REDDITCH BOROUGH COUNCIL

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Overview and Scrutiny Committee

23rd June 2010

MINUTES

Present:

Councillor Diane Thomas (Chair), and Councillors Robin King, Wanda King, William Norton, Brenda Quinney, Mark Shurmer and Graham Vickery

Also Present:

Councillors Andrew Brazier, Adam Griffin and Gay Hopkins.

Officers:

H Bennett, A Heighway, L Jones, T Kristunas and S Skinner

Committee Services Officer:

J Bayley and J Smyth.

13. APOLOGIES AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors Banks, A Clayton and Hartnett.

An apology was also received on behalf of Councillor Braley (Portfolio Holder for Corporate Management).

14. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND OF PARTY WHIP

There were neither declarations of interest nor of Party Whip.

15. MINUTES

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 28th April 2010 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

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Chair

16. ACTIONS LIST

The Committee considered the latest version of the Actions List and specific mention was made on the following matters:

a) Action 2: Convergence between Council and Registered Social Landlords (RSL) Rents

Further to a request at the previous meeting, Members were provided with a written detailed breakdown of the methodology and Government formula for calculating rents. The national average formula rent for 2010/11, deemed to be the target for convergence, was £66.04, however the actual average rent for Redditch Borough Council was £63.38.

Officers clarified a number of points raised, in relation to the difference between the national average figure and that for Redditch Borough Council and explained that, as well as applying the Government formula rent, other factors were taken into account in respect of capital values of individual properties, which varied across the country, numbers of bedrooms and average earnings. Members were advised that, whilst authorities aimed for the "target" formula rent, the average was generally either lower or higher dependent on local factors. Officers further advised that the gap between the Government formula rent and actual average rents was much wider than Redditch's in some areas.

Officers advised that local authorities had very little input into the process other than to undertake the calculations required based on the Government formula provided.

b) Action 6: Letter to former Councillor Phil Mould

Copies of a letter from the Chair on behalf of the Committee, sent to former Councillor Phil Mould, previous Chair of the Committee, were circulated for Members information.

c) Action 8: Garden Waste Collection – Pre-scrutiny

Members were advised that the Garden Waste Collection report, scheduled on the Forward Plan for consideration at the 29th September Executive Committee, had been included on the Committee's Work Programme for pre-scrutiny at its meeting on 15th September 2010.

RESOLVED that

the reports be noted.

17. CALL-IN AND PRE-SCRUTINY

It was noted that there had been no specific call-ins relating to the Decision Notice of the Executive Committee meeting held on 16th June 2010.

In respect of pre-scrutiny requests, the Committee discussed various items scheduled on the Forward Plan for consideration by the Executive Committee. Members agreed that several of the items were suitable for pre-scrutiny, namely:

a) REDI Centre Options – Update report (28th July 2010 Executive)

b) Older Persons Housing and Support Strategy (28th July 2010 Executive);

c) Children and Young Peoples Plan (12th January 2011 Executive); and

d) Improvement Plan 2010/11 (28th July 2010 Executive - Members noted that this item might be removed from the Forward Plan);

It was noted that the Joint Worcestershire Scrutiny into Flood Task and Finish Group's recommendations had still to be considered by the Executive Committee, although no specific date for it to be considered had been scheduled on the Forward Plan. Officers were requested to advise Committee Services on the proposed date for the Executive to consider the matter as soon as possible for scheduling on the Forward Plan.

Reference was made to an item on the Decision Notice from the 25th May 2010 Executive Committee meeting relating to the Supporting People Strategy. Officers advised that, whilst the matter could no longer be called in, and the Executive Committee's recommendation to adopt the strategy was due to be considered at full Council on the 28th June (where Members would have an opportunity comment if they wished), it could still be subject to further scrutiny. Particular concerns were expressed about the style of writing and language used which, it was suggested,

rendered the report incomprehensible, unclear and not suitable for a public audience.

