

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Thursday, 20th July, 2023

MINUTES

Present:

Councillor Sid Khan (Chair), Councillor Sharon Harvey (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Imran Altaf, Karen Ashley, Chris Holz, Joanna Kane, Emma Marshall, Jane Spilsbury and Monica Stringfellow

Officers:

Peter Carpenter, Sue Hanley and Carl Walker

Democratic Services Officers:

J Gresham

10. APOLOGIES AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES

There were no apologies for absence.

11. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND OF PARTY WHIP

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

12. MINUTES

The minutes of the meetings held on 8th June 2023 were submitted for Members' consideration.

RESOLVED that

the Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 8th June 2023 be approved as a true record and signed by the Chair.

Chair

13. PUBLIC SPEAKING

There were no public speakers on this occasion.

14. WORCESTERSHIRE HOUSING STRATEGY 2040 - PRE- SCRUTINY (TO FOLLOW)

The Deputy Chief Executive presented the Worcestershire Housing Strategy 2040 for Members' consideration. During the presentation the following was highlighted:

- This was a high level strategy for the County until 2040 and was the culmination of many months of work undertaken by the Worcestershire Housing Strategy Board chaired by the Chief Executive of Redditch Borough Council. The strategy provided the foundation for a more detailed Local Action Plan that would be focussed on Redditch and prepared by Officers.
- Councils across the County had been involved in the development of the strategy recognising that decisions currently being made would have significant impact on housing in the future. There had been an extensive amount of consultation across all stakeholders during the preparation of the strategy.
- The vision would be delivered through four priority areas which were identified as follows:
 - Economic growth and jobs
 - Quality and standards
 - Health and wellbeing
 - Net zero carbon and climate change.

It was noted that the above priorities were also considered Council priorities and would be looked at as part of the Council Plan refresh due to take place later in the year.

- As the strategy set out a 20-year ambition, the proposals would be delivered in three levels of detail:
 1. A 100-day plan to create momentum and promote awareness.

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2. A 5-year action plan setting out key priorities across each of the four priority areas. These actions will be delivered through Countywide delivery groups.
3. A twenty-year road map outlining how the components of the strategy would support the delivery of the vision.

Finally, it was reiterated to Members that this was a high level strategy for the County which was underpinned by a significant amount of data. A more detailed plan would be developed and tailored towards the needs of Redditch and its residents.

During a detailed discussion the following areas were considered by Members:

- The 100-day plan to create momentum and promote awareness – had work on this area already started? Officers explained that they were not aware of the specific date when the 100-day plan would be available. However, Members were reassured that this piece of work would not be done in isolation and a number of service areas would be involved including, Housing Strategy and Planning. It was anticipated that a draft 100-day plan would be available fairly quickly and that Officers were already undertaking preparatory work in this area.
- The membership of the Worcestershire Housing Strategy Board – Members queried who was the Council representatives on this Board. It was confirmed, as outlined earlier in the meeting that the Chief Executive of Redditch Borough Council had chaired the Board. Members were informed that a working group sat underneath this Board and that the Council representatives had included the Head of Community and Housing Services, the Housing Development & Enabling Manager and the Strategic Housing Officer. It was confirmed that these Officers would also be managing housing projects and helping to develop the programme going forward.
- Community Engagement – this was an important area that needed to be considered, in order for residents to understand the purpose of the strategy and the Local Action Plan and ensure its sustainability for the future.

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- Specification of future developments – Members were interested in better understanding whether future developments within the Borough would be of a high specification. It was confirmed that this would be looked at within the Planning Policy framework. It was acknowledged that this area was critical in tackling climate change and providing affordability and quality in future developments.
- The increase of residents living alone across the County in the future – Members noted that included in the report was data that predicted the number of residents living alone across the County would increase by 35% by 2035. It was noted that this would inevitably have social impacts within the Borough and Members were concerned as to how Officers planned to prevent social isolation in the future. Officers stated that this was not a problem that had a quick fix, nor could it be delivered by Redditch Borough Council in isolation. It would need significant work across all partners. However, it was noted that the Community Safety Team within the Council already worked with vulnerable and isolated residents within the Borough and that this work would continue in the future.
- Retrofitting of properties within the Borough – contained within the Worcestershire Housing Strategy 2040 was a ‘strategic lever’ regarding support for the development of low-carbon supply chains to deliver high quality, best value retrofits to the public and social and affordable housing sector. Members were concerned that this might prove difficult and expensive for the Council in the future in respect of its own housing stock. Furthermore, Members felt that homeowners would also need signposting in order to access funding for retrofitting their own properties in light of the current Cost of Living crisis. It was suggested that an amendment to the recommendations contained within the report be made in order to ensure that this was considered as part of the development of the Local Action Plan. Members were reminded in respect of the Council’s housing stock that an Executive Committee report had been considered in February 2023 that dealt with the 30 year HRA business plan, investment programme and asset management strategy for council housing. Also included in this report had been details regarding the plans to undertake

