

Redditch Borough Council
Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Annual Report 2019 – 2020



REDDITCH BOROUGH COUNCIL

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CHAIR'S FOREWORD

Over the last year it has been a privilege and a pleasure to be the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. It has been a good year as there has been a lot of cross-party working. This is significant in a number of different ways; the importance of cross-party decision-making when representing the community as a whole, in addition it shows that by working together in partnership we can move things forward as a Council. The majority of the recommendations made by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee were cross-party recommendations, however the Executive Committee have not agreed all of them.

It is noted that there have been two specific Task Groups established during the year, the Suicide Prevention Task Group and the Parking Enforcement Task Group. We have had in-depth group discussions at meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Frequently we discussed individual items put forward by the whole Committee and raised issues that mattered to the community.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee used its powers to scrutinise decisions made by the Executive Committee in a cross-party way. There have been changes implemented over the municipal year. /this year it was decided that a regular meeting be set up with the Chief Executive Officer and Leader of the Council which has been useful in the support of the scrutiny process. It was also encouraging when scrutinising the Overview and Scrutiny Select Committee Findings and New Governance Guidance, published in May 2019, to see that the Committee is working in line with best practice.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee who have contributed their time and energy to make this a successful year for Overview and Scrutiny. Further thanks are extended to those councillors who have chaired Task Groups and Working Groups during the year, Councillors Debbie Chance, Andy Fry, Mark Shurmer and Jenny Wheeler as well as to Councillor Mike Chalk who has provide excellent written updates on the work of the West Midlands Combined Authority Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Worcestershire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee during the year. I am proud that I have been able to continue in my role as Chair.

Councillor Joe Baker
Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee



INTRODUCTION

This report outlines the work undertaken by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee of Redditch Borough Council during 2019 – 2020.

THE ROLE OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

The role of overview and scrutiny is an important one in the Council's governance structure, in providing challenge and driving improvement. It is often referred to as the "critical friend" of the Council and can review any issues of concern or real interest to local residents.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee has a number of roles within the Council. These include:

- Holding the Executive Committee to account by thoroughly scrutinising their decisions to ensure that the Council continues to provide the best services possible for Redditch residents. As part of this role, the Committee has the power to 'call-in' decisions made by the Executive Committee and to request that the Executive Committee review the original decisions, taking into account the issues raised by the Committee.
- Acting as a 'critical friend' to the Executive Committee by reviewing Council policies and strategies, making recommendations where appropriate.
- Performance and financial monitoring, to ensure the Council's services are sustainable and to the highest possible standard.
- Commissioning reviews of services/topics that impact on the Council or on the lives of Redditch residents.
- Pre-scrutiny of items prior to a decision being made by the Executive Committee.
- Setting up Task Groups to focus on specific subjects and recommend ways to improve existing practices within the Council and community as a whole. A flow chart on how to consider potential scrutiny reviews can be found at Appendix A and the Council's scoping form at Appendix B.

MEMBERSHIP

The Committee appoints individual Members to oversee the work of Overview and Scrutiny. Membership of the Committee for 2018/2019 is as follows:



Cllr Joe Baker (Chair)



Cllr Debbie Chance (Vice Chair)



Cllr Salman Akbar



Cllr Joanne Beecham



Cllr Michael Chalk



Peter Fleming



Cllr Andy Fry



Cllr Mark Shurmer



Cllr Jennifer Wheeler

ACTIVITIES AND OUTCOMES DURING 2019/20

Non-Executive Members attended Overview and Scrutiny training in May 2019 and during this session the Councillors identified priority issues to add to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's work programme.

The Committee considered the potential items for scrutiny that had been identified during the training. In addition, Members considered topics suggested by the Corporate Management Team (CMT) for potential review.