Members were informed that the report had, in fact, been produced by the County Council for circulation to District Councils. Officers were asked to report the Committee's concerns regarding the strategy to the Worcestershire Supporting Peoples' Group and provide a further presentation on the subject of the strategy for the Committee's consideration in due course.

RESOLVED that

1) the REDI Centre – options report be provided for pre-scrutiny by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee prior to the Executive Committee considering the item;

2) the Older Persons Housing and Support Strategy report be provided for pre-scrutiny by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee prior to the Executive Committee considering the item;

3) the Children and Young Peoples Plan be provided for pre-scrutiny by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee prior to the Executive Committee considering the item;

4) subject to the item remaining on the Forward Plan, the Improvement Plan 2010/11 be provided for pre-scrutiny by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee prior to consideration by the Executive Committee;

5) a further presentation on the subject of the Supporting People Strategy be provided for the Committee's consideration in due course; and

6) in respect of the Joint Worcestershire Scrutiny in to Flooding Task and Finish Group recommendations, currently listed on the Forward Plan with no scheduled date, appropriate Officers be requested to provide Committee Services with a date when the item was to be considered by the Executive Committee, as soon as possible.

18. TASK & FINISH REVIEWS - DRAFT SCOPING DOCUMENTS

There were no draft scoping documents for the Committee to review.

Members reiterated their previous concerns on the continuing lack of Officer support for the work the Committee wished to undertake on both existing and future Task and Finish reviews. It was reported that the Head of Legal, Equalities and Democratic Services would be applying herself to resolving the issue as a matter of urgency.

19. TASK AND FINISH GROUPS - PROGRESS REPORTS

The Committee received oral reports in relation to current reviews, namely:

a) Local Strategic Partnership

It was reported that eight further recommendations had been drafted at the most recent meeting of the Task and Finish Group. An additional witness interview was due to take place in June. The review was still considered to be on course for completion ahead of schedule and it was likely that the Group's final report would be presented in July / August 2010.

b) Worcestershire Hub Review

The Chair thanked Councillor Hopkins for attending the meeting on behalf of the Committee. It was acknowledged that she had only recently taken on the role of the Council's co-opted Member on the Group and that she was not, therefore, fully conversant with the work of the review to date.

Councillor Hopkins reported that she had attended the most recent meeting of the Task and Finish Group and referred Members to her notes attached to the Agenda. She provided the following answers to the questions on the subject of the Worcestershire Hub service and Task and Finish review that had been proposed by members:

1) What stage has the Joint Worcestershire Hub Scrutiny Task Group reached in the review of the Worcestershire Hub Service?

Councillor Hopkins advised that, from what she had understood from the meeting, the review of the Hub was well past the half-way stage.

2) <u>What actions are likely to be suggested to improve the delivery of the service?</u>

Councillor Hopkins reported that a number of actions were already being implemented; specifically for Redditch, a similar change to that already made by Bromsgrove who have provided one telephone number for their Revenues and Benefits service which has, it would seem, helped to reduce the number of enquiries to their back offices. It was anticipated that a similar set up in Redditch would have a similar impact on reducing calls through the Hub.

Redditch had introduced the option for its Switchboard to offer callers the opportunity to key in Office extension numbers (if known) which provided automatic transfers of calls and speeded up the process for passing on calls.

3) <u>During the course of the Neighbourhood Groups Review in Redditch we consulted with residents who frequently complained about the Worcestershire Hub at Neighbourhood Group meetings. Has any attempt been made during the review to consult with residents about the service?</u>

It was reported that a number of consultation processes were undertaken, namely:

i) Customer Questionnaire – January / February
ii) Worcester Viewpoint in May – a general newsletter but included an article on the Hub for feedback
iii) Your Views Count – an online area on the Hub website which provided a questionnaire for users to complete and submit.