stock condition surveys of housing stock to better understand what was required for the future.

- Financial Implications – Members queried the accuracy of the information contained within the covering report which stated that there would be no financial implications as a result of the adoption of the strategy. It was clarified that any financial implications would be experienced with the development and adoption of the more detailed Local Action Plan. This would include the cost of Officer time and resource in order to deliver the plan.
- Adoption of the strategy by other Councils within the County – Members were concerned of the risks involved should the other Councils choose not to adopt this strategy for the future. It was explained that Bromsgrove District Council had already agreed to adopt the strategy at its Full Council meeting and that it seemed that other Councils were all on board in using the fundamental principles contained within the strategy, as a foundation to their more detailed plans. It was explained that this was a good opportunity to strengthen partnership working across all Councils within the County in order to move in the right direction. Members felt that this was an ambitious plan and welcomed the potential to have a more joined up approach to partnership working and felt that this was a great opportunity to maximise this approach for the future. Particularly when thinking about keeping young people within the Borough.

Following on from the earlier discussion regarding retrofitting of properties Councillor Kane suggested that an addition be made in respect of the second recommendation contained within the report which related to retrofitting for Council stock and residents who owned their own homes. The addition was suggested as follows:

Officers be asked to develop a Borough Level Action Plan with consideration given to the proposals in this Strategy.

- a. The Action Plan should include what support will be available for homeowners to retrofit their own property taking into account the Cost of Living Crisis; and***

b. The Action Plan to include what plans the Council had to deliver retrofitting improvements within its own housing stock.

Members discussed the additions in detail. However as outlined earlier in the meeting, the 30 year HRA business plan, investment programme and asset management strategy for council housing report considered earlier in 2023 had outlined the plans for the future of Council housing stock and therefore Members did not think that the second addition was necessary as plans were already in place in respect of Council housing stock. However, there was further discussion regarding the current Cost of Living crisis and the need for homeowners to understand any future costs they may have in respect of retrofitting their own properties and whether there was any funding available to provide assistance. This information could be included as part of the Local Action Plan. Therefore, Councillor Kane amended the addition to the recommendation as follows:

Officers be asked to develop a Borough Level Action Plan with consideration given to the proposals in this Strategy.

a. The Action Plan to include what support will be available for homeowners to retrofit their own property taking into account the Cost of Living crisis.

On being put to the vote the addition to the recommendation was carried.

RECOMMENDED to the Executive Committee that the following addition (in italics) be inserted into recommendation 2 of the Worcestershire Housing Strategy report:

- 2) The Worcestershire Housing Strategy 2021 – 2040 be adopted.**
- 3) Officers be asked to develop a Borough Level Action Plan with consideration given to the proposals in this Strategy.**

- a. *The Action Plan to include what support will be available for homeowners to retrofit their own property taking into account the Cost of Living crisis.*

15. FLY TIPPING AND BULKY WASTE TASK GROUP - SCOPING DOCUMENT

Councillor Khan presented the Topic Proposal in respect of the Fly Tipping and Bulky Waste Task Group. In doing so, he highlighted the idea of the Task Group would be to assess what the Council was currently doing to reduce the levels of fly tipping in the Borough. He indicated that fly tipping was an issue raised regularly by residents and that recently there had been seven incidents reported in one day.

It was suggested that by establishing this Task Group it would help to fulfil one of the Council's Strategic Purposes regarding providing residents with a green and safe place to live.

Members discussed the Topic Proposal and agreed that the latest version of the Topic Proposal was a more acceptable proposal; and would ensure that the Task Group outcomes would be based on evidence collected during the investigation. It was noted that during these investigations it was important for Members to use evidence based research to better understand the topic.