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

- Poverty – Members agreed that this subject might be suitable for a Short Sharp Review or Task Group exercise.
- Mental Health Services - to include loneliness, in particular, with older people.
- Skills in the local workforce – 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) – Through the Crime and Disorder Scrutiny Panel members would consider the work of the North Worcestershire Community Safety Partnership to address anti-social-behaviour in Redditch.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee monitors the impact of all of its recommendations that have been endorsed by the Executive Committee. A tracking report is presented to the Committee during the year stating progress made to date.

During consideration of the Executive Committee's Work Programme, Members agreed to pre-scrutinise the following items:

- Disposal of HRA Asset at Green Lane, Studley
- Redditch Council Plan
- National Waste Strategy - Implications for the Council.
- Housing Strategy report
- Review of the One Stop Shops.
- Voluntary and Community Sector Grants Programme 2020/21.
- Leisure and Cultural Services Strategy.

Further information about the issues discussed by the Committee during the year and Members' findings are detailed below.

PRIVATE SECTOR HOME REPAIR ASSISTANCE POLICY – 6 JUNE

Representatives from the Strategic Housing and Private Sector Housing Teams presented the private sector housing assistance report for members' consideration. This report outlined changes to an existing policy.

The policy had been updated in line with recommendations from an internal audit that was conducted during 2017/2018. There were a number of proposed changes included in the report which reflected changes around loan limits and local land charges.

Members discussed the proposed changes to the policy and highlighted a number of points including the need for increased communication with partner organisations and the public in order to make them aware of the grant's existence. This updated policy was welcomed by Members as it offered a wider range of assistance to people with disabilities and would potentially benefit the local community.

TENANCY CONDITIONS FOR COUNCIL HOUSING TENANTS AND TENANTS HANDBOOK PRESENTATION – 4 JULY 2019

Members pre-scrutinised a report providing an update in respect of proposed changes to the Council's Housing Tenancy Agreement and Conditions.

The new 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 being revised and contained more detailed information on managing a tenancy.

The presentation made reference to the new Recharge Policy for tenants, their rights and responsibilities as Council tenants, information for tenants on how to mitigate issues and dealing with tenants who suffer mental health issues.

A recommendation was made by the Committee that the Council should be more proactive in their enforcement with tenants particularly with regards to rubbish deposited in gardens. This recommendation was approved by the Executive Committee.

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY SELECT COMMITTEE FINDINGS AND NEW GOVERNANCE GUIDANCE – PRESENTATION – 4 JULY

In May 2019, a report had been presented to the Committee which highlighted the areas in the Overview and Scrutiny Statutory Guidance which had been produced by the Department of Housing, Communities and Local Government. Members were pleased when looking through the guidance as the council was already primarily compliant with scrutiny best practice.

Members considered the need for greater and more formal engagement between the Executive Committee and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Following discussion at the Constitutional Review Working Party it was decided that there would be quarterly meetings between the Leader of the Council and the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. .

The Leader of the Council subsequently met with the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny committee, the Chief Executive and Senior Democratic Services Officer (Redditch) to discuss the scrutiny process and how the Committee could assist the governance process at the Council more effectively. At the first meeting in November 2019 it was decided that the relevant Portfolio Holder should be invited to attend future meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to speak on items within their remit. This has occurred at every meeting since that date and has worked very well. The next meeting between the Leader and Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee is due to take place in April 2020.

During consideration of the report there were also discussions regarding communicating Scrutiny's role and purpose to the wider Authority and to the public. There was discussion that the Communications team would be invited to a future meeting to help discuss actions that could be taken to help raise public awareness of the work of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

DISPOSAL OF HRA ASSET AT GREEN LANE, STUDLEY - PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY – 5 SEPTEMBER

A report was presented to Members in respect of the disposal of a Council asset in the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) located at Green Lane, Studley and the removal of a railway bridge from an adjacent site. The project would require a significant amount of expenditure from Redditch Borough Council to make the bridge properly fit for purpose. Officers proposed that the bridge structure should be completely removed, and the site realigned to allow for two new four-bedroom properties to be built at the site.

