baker (Chair), Councillor Debbie Chance (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Salman Akbar, Joanne Beecham, Michael Chalk, Peter Fleming, Mark Shurmer and Jennifer Wheeler

Also Present:

Councillor Matthew Dormer (Portfolio Holder for Planning, Economic Development, Commercialism and Partnerships)
Councillor David Thain (Portfolio Holder for Corporate Management)
Councillor Craig Warhurst (Portfolio Holder for Housing)

Officers:

Rebecca Green, Sue Hanley, Jayne Pickering, Deb Poole, Guy Revans and Paul Stephenson

Democratic Services Officers:

J Bayley and J Gresham

69. APOLOGIES AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES

An apology for absence was received on behalf of Councillor Andrew Fry and it was confirmed that Councillor John Fisher would be attending as his substitute.

Members noted that Councillor Joanne Beecham would be arriving late.

70. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND OF PARTY WHIP

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

71. PUBLIC SPEAKING

There were no registered public speakers on this occasion.

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Chair

72. PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY HOUSING / HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT STRATEGIC IMPROVEMENT PLAN PROGRESS REPORT

Officers presented the Housing/Housing Revenue Account Strategic Improvement Plan Progress Report. The following was highlighted for Members' consideration: -

- Significant Housing Revenue Account (HRA) issues had been identified particularly in Repairs and Maintenance.
- The Cultural change work was underway.
- This report was the third update to Members as part of the three year improvement plan.
- Senior Officers completed and implemented a Review of the Housing and Community Services Management Team.
- The consultation phase of the Review of Housing Capital/ Property/ Compliance Team(s) had taken place.
- There was due to be a Review of Locality Team(s) in May 2020.
- An external consultancy was commissioned to carry out Stock Condition Surveys and a Work Force Skills Audit.
- Stock Condition Surveys were due to be completed in January 2020.
- Regular compliance updates including Fire Safety Orders, Control of Asbestos, Electricity and Gas were received by Portfolio Holders and Executive Members.
- A new Housing IT system was procured at the end of 2019 and would be implemented by December 2021.

The Chair asked Councillor Warhurst, as Portfolio Holder for Housing if there was anything further he would like to add and Councillor Warhurst thanked the Officers for their hard work and comprehensive report. Councillor Warhurst added that the new Housing IT system would provide a much more robust control of the Council's Housing stock

Members questioned how Officers hoped to make savings in order to help the HRA balance. Officers explained there had been a change to the way contractors were engaged, that non-essential electrical works had been suspended and that the Council had capitalised as much as possible. It was also confirmed that the review and redesign of the Voids process had improved. Members requested that Officers distribute further information regarding the backlog of Void properties and how they had been reduced.

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Members had a discussion about whether the Housing IT system would be able to 'talk to' the Finance system. Officers informed the Committee that although there was not a system that addressed both functions the new Housing IT system would certainly be able to interface with the Finance system and that some of the same Officers were working across both projects therefore there was integration and oversight between the two projects. Some Members questioned why the implementation phase for the system was so long and Officers explained there had been an overhaul of the Policies and Procedures which had prolonged the process but that a large amount of preparatory work had been undertaken and the programme of works was firmly underway. Officers resolved that they would circulate the Project Plan to Members for their information.

Members questioned how the Council was ensuring that there was sufficient Council Housing stock in Redditch. Councillor Warhurst confirmed that there had been no new stock built by the Council in Redditch since 1998 but that there was a tender undertaken in January 2020 in order to build 20 houses in the Borough.

RESOLVED that

- 1) Officers should circulate the data regarding the backlog of Void properties amongst Overview and Scrutiny Committee members.**
- 2) Officers should circulate the Housing IT System Project Plan amongst Overview and Scrutiny Committee members.**

73. PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY - REDDITCH COUNCIL PLAN

The Policy Manager for Redditch Borough Council presented the Redditch Council Plan Report. The following was highlighted for Members' consideration:

- The updated Redditch Council Plan included 5 Strategic Purposes which provided a strategic direction for the Borough.
- A Community Priority sat underneath each Strategic Purpose and would directly support the community on issues that mattered to them.
- There was a 'Green Thread' that ran through the plan and supported Climate Change issues.
- This was a four year plan for Redditch.

