

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Thursday, 1st December,
2022

MINUTES

Present:

Councillor Bill Hartnett (Chair), Councillor Joanna Kane (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Salman Akbar, Imran Altaf, Tom Baker-Price, Michael Chalk, Brandon Clayton, Sid Khan and Timothy Pearman

Also Present:

Matthew Dormer – Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Planning, Economic Development, Commercialism and Partnerships (on Microsoft Teams)
Karen Ashley – Portfolio Holder for Finance and Enabling (on Microsoft Teams)

Officers:

Kevin Dicks, Sue Hanley, Guy Revans, Deb Poole (on Microsoft Teams) and Becky Talbot (on Microsoft Teams).

Democratic Services Officers:

Jess Bayley-Hill and Mat Sliwinski

68. APOLOGIES AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES

There were no apologies for absence received from Committee Members.

An apology for absence was submitted by the Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Community Services and Regulatory Services, Councillor Nyear Nazir.

69. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND OF PARTY WHIP

There were no Declarations of Interest nor of any Party Whip.

70. MINUTES

Chair

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The minutes of the meeting held on 6th October 2022 were submitted for Members' consideration.

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 6th October 2022 be approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chair.

71. PUBLIC SPEAKING

There were no public speakers who registered to speak on this occasion.

72. SUPPORT PROVIDED BY THE COUNCIL TO RESIDENTS IN RESPECT OF THE COST OF LIVING

The Chief Executive Officer presented a report on the cost of living support that was provided to residents by the Council. It was noted that the report outlined all the initiatives that the Council was providing to residents in relation to the cost of living support. The report highlighted what financial support was made available by the Council for residents impacted by the cost of living crisis and how the support provided by the Council was communicated to eligible residents.

It was noted that residents could access information and support not only via various webpages on the Council's website but also through a hard copy leaflet, replicated in the agenda pack, which signposted residents to the various services available. It was highlighted that a number of initiatives would be taking place over the next weeks and months, such as Christmas support digital advent calendar that provided cost of living tips for residents and the cost of living bulletin that provided useful updates on the support available.

Members welcomed the detailed report and expressed appreciation that much work in this area was being undertaken jointly with other organisations, including the community and voluntary sector. It was noted that the cost of living leaflets provided a very good resource for residents and were being distributed by Members in the community.

Members were asked to inform Officers if they were aware of any warm space or had set one up so that residents could be signposted to these spaces. Officers commented that there would be monthly updates to the leaflets and regular updates were in

place on the Council's webpages so that up-to-date information was available.

The Chairman commented that one aspect that was not included in the report related to financial support for insulation of private sector properties in the Borough, as it was reported that there were 3,500 poorly insulated properties across Worcestershire. In light of this, the following recommendation was proposed:

'that the Overview and Scrutiny asks the Executive Committee to actively seek external grant funding to enable a borough-wide campaign to subsidise the insulation of poorly insulated dwellings in the private sector'.

A discussion on the proposed recommendation followed and Members largely spoke in support of the motion, with some Members highlighting that the Council was already proactive in this area, for example with loft insulation works being undertaken at Council properties over the last few years.

Some Members commented that it was unlikely the Worcestershire Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) or the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) would be in a position to offer grant funding support at present, but that it might be obtained from the wider health system, such as the Herefordshire and Worcestershire Integrated Care System (ICS), as lack of proper insulation was a wider determinants of health issue. Officers added that Council had received grant funding for energy efficiency improvements and further opportunities would be sought through Act on Energy, the organisation appointed as the Council's official Energy Advice Service in June 2022, and which provided energy support services for residents. With regards to Council properties, it was highlighted that an insulation programme was ongoing to undertake insulation improvements to the small number of social housing properties which were not covered by the similar insulation initiatives in previous years.

On being put to the vote this recommendation was carried.

RECOMMENDED

that the Executive Committee actively seek external grant funding to enable a borough-wide campaign to subsidise the insulation of poorly insulated dwellings in the private sector.

73. HR AND ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT / PEOPLE STRATEGY / WORKFORCE STRATEGY - PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY

The Head of Business Transformation, Organisational Development and Digital Strategy presented the report on the Council's Workforce Strategy.

The following was highlighted for Members' attention:

- There were three key themes to the Workforce Strategy, namely workforce planning and talent management, engagement, and health, safety and wellbeing.
- The key aim of the Council's Workforce Strategy 2022-2026 was to have a workforce that was fit for the future and able to deliver the Council Plan and Strategic priorities whilst promoting the wellbeing of the workforce.
- Action plans would be devised and implemented during the course of this Workforce Strategy to ensure that the aims of the strategy were being implemented in practice.