The Environmental Services Manager stated that there was a large amount of statistical information available in respect of fly tipping and bulky waste and this could be provided to Members of the Task Group when required.

Councillor Khan was nominated as the Chair for this Task Group and on being put to the vote it was

RESOLVED that the Fly Tipping and Bulky Waste Task Group be established, and that Councillor Khan be appointed Chair.

16. ESTABLISHMENT OF A PROGRAMME OFFICE - PRE-SCRUTINY - (TO FOLLOW)

The Interim Director of Finance presented the Establishment of a Programme Office report for Members' consideration; and in doing so informed Members that this report had been prepared as a result of the recommendations from the Audit Task Group investigation that had taken place at Bromsgrove District Council earlier in the year. The recommendations from the Task Group had been agreed at the Executive Committee meeting held on 13th June 2023. One of the agreed recommendations included the establishment of the Programme Office and this report provided more information on the proposals going forward.

The number of organisational projects that were either underway or planned had recently been reviewed by the Corporate Management Team (CMT) and 59 projects had been identified. However, of these, 29 had been moved to Business as Usual. These projects were placed into four main categories:

- Economic Development and Regeneration
- Housing
- ICT Related
- Organisational Change Related

Members were informed that Public Realm projects already had a governance structure in place under the Project Governance Group. This was chaired by the Chief Executive of Redditch Borough Council. It was clarified that this group covered projects managed by North Worcestershire Economic Development and Regeneration (NWEDR) on behalf of the Council. The group met on a 6-weekly basis and managed the projects that involved large infrastructure projects.

There would need to be a Housing Board established to look at all Housing Projects including the General Fund and HRA. The largest area to look at was highlighted as ICT and Organisational Change projects where additional resource would be needed to prioritise projects, prioritise resource for these projects, coordinate interdependencies across these projects and ensure these projects were delivering.

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It was envisaged that all projects from the four main categories highlighted above would be collated in a monthly report to CMT at its monthly Assurance meeting.

It was noted that there was a difference between specific Project Managers and Programme Managers. It was highlighted that there were already Project Managers at the Council, however a Programme Manager, would look to manage a range of projects already in place and in the future. From a financial perspective as the projects that the Programme Manager and Programme Officer would be coordinating covered a number of service areas, the salary costs for these positions would be covered as part of the project costs across shared services. It was anticipated that due to the added efficiencies these roles would deliver, a reduction of financial costs would be seen in future years.

Following the presentation of the report, Members queried the following areas in more detail:

1. Project Monitoring – Members queried how Members could monitor these projects. The Interim Director of Finance stated that they would be monitored through the Quarterly Finance and Performance monitoring reports and by CMT at its monthly Assurance meetings.
2. Career Progression – Officers explained that ideally there would be some Officers from within the Council who would apply for these roles, particularly those who already had Prince2 Project Management qualifications. It was anticipated that if the candidates were recruited from internal candidates, they could commence within 3 months. However, if they were external candidates then it would be a longer process and could potentially take up to 6 months. Members further questioned whether it would be realistic to anticipate these timelines given the difficulties previously experienced in recruiting to Local Government roles. It was reported that it was always difficult to recruit to these kinds of roles due to the high demand within the private sector and the geographical location of the Council and close proximity to other larger Councils. Some Members queried the title of the roles and commented that they were not necessarily job

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titles they recognised. It was confirmed that Programme Manager and Programme Officer roles were more specific to Local Government and would be recognisable within this sector.

Members felt that this was a welcome report and a constructive measure given the recommendations made by the Audit Task Group. It was further noted that hopefully the establishment of a Programme Office would make a dramatic difference to efficiencies and what the Council could achieve in the future.

On being put to the vote Members endorsed the following recommendations to the Executive Committee:

- 1) Formal reporting of all projects be undertaken on a monthly basis by Officers and this information to be fed into the Quarterly Finance and Performance Reports for Members.**
- 2) That a compliance structure be put in place to ensure delivery of projects and management of the multiple interdependencies across projects. This included:**
 - a. A council Programme Office be established to provide oversight and validation of the delivery of projects across the organisation.**
 - b. The roles of a Programme Manager and a Programme Officer be established to provide support for the delivery of this oversight, especially for ICT and Organisational Change projects across the organisation.**

17. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY TRAINING EVENT - CONSIDERATION OF ITEMS SUITABLE FOR SCRUTINY

The Committee reviewed the items that had been identified at the Overview and Scrutiny Training event that had taken place in June 2023. Members agreed this had been a useful event that had identified a large number of areas which could be considered for scrutiny at future meetings.