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The Chair asked Councillor Matthew Dormer, as Portfolio Holder for Planning, Economic Development, Commercialism and Partnerships if there was anything further he would like to add and Councillor Dormer thanked the Officers for the considerable work the team had carried out.

Officers explained that the plan was a high level document and not designed to go into granular detail. It was noted by Members that one of the Community Priorities included the increase in wages for those who lived and worked in the Borough. The Chair expressed an interest in how this would be measured in the long-term. Officers confirmed that through working alongside North Worcestershire Economic Development and Regeneration (NWEDR) there would be higher engagement with schools and businesses in the Borough. Members were also interested to find out the number of 18-24 year olds who were not in full time education and Officers resolved to distribute the information amongst Members after the meeting.

RESOLVED that

Officers should circulate information about the number of 18-24 year olds who were not in full time education in the Borough for the consideration of members of the Committee.

74. PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY - REVIEW OF THE ONE STOP SHOPS

Officers presented the Review of the One Stop Shops Report. The following was highlighted for Members' consideration:

- The falling customer numbers at One Stop Shops (OSS) in Batchley, Winyates and Woodrow had resulted in the proposal that they would be closed.
- That there were no plans to close the Locality offices and these teams would remain based in the communities.
- That revenue would be collected from renting the OSS space to other groups and agencies.
- The Council's partnership with Allpay created greater opportunities for customers to make payments in more locations.

Members discussed whether all customers, in particular the elderly and vulnerable, would be happy to make regular payments in other locations than the One Stop Shops. In addition, Members questioned what service provision would be made available to assist those who were not comfortable with the new electronic system. Officers assured Members that there were plenty of

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locations for payments to be made and the cashiers at the Town Hall would still be available to all customers. Members also discussed how no other Councils in Worcestershire accepted cash for payments.

Officers explained to Members that the Locality teams would continue to be present in the local communities and that there were other teams, such as the Financial Independent Teams (FIT), that could provide assistance to customers who needed it.

Members highlighted the following areas for consideration:

- The potential use of the Voluntary Sector to champion the new scheme in local communities.
- That residents might perceive they were not being looked after if any closures were made.

The Chair asked Councillor Thain, as Portfolio Holder for Corporate Management if there was anything further he would like to add and Councillor Thain thanked the Officers for the considerable work the team had carried out.

RECOMMENDED that

Executive Committee note that Overview and Scrutiny Committee have concerns regarding the content of this report, as detailed in the preamble above; and

RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

75. PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY - FEES AND CHARGES 2020/21

This item was postponed and for discussion at the meeting of the Committee due to be held on 14th January 2020.

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

Officers confirmed that the Executive Committee had not sat since the previous Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 5th December 2019 and so there were no minutes from Executive Committee meetings for consideration. There had also been no updates to the Executive Committee's Work Programme since the previous meeting of the Committee.

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77. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

There had been no updates to the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme since the last meeting.

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

The following updates were provided in respect of the work of scrutiny Task Groups and Working Groups:

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

Councillor Wheeler explained that there had been no meetings since the last Overview and Scrutiny meeting therefore there was nothing to report to the Committee.

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

Councillor Shurmer explained that there had been no meetings of the group since the general election on 12th December 2019 was called, though meetings would take place in 2020.

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

Officers explained that there had been no meetings since the last Overview and Scrutiny meeting therefore there was nothing to report to the Committee.

d) Suicide Prevention Task Group – Chair, Councillor Debbie Chance

Councillor Chance explained that there had been no meetings since the previous meeting of the Committee. There was a meeting planned for 17th December 2019.

79. EXTERNAL SCRUTINY BODIES - UPDATE REPORTS

Councillor Chalk explained that there had been no meetings since the last Overview and Scrutiny meeting.

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The Meeting commenced at 6.30 pm
and closed at 8.20 pm