



Overview & Scrutiny Committee

27th March 2008

Minutes

Present:

Councillor C. MacMillan (Chair) and Councillors Banks, Cookson, Fry and Thomas.

Officers:

S Shammon and J Staniland.

Overview and Scrutiny Support Officers:

J Bayley and H Saunders.

151. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors Brunner and Taylor.

152. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND OF PARTY WHIP

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

153. MINUTES

The Chair reported that, with his agreement, the minutes from the previous meeting, held on Wednesday the 19th March 2008, would be presented to the following meeting of the Committee on Wednesday the 9th April 2008.

154. ACTIONS LIST

Officers reported that a completion date had been provided for the first action detailed on the Action List, requested at a meeting of the Committee on the 7th November 2007. Officers estimated that the information would be made available for Members' consideration by Tuesday the 15th April 2008.

Officers further reported that information about the extended recycling services and cemeteries, as requested at previous meetings, had been provided for the consideration of Members.

RESOLVED that

the Actions List be noted.

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CHAIR

**155. GYPSIES AND TRAVELLERS –
JOINT POLICY ON UNAUTHORISED ENCAMPMENTS**

Officers explained that a discussion of the Worcestershire Joint Policy on unauthorised Gypsy and Traveller encampments had been proposed at a previous meeting to provide Members of the Committee with an opportunity to discuss the subject of a proposed scrutiny exercise.

Officers explained that the joint policy had been adopted by the Worcestershire District Councils, the County Council and West Mercia Police in 1995. Members were informed that the policy document had subsequently been amended in 2000 and 2006 and that any of the partners could propose further changes to the policy.

Officers explained that the Policy outlined the roles of the Council, the County Council, West Mercia Police and other partner organisations in response to unauthorised encampments. Members noted that Redditch Borough Council was responsible for the use of Council owned land and property. Officers reported that the Borough Council was not responsible for unauthorised sites on private land, though the Council would approach private landlords to ensure that they were aware of their responsibilities, particularly when there were Environmental Health concerns. Officers explained that Worcestershire County Council was responsible for the provision of authorised traveller sites and for monitoring the movements of gypsies and travellers in the County.

Members were informed that the Council was required to abide by the policy, which incorporated the principles set out by the Human Rights Act and Race Relations (Amendment) Act, when investigating unauthorised encampments. Government-issued guidance “Managing Unauthorised Camping – A Good Practice Guide” and subsequent circulars encouraged Councils to be tolerant of gypsies and travellers, and required that they must ascertain whether there were any welfare concerns that justified the encampment. Officers explained that if there was no discernable reason to justify an unauthorised encampment the Council could take legal proceedings to enforce their removal. Officers reported that in the past there had been a large number of incursions every year within Redditch but that this had reduced to two or three unauthorised encampments every year. Redditch was therefore regarded at County level as an active authority at responding to the issue.

Members were informed that the Police had powers to evict gypsies and travellers in cases where five or more caravans had been parked; when a landlord requested that the travellers be removed; and in cases where it could be proved that they had committed a criminal offence. Officers explained that the Police had two additional policies which affected their responses to unauthorised encampments.

Officers further reported that there was some concern that the Police were not fulfilling their role as set out in the joint policy.

Members agreed that their main concern was to ensure that all partners consistently complied with the terms of the joint policy when responding to unauthorised gypsy and traveller encampments. Members further agreed that a Task and Finish review might not be the most appropriate measure to address this issue. Instead, Members approved three courses of action which, in descending order, could be undertaken to address the issue:

- a) The Chair would address a letter to the Gypsy and Traveller Liaison Officer at Worcestershire County Council, on behalf of the Committee, requesting that a meeting of the partners take place to discuss the joint policy: whether the terms of the policy remained appropriate; and the roles and responsibilities of each partner organisation. Members agreed that this letter would request that an elected Member from the Borough Council should be invited to attend the meeting.
- b) Members agreed that, if no action was taken in response to this letter, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee would invite representatives of the partner organisations to attend a meeting of the Committee to discuss the joint policy and the roles of each partner organisation.
- c) Finally, Members agreed that, if neither of these courses of action resolved the issue to Members' satisfaction, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee would invite the relevant Police representative and the County Council Gypsy Liaison Officer to attend a meeting of the Redditch Forum to answer questions about the policy.