Following the presentation of the report, Members made a number of comments and questions were responded to as follows:

- Concern was expressed regarding the low rates of staff who provided their disability and ethnicity data at 18 and 23 per cent respectively,
- Officers responded that there was currently an annual survey where staff had the opportunity to provide data. In addition, staff were encouraged to keep their information up to date on the employee self-service portal.
- Officers commented it was preferable not to overload staff with surveys but instead combine multiple surveys and work on engagement with staff, including addressing any concerns that staff had about taking part in internal surveys.
- It was explained that this was a completely new workforce strategy and was not a refresh of any previous strategy.
- Some Members queried why this executive report was not classed as a 'key decision'. In response, the Principal Democratic Services Officer explained that whilst this report concerned an important matter, there was a definition of an executive key decision set out in legislation. The above report did not meet the criteria of a key decision under the legislation.
- Officers explained that the Workforce Strategy would be underpinned by a number of action plans
- Some Members commented that remote working was not ideal in all circumstances as it could lead to lack of social

interaction and, consequently worsening staff mental health. It was therefore deemed important that staff be provided with opportunities to work in the office if they wished to do so.

- Officers commented that the Council operated a hot desking policy so that most staff could work from office but needed to book a desk in advance. The main consideration was, however, being customer-centred and needs of the customers dictated working arrangements.
- The strategy and action plans were still in the initial period but work was advancing on a number of areas, including streamlining the recruitment process by utilising recruitment platforms and business planning processes.
- Members requested that this Workforce Strategy, and the key performance indicators (KPIs) that were being developed in relation to the strategy and associated action plans, be reviewed by the Performance Scrutiny Working Group. It was agreed to refer this topic for consideration by the Working Group.

RECOMMENDED

that the Executive Committee endorse the approach taken by the Chief Executive, as Head of Paid Service, to address the Workforce Strategy.

74. REVISITING ITEMS IDENTIFIED AT THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY TRAINING HELD ON 6 JUNE 2022

Members were informed that there were a number of items identified at an overview and scrutiny training event held on 6 June 2022 which had not yet been scheduled on the Committee's work programme. Members were asked to decide which of the outstanding items they wished to add to the work programme for the rest of the municipal year.

Members were also informed that a number of task and finish group reviews previously requested by Members had not been launched yet. Members were requested to prioritise the task and finish review they wished to undertake in the first instance as there was limited Officer resource and time left in the municipal year to undertake a substantive task and finish group review.

In the discussion that followed, Members agreed that a Task and Finish Group review of bulky waste collections should be prioritised by the Committee in the first instance and that it was possible to tie this topic together with the issue of fly tipping. Members present pointed out that a Council motion was agreed by the full Council to

the effect that a task and finish group on bulky waste be launched and, as such, it was important that this issue be prioritised. Time and resource permitting, the Committee could then investigate launching the other task groups which were previously agreed by the Committee – Health Inequalities within the BME Committee Task Group and the Road Safety and Speeding Task Group.

RESOLVED

- (1) that the updates to the issues raised at the Overview and Scrutiny Training Event held in June 2022, as detailed in the Appendix 1 of the report as submitted, be noted;**
- (2) that, out of the four outstanding issues detailed in Appendix 1, the Committee proceed with consideration of fly tipping and bulky waste collections in the first instance;**
- (3) that the remaining items identified at the Overview and Scrutiny Training Event held in June 2022 be scheduled individually at future meetings of the Committee, subject to Members' agreement.**

75. COUNCIL MOTION - BULKY WASTE COLLECTION

Councillor Khan, the proposer of the original motion in relation to bulky waste at the full Council meeting on 14th November 2022, introduced the Council motion and spoke of the importance of undertaking a task group review into the issue of subsidising bulky waste collection at a time when many residents struggled due to the cost-of-living crisis. It was added that offering a free bulky waste collection service would likely contribute to reduction in fly tipping. The substance of the amended motion that was agreed at a full Council meeting was reiterated and it read as follows:

“Council is concerned about the cost-of-living crisis having a new impact on fly tipping, with the cost of bulky waste collection becoming a disincentive for many residents. Council asks the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to set up a Task and Finish review, to consider the costs, consequences and benefits of a pre-booked, free household bulky waste collection service for those Redditch residents who are low paid, elderly, disabled or in receipt of benefits, which will enable Members to consider options and determine what action, if any, to take.”