4) <u>What measures are being taken to improve the Worcestershire Hub telephone service?</u>

Councillor Hopkins advised that she had no further information on other measures to be taken at this time. It was reported that the Group's Chair had suggested that perceptions had indicated that the service had much improved. This view was not shared by the Committee and Members highlighted

several of their own experiences when dealing with enquires through the Hub, namely:

i) A Member reported that during an enquiry through the Hub until they mentioned they were a Borough Councillor; they had been treated in an unsatisfactory manner.

ii) A Member recently ordered a new wheelie bin and after several calls, which lasted between ten and fifteen minutes each, they ended up with five wheelie bins.

iii) A Member attempted to report a problem with a pavement to the Highways Unit. This had not resulted in any action and they had eventually been advised to contact a County Councillor to resolve the issue.

iv) A Member reported that, in his experience, using the Hub to access services was very frustrating because you could not approach individual services to discuss issues.

It was questioned what value was added to the delivery of services if people were prevented from having direct contact with relevant services. Officers reported that the ultimate vision for the Hub had been that a customer could contact any Hub in the County to resolve an issue regardless of where they lived in the County or who the responsible authority was. Due to technical difficulties, however, this ideal of service delivery still remained to be achieved.

Councillor Hopkins was asked to report the concerns and experiences highlighted by Members to the Joint Scrutiny Review Group for further consideration. It was noted that Councillor Hopkins would provide written updates for the Committee after every Review Group meeting.

In the context of external appointments, it was highlighted that, as Councillors, Members were appointed to a number of outside bodies, such as the Worcestershire Hub Board. However, they were not aware of providing updates on the work of these outside bodies for other Members' consideration. It was reported that feedback on outside Body appointments was supposed to be directed through the Executive Committee, although this rarely happened.

RESOLVED that

1) the updates be noted;

2) Councillor Hopkins be asked to report the Committee's concerns and comments on the Worcestershire Hub service back to the Joint Scrutiny Review Group for consideration; and

3) Officers be requested to review the arrangements currently in place for delivering reports on the subject of Members' work on outside bodies.

20. BUS PASS SCHEME: COUNTY PROVISION - UPDATE

The Committee received an update report on progress to date in relation to the Bus Pass Scheme for the County.

Officers reported on a number of specific areas, in particular in relation to:

a) Age of eligibility for concessionary bus travel

Members noted that the age of eligibility for concessionary bus travel had been altered in line with changes made to the State Pension Scheme from April 2010. The changes, which would only impact on those due to turn 60 on or after 6th April 2010, had led to a lot of confusion for residents as there had been very little publicity nationally with the added issue that there would be a phased approach to issuing passes. Eligible residents would not necessarily receive their bus passes immediately upon application.

b) Concessionary fares funding

The 2010/11 grant for Redditch had remained unchanged at £239,400. Members were reminded, however, that from 2011 the County Council would be the designated Travel Concession Authority for the County's six Districts and all funding will be directed to them.

Members were advised that the County Council had been instructed to have a main-stream, uniform approach to the scheme. Dependant on what scheme they decide to adopt, District Councils might ultimately have to fund any enhanced concessionary schemes they wished to have

over and above the County Council's standard scheme. Officers reported that JMP Consulting would be providing estimates on the overall cost of pre-9.30am travel concession by the end of June. Members requested that a copy of the information be circulated to them for information. It was noted that two Districts had already removed this enhanced concession.

c) Branding

In response to a Member's query on why the Concessionary Passes could not display both County and Redditch Councils Logos on the front of cards, Officers advised that current legislation only allowed for the Travel Concession Authority's logo (the County Council's in this instance) to be displayed.

Members expressed their concerns that Redditch would have no real input into the decisions on the scheme and how it operated. They were particular concerned that the pre-9.30am travel scheme might be lost.

It was noted that, ultimately the responsibility for the Concessionary Fares Scheme and the decision as to whether to adopt the National scheme or to allow enhancements such as pre-9.30am travel would rest with the County Council. It was suggested and agreed that the relevant Worcestershire County Council Portfolio Holder and appropriate County Council Officers with responsibility for concessionary fares should be invited to attend the next meeting of the Committee to discuss the matter in more detail.

