



## **CHAIRS' STEERING**

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY  
COMMITTEE

**26th March 2007**

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### **MINUTES**

**Present:**

Councillor D Cartwright (Chair) and Councillors Beech, Field, MacMillan and Shurmer.

**Officers:**

S Hanley and J Smith.

**Member and Committee Services:**

I Westmore.

#### **35. APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors Hill and Thomas.

#### **36. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND OF PARTY WHIP**

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

#### **37. QUARTERLY PERFORMANCE REPORT – APRIL – DECEMBER 2006**

At the outset it was noted that a budget monitoring report was not being submitted to the present meeting as consideration of third quarter figures so close to year end was thought untimely.

##### Housing and Asset Management

The average length of stay in hostel accommodation was noted. Officers were able to report that the figure was decreasing and was expected to fall further with the work undertaken to prevent homelessness apparently proving fruitful.

The failure of responsive maintenance to fall off as a result of increased spending on planned maintenance was again highlighted. Investment over recent years of £38 Million could not alter the fact that the Council still maintained an ageing housing stock, but the Council was still on course to achieve the Redditch Standard for its stock. A related issue was that of the percentage of repair appointments kept. It was noted that the Council was exceeding its target but Members

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were interested to establish whether tenants were similarly good at keeping appointments. Officers confirmed that there was no sanction at present and that the level of any charge could not be justified in terms of overall financial benefit to the Council. Officers were primarily engaged in building up tenants' confidence in the service.

### Environment and Planning

The numbers of concessionary journeys and Dial-a-Ride passenger trips were seen to be on target to exceed targets. Officers informed the Committee that the significant increase in use had not been expected and that it was expected to have an ongoing impact on budgets. The audit process to determine the validity of the figures produced for these services was outlined; the processes for independently auditing the figures was unclear and Officers undertook to determine from the County Council the measures in place. It was anticipated that a roll-out of smart-cards would assist in ensuring accurate recording of passenger usage.

### Leisure, Customer and Business Support

Members were keen to determine the validity of satisfaction ratings for the Council's sports and leisure facilities. It was noted that periodic changes to the methodology for assessing satisfaction was an effective means of ensuring the continued soundness of monitoring.

The effectiveness of the Reddicard concessionary scheme was questioned. The figures contained within the report appeared to suggest that the level of concessionary use was considerably lower than might be expected and Members were concerned that take-up of the concession was apparently not taking place.

### Well Managed Organisation

The levels of sickness absence were seen to be running above the target figure. Officers explained that sickness absence was generally becoming less of a problem although a differentiation needed to be made between long-term and short-term absences. There were also differences apparent between front-line and other services as might be expected and services which had previously had cultural issues around sickness absence, such as leisure, were being addressed.

### **RESOLVED that**

**Subject to Members' comments, the update on key performance indicators for the period April – December 2006 be noted.**

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### **38. COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT**

The Committee considered a report that set out a proposed method of producing the Annual Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees. Members were content with the course of action proposed and for Officers to draft a report on their behalf.

#### **RESOLVED that**

**the overall structure and the form of its proposed contribution to an annual report to Council from the Overview and Scrutiny Committees be approved.**

### **39. TAKING SCRUTINY FORWARD**

The Committee considered a report following up on the discussion held at the previous meeting on the issues that had arisen from the Overview and Scrutiny training session provided in January 2007.

Members provided their own perspective on the present Scrutiny structures and how they might be adapted. It was suggested that the existing structures were too close in nature to the previous service committees and that alignment to particular services discouraged adequate scrutiny. A clear gap between the executive and scrutiny was considered desirable, even to the extent of having minority party chairing of scrutiny, and it was proposed that this could be achieved within a position of no over-all control.

The forthcoming proposal to move to a single commissioning Overview and Scrutiny body was generally welcomed. The adoption of an alternative system in order to overcome present deficiencies was considered a worthwhile exercise. Added value from scrutiny was considered relatively low although the reasons for this were thought to stem as much from the executive arm as from scrutiny processes. The executive was generally regarded as emasculated and it was hoped that perceived shackles on the executive could be released, portfolio holder roles enhanced and modernised structures embraced more fully.

Scrutiny was at times seen to be an obfuscating process and it was suggested that groups needed the opportunity to critique possible policy options and legitimately engage in a 'political' debate over issues. The converse view, demonstrating that scrutiny could and did work consensually, was also provided by some Members.

#### **RESOLVED that**

**Subject to Members' comments, the report be noted.**

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## 40. WORK PROGRAMME

The programme of future work was considered. It was noted that there were two items that had been proposed by Officers for consideration, these being the establishment of a group to consider corporately fees and charges and a means of engaging in a review of corporate communications.

Officers circulated a report from the Redditch Community Safety Partnership on its performance in addressing violent crime.

### **RESOLVED that**

**the programme of future work be noted.**

The meeting commenced at 7.00 p.m.  
and closed at 8.10 p.m.

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CHAIR