Members discussed the options for the site and endorsed the proposals brought forward by Officers in respect of the site. These recommendations were subsequently agreed by the Executive Committee.

HEREFORDSHIRE AND WORCESTERSHIRE SUSTAINABILITY AND TRANSFORMATION PARTNERSHIP – 24 OCTOBER 2019

The Director of Strategy and Partnerships for Worcestershire Health and Care Trust presented an update on the Herefordshire and Worcestershire Sustainability and Transformation plan (STP). This was the latest update in respect of this matter, which had also been discussed in previous years, and enabled Members to learn more about plans for local health services moving forward.

CONCESSIONARY RENTS – 7 NOVEMBER 2019

On 7th November 2019 a position statement was presented in respect of the Council's Concessionary Rents Policy. Public speakers were in attendance at the meeting in order to express their views on the possibility of a change in Council policy for concessionary rents.

A recommendation was made by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at the end of the meeting that was held on 7th November 2019 which proposal that the Executive Committee abolish the idea of removing concessionary rent relief for Voluntary and Community Sector groups and instead look at alternative methods of funding the shortfall in the Council's budget. It was decided that this item would be discussed again at a future meeting of Overview and Scrutiny on 14th January 2020. This recommendation was not approved by the Executive Committee.

PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY - SUPPORT TO THE VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SECTOR 2020/21 – 9 JANUARY 2020

Further to the report that was presented to the Committee on 7th November 2019 this was an additional presentation that covered the Support to the Voluntary Sector. It was a policy that divided the Council however the Committee acknowledged that due to the financial position of the Council difficult decisions needed to be made. There were registered public speakers at this meeting who expressed their opinions regarding the proposed policy and how it would affect the Voluntary Sector.

There was a lengthy discussion which included comments about the consultation period with the sector and the revised funding model that was proposed. The discussions consisted of what options should or could be left in and which ones should or could be removed from the proposal. It was a long and difficult discussion for the Committee on a subject matter that had created much debate in the community and across Members. A recommendation was made to the Executive

Committee regarding the exemption of 'meanwhile type' leases in any proposed options. This recommendation was not agreed by the Executive Committee.

PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY - TOWN CENTRE REGENERATION (COMMUNITY HUB AND RAILWAY QUARTER) – 7 NOVEMBER

A report was received on the regeneration of Redditch Town Centre. In the course of the presentation Members were advised that the report captured the outcomes of a master planning exercise and the key points of a business case for a public Sector Community Hub.

The following was discussed at length by the Committee:

- The need for Redditch Town Centre to be regenerated and the benefits that this might have in respect of the impact on the local economy and the community.
- A submission of an Investment Plan by the Council in order to help secure funding from the Towns Fund
- The regeneration of Redditch Town Centre would be significant for all Councillors due to the importance of the town centre to all residents
- Further consultation had not yet been undertaken as the plans were only at an indicative stage. Specific proposals would be subject to consultation once they were brought forward.

The Committee made a number of recommendations in relation to this presentation including endorsing the concept of a comprehensive regeneration for the station quarter, Church Road sites, the library site and outdoor market sites. Another recommendation that was agreed to during this presentation which was that authority be delegated to the Chief Executive to commission an architect-led professional team to draw up feasible and deliverable design proposals supported by viability appraisals for a Community Hub, to include consideration of partners' requirements. These recommendations were approved by the Executive Committee

WASTE SERVICES – PRESENTATION – 7 NOVEMBER 2019

A brief presentation was delivered in respect of Waste Management. The presentation focussed mainly on the approach that Redditch Borough Council took in Waste Management and the communications that are currently underway in order to encourage residents to reduce the amount of waste generated by each household and the value of taking preventative action. Members were also informed about changes to waste and recycling collection services, including garden waste collections, that had been the subject of Government consultation earlier that year.