RESOLVED that

1) the Officers' report and oral update be noted;

2) Officers to circulate a copy of the information due to be provided by JMP Consulting on the costs associated with providing the pre-9.30am travel concession for members' consideration; and

3) the relevant Worcestershire County Council Portfolio Holder and Responsible Officer(s) be invited to attend the 14th July 2010 meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, to discuss the matter in more detail.

21. CHARGING POLICY - MONITORING REPORT

The Committee received an oral report in relation to monitoring of the Council's Charging Policy on the Council's process for setting fees and charges.

Officers provided background information on the Charging Policy that had been approved by Council in accordance with the recommendations made by the Fees and Charges Task and Finish Group in 2008. It was clarified that the purpose of bringing the matter to Committee was for Members to monitor the impact of the Charging Policy on the Council's fees and charges setting process, its weaknesses and positive outcomes.

Members were informed that, there had been some significant changes to services since 2008, particularly in the Leisure Services. However, it was difficult to determine to what extent this had been influenced by the Charging Policy as the introduction of the charging policy had coincided with the economic downturn which was also likely to have impacted on the use of many services. Officers, though, believed that the spirit of the policy was being followed leading to improvements across various services, including Planning, Leisure and Garden Waste collection.

Members noted the information provided by Officers but considered that a comprehensive written report was required in order for them to exercise a proper monitoring role.

RESOLVED that

Officers provide the Committee with a detailed written report on the impact of the Council's Charging Policy on the fees and charges setting process as soon as possible.

22. CONSOLIDATED REVENUE OUTTURN - FINANCIAL YEAR 2009/10

The Committee received a report which detailed the Council's overall financial outturn and actual income and expenditure for the 2009/10 financial year with a comparison to the budget for General Fund Services and the Housing Revenue Account.

Officers provided details on various aspects of the report in relation to major variations in budgets and in particular in respect of significant changes in the Corporate employee costs subsequent to the review of senior management posts and redundancies and it was noted that, whilst the figures were still subject to examination

by the Audit Commission during July 2010, in general terms the Council had saved more than anticipated.

RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

23. QUARTERLY PERFORMANCE MONITORING - QUARTER 4 - JANUARY TO MARCH 2010

The Committee received a report on the Council's performance for the forth quarter of the 2009/10 financial year for comment and noting.

Officers reported on various indicators that had shown improvements and highlighted Benefits and Housing Repairs as well as reductions, particularly those relating to recycling and levels of detritus. Members commented that solutions were being implemented to improve clearance of detritus through staff training and increased use of equipment such as mechanical sweepers.

Members also discussed NI 151 regarding the slight fall in the local overall employment rate (working age) and queried what Redditch Borough Council, as a local employer, was doing to help improve employment in the town. In the absence of specific knowledge on the matter, Officers suggested that Local Authority influence on general employment in the town was fairly marginal although a number of events had been staged as part of the Local Development Strategy work and more were planned. The Committee agreed that relevant Officers be requested to circulate a written answer to the query for Members information.

RESOLVED that

1) the update on key performance indicators for the period ending March 2010 be noted; and

2) in relation to NI 151, regarding the overall employment rate (working age), relevant Officers be requested to circulate a written answer to Committee Members in respect of the query on what Redditch Borough Council was doing to help improve employment in the town, as soon as possible.

24. ITEMS FOR SCRUTINY - SUGGESTIONS FROM THE CORPORATE MANAGEMENT TEAM

The Committee was asked to consider a list of potential items for scrutiny that had been proposed by the Council's Corporate Management Team and to determine which, if any, they considered might be suitable for inclusion on the Committee's Work Programme for the forthcoming year.

Members agreed that the "red flag" issues of education attainment and health inequalities were suitable for ongoing scrutiny. It was noted that the Redditch Partnership was currently working on both of these issues and that a Health Action Plan was to be produced. Officers suggested that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee might wish to look at the Health Action Plan in more detail and invite a representative of the NHS to a future meeting to for this purpose. It was also reported that the Local Strategic Partnership Task and Finish Group would be making recommendations regarding the partnership that would help the Committee in the long-term to scrutinise these issues.

