



Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Thursday, 26th October,
2023

MINUTES

Present:

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

Also Present:

Councillor Brandon Clayton – Portfolio Holder for Environmental Services
Councillor Lucy Harrison – Portfolio Holder for Community and Regulatory Services

Officers:

Guy Revans, Judith Willis, Matthew Austin and Bev Houghton

Democratic Services Officers:

M Sliwinski

33. APOLOGIES AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Ashley.

34. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND OF PARTY WHIP

There were no declarations of interest nor of party whip.

35. PUBLIC SPEAKING

There were no public speakers on this occasion.

36. PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY - GARDEN WASTE SERVICE

[With the Chair's agreement item 5 on the published agenda – Pre-Decision – Garden Waste Service – was considered as item 4 at the meeting]

Chair

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The Portfolio Holder for Environmental Services addressed the Committee to introduce this item and in doing so stated that the provision of Garden Waste Service to residents was a matter the Portfolio Holder had been passionate about, and campaigned, for over a decade and he was pleased that a dedicated Garden Waste Collection Service was finally going to be provided to Redditch residents, subject to approval of the report recommendations by the Executive Committee and Full Council.

The Environmental Services Manager introduced the report and noted that in 2017, Redditch Borough Council commissioned Bromsgrove District Council to use spare capacity within their garden waste service to support Redditch residents by providing a limited service utilising a single vehicle and crew every other week for 20 scheduled collections per year (February – November). This was to gauge the level of interest for the service among Redditch residents.

It was added that in 2021 the Government outlined plans for potential changes to legislation around Garden Waste including the possibility of making collection of garden waste a statutory service for local authorities. Last week it was announced, however, that the Government was not planning to change legislation on Garden Waste. This meant that the Council would retain discretion over whether to provide the service and whether, and how much, it charged for it.

The proposals were set out as being to purchase one additional refuse vehicle and to recruit three full-time staff to provide a dedicated Redditch Borough Council Garden Waste Collection Service. As the lead in time for purchases of new Refuse Collection Vehicles (RCV's) were approximately 18 months at the moment, it was proposed that if the Council were to expand the current service, an RCV was hired to support the service from February 2024 until the delivery of the dedicated vehicle. This would necessitate the hire of the refuse vehicle for the 40 weeks of the year that the current garden waste service operated.

The current arrangements cost £49,000 for the provision of the vehicle and staff from Bromsgrove District Council's service, but generated £88,500 in income, leaving a net benefit to Redditch Borough Council of £39,500 with minimal direct risk. It was estimated that the service with the new arrangements, if agreed, would require 1-2 years to build its customer base to a break-even point (approximately 1,300 additional customers at current pricing levels). This service, however, then had the potential to grow and deliver more significant income for the Council in the longer term.

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It was noted that based on the current customer base of 1,800 customers, there was a risk of losing up to £100,000 of revenue in year one as a result of the increased costs and lost income from the service-level agreement (SLA) arrangements. However, a dedicated crew and vehicle would have the capacity to generate higher income over time, as well as support environmental benefits through increased recycling rates for Redditch. There would also be carbon reduction benefits in composting garden waste than if it were collected within the residual waste bin (grey), although this would be offset by an increase in emissions arising from an additional Refuse Vehicle operating every other week in comparison with the current service.

Following the presentation by the Officer, a discussion took place with the following areas considered by Members:

- Potential number of collections – It was highlighted that at Bromsgrove on average 29,000 households had their garden waste collected, but the initial capacity of the single crew to be initially deployed at Redditch would be 6,000.
- Waiting list for garden collection services – It was noted that the Council no longer kept a waiting list of residents who requested a garden waste service. It was noted that, if approved, a communication campaign would be undertaken to encourage residents to use the service. It was expected that this would be undertaken through social media, local newspapers advertisements, and possibly banners displayed on existing fleet vehicles promoting the service.
- Proposed charges and comparison with other authorities – The Council's proposed fee for Garden Waste as in the recommendation was £60 per year plus a one-off set up fee of £20 for new customers. It was noted that nationally annual charges ranged from £35 to £90.
- It was noted that in the winter period when the staff working on garden waste, they would be encouraged to either book leave during the period or support staff across the rest of the fleet.
- Officers reported that forecasts of financial performance and customer take-up of the service were arrived at through conversations with other authorities on their levels of take-up as well as looking at the Council's take up when the garden waste service was first launched. It was noted that 1800 capacity of the then system was reached within the first year.
- Support for residents who cannot afford the service – Officers reported that the set up of an administrative system to support specific offering concessionary service would be

difficult to implement due to data protection requirements. It was reported that most authorities did not offer a concessionary garden waste service and that residents could also dispose of the waste by accessing the tip sites in the Borough. However, once the service started delivering profit the viability of this option would be investigated.