CIVIL CONTINGENCIES ANNUAL REPORT – 5 DECEMBER 2019

The Civil Contingencies Annual Report was presented to the Committee and provided an update for Members on matters that had been carried out over the past year. This annual report was delivered in accordance with recommendations made by the Civil Contingencies short Sharp Review Group in a previous municipal year.

There had been extensive work around the updating of Business Continuity Plans and Rest Centre Plans across the Authority. A test was carried out on the Rest Centre Plan which had highlighted some errors within the plan that officers had then updated to ensure that the plan contained the most up to date and accurate information. Members were also provided with information on a multi-agency test exercise that had been carried out by officers at the West Midlands Safari Park. It was an opportunity to test the emergency plan with partner organisations.

REDDITCH PARTNERSHIP ANNUAL REPORT – 5 DECEMBER 2019

A report was presented to the Committee in relation to the Redditch Partnership Annual report. Again this report was presented in accordance with a proposal by the Local Strategic Partnership Task Group some years ago that the partnership should provide an annual update to the Committee.

The partnership is made up of from a range of organisations in Redditch who have identified priorities for the Borough including health inequalities, education attainment, raising aspirations of young people and the economy of Redditch.

The Redditch Partnership worked with local businesses to look at the skills available in the Borough and distributed data and knowledge to Members and partner organisations.

SKILLS IN THE LOCAL WORKFORCE – PRESENTATION – 5 DECMEBER 2019

The Committee received a report in relation to Skills in the Local Workforce and were advised on key areas including employment and local business initiatives, education and engagement with young people in the Borough and the work that Members could undertake in order to increase the engagement of local schools, pupils and their parents / care givers.

Members requested that a further presentation take place later in the year in order to clarify some of the data and receive an update on the initiatives that were currently underway.

PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY- HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT STRATEGIC IMPROVEMENT PLAN PROGRESS REPORT – 16 DECEMBER 2019

Members were updated on the progress of the Housing/Housing Revenue Account report and questioned officers regarding progress that had been made.

There had been significant changes since the previous update including the consultation and implementation of a review of the Housing and Community Services Management Team and consultation of a review of Housing Capital/ Property/ Compliance Team(s). The Committee was also updated that non-essential electrical work had been suspended and that significant work was being carried out by officers regarding cultural change within the service. The Committee were interested in receiving information regarding the backlog of Void properties and the Housing IT System Project Plan going forward.

Members were advised that compliance work including Fire Safety Orders, the control of asbestos, electricity and gas safety checks were being regularly disseminated to Portfolio Holders and Executive Committee Members. The new Housing IT system had been procured and would provide a more robust control of the Council's housing stock in addition to linking with the Council's new Finance system.

PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY - REDDITCH COUNCIL PLAN – 16 DECEMBER 2019

The Redditch Council Plan was presented by the Policy Manager for Members' consideration. This was the new plan and contained 5 new Strategic Purposes that provided strategic direction for the Borough. In order to support Climate Change issues there was a 'Green Thread' that ran through the new plan.

PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY - REVIEW OF THE ONE STOP SHOPS – 16 DECEMBER 2019

A report on the Review of the One Stop Shops was presented to the Committee.

The falling customer numbers at One Stop Shops (OSS) in Batchley, Winyates and Woodrow had resulted in the proposal that they would be closed. The proposal would not affect the Locality offices who would still have a presence within the communities along with other support teams including Financial Independent Teams (FIT).

Members were concerned with the potential loss of access for vulnerable and older residents concerning the making of payments. The Committee were reassured that there were plenty of locations for payments to be made and the cashiers at the Town Hall were still available to customers.

The Committee did recommend that Executive Committee note they had concerns regarding the content of this report.

PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY - ESSENTIAL LIVING FUND POLICY – 9 JANUARY 2020

The Essential Living Fund report was presented for Members 'consideration, which proposed an update of the current policy. The new policy would provide clarity for customers and officers and provided a more targeted approach to enable customers to work towards long term financial stability and a consistency of service. Members recommended that the policy should be adopted.

PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY - FEES AND CHARGES 2020/21 – 9 JANUARY 2020

The Fees and Charges report was pre-scrutinised prior to its consideration at the Executive Committee and then Council. The Heads of Service were present at this meeting in order to explain any changes to fees and charges in their service area. Members were largely in agreement with the changes and noted the report. They did, however, request that more detail be provided in the report in future years.

TASK GROUPS AND SHORT SHARP REVIEWS

Task Groups are established by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to conduct an in-depth review of any service, policy or issue that affects the Borough. The work carried out by Task Groups in 2019/20 is summarised below.

REVIEW OF PARKING ENFORCEMENT CONTRACT – 6 JUNE 2019

At the start of the year Members decided to launch a review of parking enforcement arrangements in the borough. This subject had been raised as an area of concern at a meeting of the Audit, Governance and standards Committee in April 2019. Members had concerns regarding the Council's parking enforcement arrangements, in particular, dangerous and illegal parking around schools and hospitals. The review would include engagement with both Wychavon District Council, which provided a parking enforcement service on behalf of the Council, and Worcestershire County Council in respect of the legal agreement which shaped what the Council could do.

The meetings have included interviews and consideration of evidence submitted by with the following officers and representatives from partnership organisations:

- Representative from West Mercia Police
- Head of Environmental Services (Redditch Borough Council)
- Environmental Services Manager (Redditch Borough Council)
- Representative of Worcestershire County Council

A survey was undertaken and distributed to Members to gauge the extent to which parking enforcement problems were reported by residents to Councillors and whether there were any variances between wards.

The group has agreed their recommendations and will report to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on their findings at the first meeting of the new municipal year.

SUICIDE PREVENTION

Six Members were appointed to the Task Group and the first meeting of the Task Group took place on 27th June, 2019, and a work programme was produced. To ensure that Members could undertake an effective review of an important subject Members agreed that the deadline for the Suicide Prevention Task Group should be extended to 2020.

In the course of this review the task group has interviewed the following:

- Representatives of Worcestershire County Council

- Local community group experience in helping people mental ill health.
- NHS Practitioners
- The Redditch Partnership manager and other Council officers

The group is due to report their findings to the overview and scrutiny committee at the first meeting in the new municipal year.

CRIME AND DISORDER SCRUTINY PANEL – 25 SEPTEMBER

Local authorities are required to have a Committee designated with responsibility to review the work of the local Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership and this Committee must meet at least once a year to discuss the work of the partnership. In Redditch this role is undertaken by the Crime and Disorder Scrutiny Panel, which is a permanent sub-committee of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The Panel holds the North Worcestershire Community Safety Partnership to account for its work in Redditch.

A meeting of the Crime and Disorder Scrutiny Panel took place in September 2019. During the meeting Members received an update on the work of the partnership in the Borough in the preceding 12 months, this included Anti-Social Behaviour and data surrounding the reporting of it in the Borough. There was also discussion and information circulated to Members regarding the Nominated Neighbour Scheme.

BUDGET SCRUTINY WORKING GROUP – CHAIR, COUNCILLOR JENNY WHEELER

The Budget Scrutiny Working Group held a number of meetings in 2019/20. The model of the working group had been considered successful in the previous year and therefore a similar approach would be undertaken in 2019/20. Members concluded that this was a challenging time financially for the Council and that the Budget Scrutiny Working Group had an important role to play in terms of providing assurance to the Executive Committee and scrutinising any plans that might have significant financial implications for the Council.