The report provided to Members included three groups of issues identified at the training event and Members were asked to outline which they felt were the most suitable for future scrutiny.

During a detailed discussion, the following comments were noted:

1. Third Sector Support

- a. How did the Council work with Third Sector partners?
- b. Could this area be looked at in conjunction with County Lines and Drug Use including cuckooing?

2. Domestic Violence

- a. this would be a welcome opportunity to have a positive effect within the communities of Redditch and for those experiencing Domestic Violence.

3. Road Safety and Speeding

- a. There was already a Task Group due to be undertaken in this area and Worcestershire County Council (WCC) were also undertaking some work in respect of this issue. It could potentially be difficult to make significant changes in this area, as it was dependent on whether WCC agreed to any recommendations made by a Task Group.

4. Social Housing Repairs

- a. This was an area that Members could potentially have a direct impact as this was a Redditch Borough Council function.
- b. Potentially this could be looked at towards the end of the municipal year in order to allow Officers to undertake the plans they already had in place.

Following the debate, it was agreed that the following items would be looked at in further detail.

- 1. Third Sector Support particularly looking at Domestic Violence – Main Committee (as soon as possible)
- 2. County Lines and Drug Use – to be looked at by the Crime and Disorder Scrutiny Panel in November – specific presentation.
- 3. Social Housing Repairs – Main Committee - this will be considered towards the end of the municipal year to allow Officers to carry out some the work they had planned.

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RESOLVED that as detailed in the preamble above, the items agreed by Members would be discussed over the remainder of the municipal year.

[Following consideration of this item the meeting was adjourned, and a brief comfort break was taken between 20:25 to 20:30]

18. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee's Work Programme was submitted for Members consideration.

RESOLVED that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's Work Programme be noted, and any additional items identified during the course of the meeting be added to the Work Programme for consideration at future meetings.

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

Updates on the Task Groups and Working groups were provided as follows:

- a) Budget Scrutiny Working Group – Chair, Councillor Kane

A meeting of the Budget Scrutiny Working Group had been scheduled and was due to take place on 24th July 2023.

- b) Performance Scrutiny Working Group – Chair, Councillor Holz

Councillor Holz informed Members that a meeting of the Performance Scrutiny Working Group was due to take place on 4th September 2023.

An update on the Fly Tipping and Bulky Waste Task Group would be provided once the first meeting had taken place.

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

20. EXTERNAL SCRUTINY BODIES - UPDATE REPORTS

Councillor Marshall presented three External Scrutiny Bodies reports. It was particularly noted that Members of the Worcestershire County Council Health and Overview Committee (HOSC) had been able to visit the new Accident and Emergency Department at Worcestershire Royal Hospital. Members were informed that it was very high tech and would provide a great service to local communities.

RESOLVED that

the External Scrutiny Bodies updates be noted.

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

The Executive Committee minutes from the meeting held on 13th June 2023 were considered and noted by Members.

The Committee requested that the following items be added to the Committee's work Programme as pre-scrutiny for consideration at future meetings:

- Town Hall Refurbishment – Final Decision
- Council response to Local Plan Consultations; Birmingham Development Plan, South Staffordshire Local Plan and South Worcestershire Development Plan
- Matchborough and Winyates Regeneration Proposals
- Playing Pitch and Built Facilities Strategies
- Future Plans for Auxerre House

It was confirmed that the following items would be considered at future meetings of the Budget Scrutiny Working Group:

- Treasury Outturn Report 22/23
- Draft Council Tax Support Scheme 2024/25
- HRA Rent Setting 2024/25.

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As some of these items already appeared on the Committee's Work Programme, Members requested that for future meetings Officers provided information as to which items from the Executive Committee's Work Programme had already been identified as reports to be pre-scrutinised. Officers undertook to provide this information in the future.

RESOLVED that as detailed in the preamble above, the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme be updated with items from the Executive Committee's Work Programme.

The Meeting commenced at 6.30 pm
and closed at 8.45 pm