Furthermore, residents were encouraged to tell the Council if unable to afford the service when the public consultation on this is launched as it would enable the Council to estimate the demand for a subsidised service.

- Implementing a dedicated RBC Garden Waste Service would impact on the current SLA with Bromsgrove District Council and require the current arrangements to be cancelled. However, there would be no penalties (including financial) for the Council for withdrawing the SLA.
- Refuse Vehicle Rental Costs and Costs of the New Refuse Vehicle – It was reported that a rental of a refuse vehicle from February 2024 would cost an estimated £1000 to £1100 per week. The new refuse vehicle would cost £210,000 in the 2025/26 capital budget as per recommendation three.
- Transition of the Council's Refuse Vehicles from diesel to HVO (Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil) - It was noted that the Council's existing diesel refuse vehicles were EURO 6 vehicles which meant they were compatible to run on HVO with relatively minor adjustments. This would also be the case with the new refuse vehicle. It was reported that consideration was given to electric and hydrogen-powered refuse collection vehicles but these were significantly more expensive at around £400,000 (electric) and over £800,000 (hydrogen-powered) respectively.

The recommendations contained in the report submitted were endorsed by the Committee as follows:

RECOMMENDED that

- 1) The Executive Committee resolve that subject to approval of recommendations 2 – 4 below, to agree the creation of a dedicated Garden Waste Collection Service for Redditch Borough Council;**

And the Executive Committee to Recommend to the Council:

- 2) An increase to the cost on Fees and Charges for Garden Waste to £60 per year, whilst maintaining the existing one-off set up fee of £20 for new customers;**

3) Inclusion of the following Capital and Revenue expenses in the Medium Term Financial Plan:

Capital Investment	
2025/26 & Inclusion on Fleet Replacement Schedule	£210,000

Revenue Investment	
2023/24	£11,000
2024/25	£156,000
2025/26	£135,000
2026/27 Onwards	£114,000

4) Adjust the Medium Term Financial Plan to reflect the following financial pressures:

2023/24	-£11,897
2024/25	-£20,528

37. DOMESTIC ABUSE - COUNCIL SUPPORT PROVIDED TO THIRD SECTOR ORGANISATIONS

Members received a paper that set out the support currently provided by the Council (through its grants and schemes) and regional and national bodies including the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC), the West Mercia Police and Crime Commissioner, and the North Worcestershire Community Safety Partnership (NWCSP) to third sector organisations providing domestic abuse prevention services or supported victims of domestic abuse.

It was noted that the paper set out the list of grants provided by one of the above agencies to the third sector organisations, the project details, the grant amount associated with the service, and the geographical area covered by the service as some of the services covered the Redditch area specifically and other services on the list had a wider geographical reach, for example covering the whole of Worcestershire county or the West Mercia police area.

The Portfolio Holder for Community and Housing Services was invited to address the Committee and in doing so thanked the

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Overview and Scrutiny for deciding to scrutinise this topic. She noted that all Members had a role to play in raising awareness of the prevalence of domestic abuse in society, and to work towards reducing its incidence by raising awareness of the issue in local communities and assist and signpost residents towards the support services that were available.

The Portfolio Holder commented that the report provided reassurance that Redditch Borough Council was doing much, in conjunction with partners, to provide support to third sector organisations offering domestic abuse support services. It was vital that all council services had an awareness of recognising signs of domestic abuse issues, and the Portfolio Holder encouraged all Members to undertake the training on recognising signs of domestic abuse.

After the report presentation, the following areas were discussed and considered by Members:

- Scale of domestic abuse in Redditch – It was noted that domestic abuse was a 'hidden crime' with many unreported incidents. It was estimated that victims of domestic abuse would experience 45-50 incidents before coming forward to report the issue to support agencies. Officers estimated that there were hundreds of families impacted by domestic abuse in Redditch Borough.
- Identifying incidences of domestic abuse from data – Officers reported that domestic abuse was not classed as a crime type in itself. To analyse domestic abuse incidence, reported crime data shared by the police was interrogated by offence type within which some offences would have a marker recorded to indicate that the offence was classed as a domestic abuse case. For example, an incidence of assault with injury could have a domestic abuse marker included. It was noted that this would be recorded by the police officer investigating the crime who would put the marker against that crime. It was noted that for violence with injury offence, domestic abuse was the second highest marker, only behind the alcohol-related marker. For the reason above, however, it was difficult to break down crime data in terms of the number of domestic abuse crimes as a given crime could have multiple markers included.
- Officers highlighted that domestic abuse reporting had increased which could indicate that more victims felt confident enough to come forward and seek support. While the community safety partnership agencies were undertaking a lot of work directly supporting the victims and families,

there was likely more that could be done in terms of recording outcomes, for example records of the type of domestic abuse support provided in each case.

