

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Monday, 8th July, 2024

MINUTES

Present:

Councillor Matthew Dormer (Chair), Councillor Craig Warhurst (Vice-Chair) and Councillors William Boyd, Claire Davies, Joanna Kane, Wanda King, Sachin Mathur, David Munro and Juma Begum (substitute)

Also Present:

Councillor Jane Spilsbury – Portfolio Holder for Performance

Officers:

Sue Hanley, Peter Carpenter and Guy Revans

Democratic Services Officers:

M Sliwinski

1. APOLOGIES AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Rogers. Councillor Begum attended the meeting as Councillor Rogers' substitute.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND OF PARTY WHIP

There were no declarations of interest nor of party whip.

3. MINUTES

As there was only one Member in attendance who was also an Overview and Scrutiny Member in the last municipal year, the consideration of the minutes was deferred to the next meeting.

4. PUBLIC SPEAKING

There were no registered public speakers on this occasion.

Chair

5. PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY - PRODUCTIVITY PLANS

A report on Productivity Plan, which showed how the Council had improved productivity to date and how it planned to improve productivity in the future, was presented for Members' consideration. It was stated that the Productivity Plan before Members would need to be submitted to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities – now Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) – and published on the Council's website by 19th July 2024 and would assist Government in understanding what worked well across local government sector as well as identify any gaps.

Redditch Borough Council's (RBC) proposed Productivity Plan response was covered during the presentation, with some of the points covered regarding Redditch position including:

- RBC had had a strong shared service with Bromsgrove District Council for 14 years, which delivered large savings by making efficiencies on the use of resources. It was noted that other shared service / function arrangements across Worcestershire authorities also delivered significant savings, with the case of Worcestershire Regulatory Services (WRS) quoted as making savings of £4 million over the last decade due to shared arrangements.
- The Council had leveraged Towns Fund Funding (£16 million) to regenerate Redditch Town Centre.
- The Council linked financial and performance monitoring through quarterly reports that were submitted to the Executive Committee and were scrutinised by Budget Scrutiny Working Group (sub-committee of Overview and Scrutiny).
- Productivity of the Council was also measured and monitored through Members' corporate dashboard that was available online, a two-tranche Medium-Term Financial Plan process which linked finance to strategic direction, the appointment of a new portfolio holder for performance on the Executive Committee, in addition to service areas methods of operation.

Following the report presentation, Members asked a number of questions to which the following responses were provided:

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- How the Council monitored the success of agile working? – It was stated that Agile Working Policy was introduced by the Council around 15 months ago. The Workforce Strategy Board, chaired by the Chief Executive, managed and monitored agile working implementation on a strategic level. It was noted that the Board was working on developing a suite of agile working performance measures that could be quantified and show progress in this area across Council services. It was reported that service business plans would now be required from each service area, where as part of this the service area needed to demonstrate and quantify performance measures of the service on agile working. It was underlined that ‘agile working’ was different from ‘home working’, with the needs of customers and the business being prioritised.
- It was highlighted that on the request of the Leader of the Council an all-Member briefing on agile working had been arranged for September 2024 to make all Members aware of the arrangements in this area.
- Migration of Council data across software systems and ensuring compatibleness and accuracy of legacy data – Officers noted that cleaning of data was one of the main uses of digital tools across the Council with some services holding significant amount of legacy data, for example (26 years) Revenues and Benefits service keeping last 26 years of data for legislative purposes. The automated software provided the ability to retrieve this data and also identify gaps using automated algorithms. It was highlighted that the Council was working towards achieving a single view of customer (via a single form) across Council services which would significantly simplify processes and reduce the resources spent on reformatting data. The Council currently used around 30-40 forms to capture looked mandatory customer data, and it was looking to move to a single standard mandatory form that could be used across council services to deliver services to a given customer– it was highlighted this project was likely to take several years to complete.
- A Member commented that it was positive to see plans for Community Engagement Proposal, including targeted surveys, and hoped that this would be brought forward to the Committee for scrutiny once the Proposal was being developed.

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- The Chair commented that a lot of work was required to improve joint working between the County Council and Redditch Borough Council.

The Portfolio Holder for Performance was invited to address the Committee. In doing so, the Portfolio Holder commented that she welcomed the report as a way to facilitate and momentum to look towards opportunities to increase efficiency across the Council. Opportunities were identified for improvements in productivity through use of information technology solutions and partnership working with other strategic public sector organisations. The Portfolio Holder highlighted that the data prioritisation programme to establish clean data would greatly assist elected members in making informed decisions.