The Committee further agreed that Shared Services and the WETT services would be suitable for scrutiny. Whilst joint scrutiny might be undertaken, Members were keen to consider both issues from a district perspective in order to gauge any direct benefits for the residents of Redditch.

A proposal was also put forward that the Committee consider setting up a Task and Finish Group to look into environmental standards on local estates. The Member concerned was requested to complete the required scoping document outlining their proposals for the review for formal submission to the Committee for consideration.

RESOLVED that

1) the list of potential items for scrutiny and Task and Finish Reviews provided by the Council's Corporate Management Team, be noted;

2) the Overview and Scrutiny Committee be provided with a copy of the Health Action Plan and a representative of the NHS be invited to attend a future meeting of the Committee to discuss the document in more detail;

3) **appropriate reports on the subjects of Shared Services and WETT Services be provided at regular intervals for the Committee's information and consideration, commencing with the report on the WETT Regulatory Service for the 14th July 2010 meeting; and**

4) **a scoping document be submitted by Councillor Vickery in respect of his request for a Task and Finish review of environmental standards on local estates, for the Committee's consideration.**

25. WORCESTERSHIRE ENHANCED TWO TIER (WETT) REGULATORY SERVICE - QUESTIONS REGARDING THE SERVICE

The Committee was asked to consider whether it wished to propose a list of questions on the Worcestershire Enhanced Two Teir (WETT) Regulatory Service which would be addressed by relevant Officers at a presentation at the following meeting of the Committee.

RESOLVED that

Members provide the Overview and Scrutiny Support Officer, in advance of the meeting, with their questions (if any) on the subject of the WETT Regulatory Service for the consideration of relevant Officers.

26. WORCESTERSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL - SUGGESTIONS FOR SCRUTINY

The Committee was informed that it had been invited by Worcestershire County Council to consider whether it wished to propose any appropriate items for consideration by a selection of the County Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committees.

RESOLVED that

Further to their invitation, the following items be put to Worcestershire County Council's appropriate Overview and Scrutiny Committees for consideration:

1) **road surfaces in Redditch;**

2) the County's response to needs analysis as detailed in the Supporting People Strategy;

3) the funding of QUANGOS, in terms of Worcestershire accessing a fair share and how it is subsequently distributed County-wide; and

4) plans for economic development in North Worcestershire.

27. REFERRALS

The Committee was asked to consider a referral from the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) Task and Finish Group relating to the potential for Redditch Borough Council to adopt a Staff Volunteering Policy. Members were provided with a copy of Bromsgrove District Council's Staff Volunteering Policy, which had been approved in February 2010, as an example.

Officers reported that, as the Bromsgrove Policy had only recently been adopted, it was much too early to assess its impact, take-up and benefits to staff at this time. With regard to the query on consultation, Officers suggested that at the very least, the Unions should be consulted but that it would be wise to consult with staff to gauge interest.

Members were generally supportive of the Council pursuing a Staff Volunteering Policy, but agreed that it would be prudent to monitor the impact of the Policy in Bromsgrove for a period of time to provide further information and allow an informed decision on whether a similar policy would be appropriate in Redditch.

RESOLVED that

1) the Overview and Scrutiny Committee review the proposal for a Staff Volunteering Policy in twelve months time once further information is available from Bromsgrove District Council on its success or otherwise; and

2) the Committee's Work Programme be amended accordingly.

28. WORK PROGRAMME

Members were reminded that the Scrutiny Work Programme Planning Event was due to be held on the 26th July 2010 at 6pm

RESOLVED that

subject to any updates previously agreed during the course of the meeting, the Committee's Work Programme be noted.

The Meeting commenced at **Error! Unknown switch argument.** and closed at **Error! Unknown switch argument.**

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Chair