- The Community Safety Manager reported that the Community Safety Team had direct contact with domestic abuse victims and survivors when undertaking work to make their homes safer, and this involved community safety project officers going into a property, undertaking a crime risk assessment and recommending improvements to the safety of the house such as window locks etc. Such sanctuary assessments, for example, provided anecdotal feedback from families supported, but collating quantitative data on outcomes presented a challenge because of the long-term impact associated with domestic abuse.
- Domestic abuse and associated support services – It was explained that domestic abuse was often the underpinning factor for a lot of other issues. For example, incidents of domestic abuse could lead to homelessness and mental health concerns, substance misuse. Equally some of the above factors could lead to domestic abuse. As a result, it was difficult to delineate support in one area from another, for example, in the case of somebody who received a grant through homelessness support, for example, because they were fleeing from a domestic abuse situation. Due to these interlinks, it was felt appropriate that the paper included organisations providing support on issues that could be related to domestic abuse.
- Third Sector Support Services specific to Redditch and county-wide commissioned services – It was noted that some organisations receiving grants listed in the report covered a wider geographical area than Redditch Borough, for example there were some services listed in the report that were commissioned across Worcestershire County or the West Mercia Police area. It was explained that when funding was provided from national government and from public health the services would be usually commissioned across the County. The Community Safety Manager explained that through the Joint Commissioning Group for Domestic Abuse and Substance Misuse the Council could monitor and look at detail of what the county-wide commissioned services delivered within Redditch Borough itself.
- Members were encouraged to take part in the Domestic Abuse Needs Assessment Survey that was currently out for consultation, on the Worcestershire County Council's website. Through this survey, Members had the opportunity to provide their views on how they see county-wide domestic abuse services should be delivered in the Borough.

- It was noted that tackling domestic abuse was one of the priorities for law enforcement agencies because of its significant negative effects on society. It was estimated that in 2017, for example, tackling domestic abuse accounted for £66 million spend by law enforcement agencies. This figure had likely increased significantly since then.
- It was reported that there West Mercia Police and Crime Commissioner had made a major funding commitment to domestic abuse services, in particular organisations working on prevention route. As such, when local organisations were supported in applying for funding by the Council, they were encouraged to evidence how they would contribute to preventing domestic abuse in the first place.
- It was noted that extra consideration was given to people trying to flee traumatic experiences. There was a direct link between the Council's Community Safety Team and other Council departments such as Housing in particular. In the case of sanctuary assessments, it would be the initial contact by housing officers who would identify if somebody was able to stay in their home and if it needed to be made safer. The Community Safety Team would then go into the identified properties to undertake the sanctuary assessment itself.
- The local Partnership organisation providing cross-agency framework for community safety (which included tackling domestic abuse) was the North Worcestershire Community Safety Partnership (NWCSP), there were forums within this such as Worcestershire Forum Against Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence.
- The Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) provided a comprehensive framework for making assessments of the cases and link the provision of appropriate services for victims and their children.

RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

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

Members considered the Executive Committee Work Programme (Forward Plan) and it was requested that the following items from that Work Programme be added to the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme for pre-decision scrutiny:

- Independent Remuneration Panel Recommendations

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- Pay Policy 2024/25

It was requested that the following items be added for pre-scrutiny by the Budget Scrutiny Working Group:

- Council Tax – Discretionary Council Tax Reduction Policy
- Council Tax – Empty Homes Discounts and Premiums

It was queried by Members, in relation to the Executive Committee item on Council Tax Base and Business Rates Yield 2024-25, whether the Council had scope in relation to setting the business rates yield. Officers present undertook to contact the necessary Officers who would provide an answer before the Committee made a decision on whether it would add this item to its work programme.

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

39. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

It was requested that the consideration of the overview item on Social Housing Repairs be moved to 19th February 2023 meeting of Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

It was reported that the item currently on the work programme relating to the Matchborough and Winyates Regeneration Proposals would be withdrawn from the Executive Work Programme. Members asked for the item to be kept on the Overview and Scrutiny work programme until confirmation of the details with regards to this item had been received.

RESOLVED that subject to changes detailed in the preamble above the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's Work Programme be noted.

40. 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

Councillor Kane reported that the next meeting of the Working Group was due to take place on Monday 30th October.

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

Councillor Holz reported that no meetings of the Group had taken place to date and the next scheduled meeting was due on 4th December 2023. Members of the Group would be contacted shortly about agenda items that could be considered at that meeting.