RESOLVED that

the Committee note the reports and agree the action, as detailed, and in the order proposed, in items a) to d) above.

156. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Officers provided Members with an overview of the Economic Development agenda at both the regional and local level. Members were informed that the West Midlands Regional Economic Strategy (RES) provided leadership and a strategic vision for economic development in the region. Officers explained that the Executive Committee had endorsed an Officer response to the West Midlands Economic Strategy Delivery Framework which would facilitate delivery of the West Midlands Economic Strategy.

The framework set out priority actions, based on the themes of Business, Place and People, around which the Council would be required to undertake action.

Members were informed that Redditch was not considered to have high unemployment and was not classified as an economically deprived area. However, there was a need to diversify the local economy outside of the manufacturing industry and to identify ways to encourage highly skilled young people to take up employment in the Borough. Furthermore, there were problems of low educational attainment which needed to be addressed, including through the development of links between schools and local businesses.

Members discussed educational attainment levels in Redditch and noted that Members and Officers from Worcestershire County Council had recently attended a meeting to discuss this issue with Redditch Councillors. Members agreed that they would appreciate further information from Worcestershire County Council on the subject of educational attainment in the Borough and asked Officers to invite representatives from the County Council to attend a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to discuss the subject further.

Officers reported that the Economic Development Manager post was vacant. Members were informed that a suggestion had been made that this should become a joint Redditch and Bromsgrove District Council post, though no decision had been taken in response to this suggestion. Members agreed that it would be useful to review the job specification for the Economic Development Manager post to ensure that the role required the Officer to address the three themes of Business, Place and People identified as priority areas for Redditch.

Members agreed that the subject of Economic Development had already been reviewed as part of the Jobs, Employment and Economy exercise undertaken by the former Leisure, Tourism and Economy Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Officers were therefore asked to circulate copies of the final report from this review to all members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee prior to further discussion of Economic Development.

Members agreed that further information was required detailing the responsibilities of Worcestershire County Council and regional bodies in addressing Economic Development. Furthermore, Members agreed that information about the work undertaken by Bromsgrove District Council on the Economic Development would be useful because the Council was considering a Joint Economic Development Manager post. Officers were asked to contact representatives of the relevant regional organisations, Worcestershire County Council and Bromsgrove District Council to obtain this information.

Members discussed timeframes for further discussing the subjects of Economic Development and educational attainment levels. The Chair proposed that these issues should be raised during the Scrutiny Work Programme Planning Day in May when Members would be discussing appropriate subjects for scrutiny in 2008/09. Members agreed that the Committee would determine the dates when Members would consider these topics after the Work Programme Planning Day had taken place.

RESOLVED that

1) Officers be requested to

review the job specification for the post of Economic Development Manager;

a) circulate copies of the Jobs, Employment and Economy scrutiny report among members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee;

b) invite representatives of Worcestershire County Council to attend a meeting of the Committee to discuss educational attainment levels in the Borough;

c) provide further details about the responsibilities of regional organisations and Worcestershire County Council in relation to Economic Development;

d) provide details about the work undertaken by Bromsgrove District Council in relation to Economic Development;

2) Economic Development and educational attainment levels be considered as potential items for scrutiny at the Scrutiny Work Programme Planning Day in May 2008; and

3) timescales be agreed for discussing the subjects of Economic Development and educational attainment levels following the Work Programme Planning Day

all as detailed in the preamble above.

157. TASK & FINISH REVIEWS – DRAFT SCOPING REPORTS

There were no draft scoping documents for consideration.

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158. TASK & FINISH GROUPS – PROGRESS REPORTS

The Chair proposed that there should be no Task and Finish Group progress reports on this occasion, because detailed information about the reviews had been provided at the previous meeting of the Committee a week earlier.

159. FLOODING - JOINT SCRUTINY EXERCISE

The Chair proposed that there should be no progress report for the Joint Scrutiny Exercise into Flooding on this occasion, because detailed information on the subject had been provided at the previous meeting of the Committee a week earlier.

160. REFERRALS

There were no referrals.

161. WORK PROGRAMME

RESOLVED that

the Committee's Work Programme be noted.

The meeting commenced at 7.00 p.m.
and closed at 8.50pm

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CHAIR