The Head of Environmental and Housing Property Services commented that the Council had a duty to provide bulky waste

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collections for domestic properties, although it was entitled to charge for the collection of waste that could not be presented in a normal household waste collection, waste over 25 kg in weight, and waste that did not fit into the black bins provided by the Council. Currently the Council charged for the collection of bulky items from households. It was added that at present the bulky waste collection service was a net cost to the Council and the current service provision in this area was not deemed to have a major effect on fly tipping incidence.

It was agreed by Members and Officers that linking the issues of fly tipping and bulky waste collections in one task group review was a sensible proposal. It was suggested that Members be provided with a presentation on bulky waste collections and fly tipping before embarking on the task group review to better understand the Council's current position on these issues. It was confirmed that a scoping document for the task group would also need to be submitted for approval by the Committee in advance of the launch of the Task Group.

RESOLVED that

- (1) the Committee receive an Officer presentation on fly tipping and bulky waste collections; and,**
- (2) the Fly Tipping and Bulky Waste Collection Task Group be launched, subject to the approval of a scoping document for the Task Group by the Committee.**

76. ROAD SAFETY TASK GROUP

As discussed earlier during the meeting under Minute Nos. 74 and 75, it was agreed that the Fly Tipping and Bulky Waste Collection Task Group be launched in the first instance, and the decision on the launch and membership of the Road Safety and Speeding Task Group be deferred to a future meeting of the Committee.

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

The Executive Work Programme was submitted for Members' consideration.

RESOLVED that

the contents of the Executive Committee's Work Programme be noted.

78. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

There was a request for a report on Rubicon Finances to be added to the Committee's Work Programme for the February meeting. During the discussion that followed, Officers highlighted that the Council's Shareholders Committee covered oversight of Rubicon from the financial perspective and as Rubicon was a limited company most financial matters would need to be discussed in a closed session. Members requesting the update clarified that a general overview of Rubicon finances would be sufficient. It was additionally requested by some Members that a report on finances should be considered alongside the executive report on the review of governance arrangements of Rubicon that was due to be pre-scrutinised by the Committee. Following further discussion, the Committee agreed to add Rubicon Finances as an item on the Work Programme.

RESOLVED that

the Work Programme be updated as in the pre-amble above.

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

Councillor Kane provided Members with an update in respect of the Budget Scrutiny and Performance Scrutiny Working Groups. In doing so, Members were informed that a meeting of Performance Scrutiny took place on 24th November 2022 when Members considered skills development in Redditch in terms of how to upskill young people and ensure they could be provided with suitable employment in the local area. Councillor Kane reported that one of the initiatives that had been discussed was a youth hub for career advice which would be set up in Redditch early in 2023. It was reported that numeracy and science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) subjects were identified as a major gap in skills among young people in Redditch. With this mind, Councillor Kane asked all councillors, and particularly those who were school governors, to promote in their local schools the Primary STEM challenge that was organised by the Worcestershire Local Enterprise Partnership (WLEP).

It was reported that the energy advice service quarterly update was discussed in the second part of the meeting on the 24th November.

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It was further reported that the next meeting of the Budget Scrutiny Working Group was due to take place on 5th December 2022.

RESOLVED that

the Task Groups, Short Sharp Reviews and Working Groups Update Reports be noted.

80. EXTERNAL SCRUTINY BODIES - UPDATE REPORTS

Councillor Chalk provided an update in respect of the External Scrutiny Bodies. In doing so, Members were informed that there had been meetings of the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) Overview and Scrutiny Committee and of the Worcestershire Health and Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC), both of which took place on 17th October 2022.

Councillor Chalk drew the attention of Members to the £88 million in UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) funding that would be given to the WMCA over the next three to four years and the need for the Council to have Officer resource to make bids for some of this funding pot. Officers responded that colleagues from the North Worcestershire Economic Development and Regeneration (NWEDR) worked on behalf of the Council in bidding for funding from the national funds.

In response to a question with regards whether a bid for funding could be made to the WMCA with respect of obtaining funds to provide subsidies for insulation of poorly insulated private sector dwellings, it was reported that most funding pots within the WMCA were restricted to the constituent member authorities of the WMCA. Councillor Chalk and Officers undertook to make enquiries with WMCA with respect to any funding, either from the WMCA's UKSPF allocation or other WMCA funding pots, that were available to non-constituent authorities.

Councillor Chalk reported that at the 17th October meeting of the Worcestershire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC) the discussion centred on the issue of patient flow and the associated challenges presented by bed shortages and a shortage of staff at Worcestershire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust.

RESOLVED that

the External Scrutiny Bodies updates be noted.

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The Meeting commenced at 6.30 pm
and closed at 8.05 pm