- c) Fly Tipping and Bulky Waste Task Group – Chair, Councillor Khan

Councillor Khan reported that the Task Group held its first meeting on 24th October with further meeting dates agreed. The actions from the first meeting included the ask for Officers to gather up-to-date statistics on fly tipping incidence in the Borough and compare this with neighbouring authorities. Another action was for Members of the Task Group to formulate questions which could be used in a resident survey on the subject of fly tipping. The third action was for Officers to provide case studies for the next meeting of authorities that had household recycling pop-up centres, for example Birmingham.

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

41. EXTERNAL SCRUTINY BODIES - UPDATE REPORTS

The Council's Representative on the external scrutiny bodies, Councillor Marshall, updated the Committee on recent meetings of the following external scrutiny bodies.

- a) West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Councillor Marshall reported that she attended a question-and-answer session with the Mayor of the West Midlands, Andy Street. A written update on this would be provided to the Committee at the next meeting.

With regards to WMCA bodies, it was reported that councillors from non-constituent councils were not being remunerated for attending meetings. The workload of a non-constituent members was, however, comparable to that of constituent authority members who, in contrast, were in receipt of annual allowance. It was deemed that given comparable workload for constituent and non-constituent representative councillors, the issue should be raised with the Council's Monitoring Officer in the first instance for advice. It was

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clarified that if any remuneration was to be agreed for non-constituent councillors on the WMCA, the payment would come from the WMCA itself.

A question was raised in relation to the benefits of Redditch Borough Council's representation as a non-constituent member of the WMCA, and the benefits of sending elected member representation to meetings of WMCA's scrutiny bodies. It was noted that by being a non-constituent member, the Council had an opportunity to bid for some of the funding that was available through WMCA, for example the Homes England funding. There were also issues decided at regional level that had an impact on Redditch, for example in relation to skills training and funding for young people.

Members asked that it be checked which grants provided by WMCA were available to access by its non-constituent authorities such as Redditch Borough.

- b) West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) Transport Delivery Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Members were referred to the information contained in the written update report provided in the agenda pack.

- c) Worcestershire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC)

Councillor Marshall reported that the following issues were raised at the last HOSC meeting on 11th October 2023:

Hillcrest Mental Health Ward - It was noted that the Ward was recently given a 'poor' rating by the Care Quality Commission (CQC). There were actions being implemented to improve the situation. However, it was noted that Hill Crest would not be likely to be used as the facility where patients from Redditch would be placed and the unit would be used for psychological rehabilitation. It was reported that the Herefordshire and Worcestershire Health and Care NHS Trust (HWHCT) recently updated the Athelon ward and it was likely that the mental health facility would move there from the current Hill Crest facility. This would reduce the need for HWHCT to outsource beds to Wrexham and would see improvement in the offer to patients. However, it was noted that the bed capacity would be 14 at Athelon ward which still represented a reduction in mental health beds capacity. It was added that specialist treatment might still require patients to be referred to a facility further afield.

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Children's Hearing Services (Paediatric Audiology) – It was explained that the Trust had identified issues around the accuracy of some children's hearing tests, specifically auditory brainstem response (ABR) tests, which the Trust provided across the County. ABRs were mainly carried out when a baby failed a newborn hearing screen and on average 4 ABRs were conducted each week. The Trust had reviewed 462 tests taken since 1 April 2018. To date, 7 cases of moderate harm and 16 cases of greater harm had been identified, such as language and development delay or providing appropriate intervention such as a cochlear implant. It was explained, however, that as this affected the cohort of children under 5 years old most children were likely able to catch up in educational development even in case of an error in testing. Every family had been given a full explanation and apology and those affected were directed to seek further advice if required. Members of the Committee expressed significant concern at this issue and asked to be kept updated by the Council's HOSC representative.

RESOLVED that

the External Scrutiny Bodies updates be noted.

42. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

The Committee agreed that exclusion of the press and public was not required for item 11 – Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting of 7th September 2023 – as it was agreed that discussion would only concern the accuracy, not the content, of the public and restricted versions of the minutes. Subsequently, when item 11 was under consideration, no discussion took place on any of the content of the restricted minutes record of the meeting of 7th September 2023.

43. MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING OF 7TH SEPTEMBER 2023

The minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 7th September 2023 were considered including the minutes record of the exempt session of that meeting (Minute Item No. 32 – The Town Hall Refurbishment – Final Decision). No information regarding the exempt minutes was disclosed or discussed during consideration of this agenda item.

RESOLVED that

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the minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Meeting held on Thursday 7th September 2023 be approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chair.

The Meeting commenced at 6.30 pm
and closed at 8.12 pm