During the year the Budget Scrutiny Working Group considered the following matters:

- Medium Term Financial Plan which outlined the potential budget gap for 2020/21 – 2023/24.
- Commercialism Programme Board including the progress within the Authority with delivering commercial services and the role of Black Radley. Professor Peter Latchford OBE, from Black Radley presented to the group and it was recommended that there be a presentation organised for all Council Members in respect of the budget.
- Section 24 Notice and the implications of this for the Council's financial position moving forward – including difficult decisions that needed to be made in order to help balance the council's budget.
- Enterprise Finance system
- Fees and Charges
- Financial Monitoring reports
- Investment and Acquisition Strategy

During the municipal year all recommendations made by the Budget Scrutiny Working Group have been accepted.

PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY WORKING GROUP

The group has an important role in scrutinising the delivery of the Council's priorities. The group agreed that for 2019/20 Members would monitor performance of services in relation to the strategic purposes. Each Member was allocated responsibility for taking a lead on monitoring the Council's performance in relation to a single strategic purpose. The Group met seven times in 2019/20. This represented a significant improvement on the previous year when only three meetings took place. The group had agreed at the start of the year that they would have at least six meetings and a quorum of three. Every meeting of the group was quorate.

During these meetings the following items were discussed:

- Corporate Performance report in respect of one of the strategic purposes 'Help me be Financially Independent'.
- Interviewed the Chief Executive and Head of Economic Development for North Worcestershire about work in respect of the strategic purpose 'help me run a successful business'.

At the end of the year members decided that in future the group should review the performance of services collectively. Heads of Service will be invited to meetings of the group in 2020/21 in turn to discuss the performance of services within their remit.

EXTERNAL SCRUTINY BODIES

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

The Committee received regular updates from Councillor Chalk, the Council's representative on the West Midlands Combined Authority Overview and Scrutiny Committee. During the year Councillor Chalk frequently provided written updates about the work of the Committee and highlighted the following points:

- Members considered the content of the WMCA Overview and Scrutiny Committee's Annual Report for 2018/19.
- 5G network and how this should be rolled out across the region#
- Homelessness – including Housing First initiatives

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

The Committee received regular updates from Councillor Chalk about the work of the Worcestershire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC). Some of the issues highlighted during the year included:

- Acute stroke services - Members discussed stroke service provision in the County
- Interview with the Chief Executive of Worcestershire Acute Hospital Trust

CONCLUSION

This has been a busy year for Overview and Scrutiny in Redditch. In particular Members have undertaken a significant amount of pre-scrutiny work and many of the Committee's recommendations have influenced the decisions reached by the Executive Committee and Council.

The Committee welcomed the report in respect of the Overview and Scrutiny Guidance that was published in 2019. Members were pleased to learn that the majority of points detailed in the report were already in place in Redditch, indicating that the Council's scrutiny function is compliant with national best practice.

To ensure that the Council's Overview and Scrutiny process continues to meet the needs of Redditch residents whilst complying with legislative requirements, a scrutiny training session will be provided in the new municipal year. All non-Executive Members will be invited to attend.

The Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee express his thanks to all Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, recognising in particular the valuable contribution made by Members through Task Group investigations and on the Budget and Performance Scrutiny Working Groups.

For any background information on the work of Overview and Scrutiny Committee in Redditch, please visit <https://www.redditchbc.gov.uk/council/the-council.aspx>

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Scrutiny Proposal Form

(This form should be completed by sponsoring Member(s), Officers and / or members of the public when proposing an item for Scrutiny).

Note: The matters detailed below have not yet received any detailed consideration. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee reserves the right to reject suggestions for scrutiny that fall outside the Borough Council’s remit.

Proposer’s name and designation		Date of referral	
Proposed topic title			
Link to local priorities including the strategic purposes			
Background to the issue			
<p>Key Objectives</p> <p>Please keep to SMART objectives (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Timely)</p>			
<p>How long do you think is needed to complete this exercise? (Where possible please estimate the number of weeks, months and meetings required)</p>			

Please return this form to: Jess Bayley, Jo Gresham or Amanda Scarce, Democratic Services Officers, Redditch Borough Council, Town Hall, Walter Stranz Square, Redditch, B98 8AH

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