Following discussion, Members endorsed the recommendation as printed in the report.

RECOMMENDED that

the Productivity Plan, as set out in Appendix A, to be approved, the plan to be published on the Council's website and forwarded to the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities before the 19th July 2024.

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

The Committee considered items of business discussed at the Overview and Scrutiny training session in June 2024 that would be suitable for scrutiny in the 2024-25 municipal year.

It was noted that paragraph 3.6 of the report listed items put forward by Members as potentially suitable for consideration at meetings of Overview and Scrutiny. Following discussion, the items that were taken forward to be considered by Overview and Scrutiny in 2024-25 were as follows:

- Modelling financial implications of various decisions relating to Redditch Library – full report to Overview and Scrutiny meeting
- Decarbonisation of the Council's Capital Programme – via a verbal or written update at Overview and Scrutiny meeting

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- Parking Enforcement – Management of Contract – Overview and Scrutiny to scrutinise this item once the Executive report on this subject becomes available
- Play and Parks Provision – full report to Overview and Scrutiny
- Review of Health Inequalities – report to Overview and Scrutiny to revisit the outcomes of a previous review of health inequalities undertaken by Redditch Councillors and whether further investigation was required.
- State of the River Arrow – It was noted that as a main river this was an area under the responsibility of Environment Agency (EA). It was clarified that the issue Members wished to consider were water quality issues along the brooks and streams to the River Arrow, including the impact of invasive species such as Himalayan Blossom on these areas. It was stated that North Worcestershire Water Management (NWWM) had undertaken work on invasive species and the brooks and smaller waterways that came under the Council's and NWWMs control. This issue was agreed to be considered by Overview and Scrutiny.

The following items were suggested, as per paragraph 3.7 of the report, for consideration by the Task Groups and Working Groups:

- Road maintenance and cleanliness – to be considered by the Performance Scrutiny Working Group
- Upkeep of verges – to be considered by the Performance Scrutiny Working Group
- Aspirations / future for young people including job provision and recreational activities – it was noted that this would be included as part of the remit of the Post-16 Education Task Group, with the terms of reference due to come before the Committee prior to this Task Group commencing with meetings.

With respect of the following items, it was determined these items would be considered via alternative formats to reports at Overview and Scrutiny:

- Pension fund investment – strategies for divestment from carbon-intensive investments – It was proposed that the Chairman of Pensions Investment Sub-Committee

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(Worcestershire County Council) should be approached for a briefing paper on the current position.

- Operation of various tier authorities in Redditch Borough (including County Council – Borough Council joint working) – It was clarified that this did not concern whether to consider options with regard to unitary authority system but concerned cooperation between the County Council and Redditch Borough Council and how the relationship could be improved. It was suggested that before a decision was made on whether Overview and Scrutiny consider this item, the Leader of the Council should be afforded the opportunity to liaise with the County Council and other district-level authorities in Worcestershire.
- Decarbonisation of the Council's Capital Programme – This item was deemed to be suitable for consideration via a written or verbal update on progress to Members.

The Committee agreed that it would not be considering the following matters at this time:

- Looking at water quality and suitability for holding water events (e.g. wild swimming) at Arrow Valley Lake – It was reported that a report on this was not required as this matter was already progressing with water quality tests revealing satisfactory water quality at Arrow Valley Lake to enable it to hold water events from this summer.
- Electric Vehicles (EV) chargers – It was noted that this area was progressing, with the Council in the process of final negotiations over the first lot of leases for electric charging points. The Committee felt that a report to Overview and Scrutiny was not needed at this point but that a verbal or written update to Members might be suitable at a later point in the municipal year.
- Consideration of planning volume for solar / battery farms – It was agreed that this item was not suitable for consideration at Overview and Scrutiny and would be better considered as part of Planning Committee.
- Housing development in specific areas of the Borough – It was agreed that this was not suitable for Overview and Scrutiny but would be considered via the Local Plan process.

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Following Member discussion on selection of items to scrutinise at Overview and Scrutiny and Task / Working Group meetings in 2024-25, an additional recommendation was proposed by Councillor Warhurst with respect of asking the Executive Committee to review the Council's constitution with a further check on policy to enable past Executive Committee Members to participate in Overview and Scrutiny in circumstances when they were previously involved in making Executive decisions which were due to appear for scrutiny at Overview and Scrutiny meetings.

It was clarified that currently the Councillors represented at Overview and Scrutiny who formed part of the Executive in prior municipal years were unable to participate in Overview and Scrutiny meetings where decisions the Executive made in prior years were being scrutinised in any capacity. This was noted as hindering the ability of some Overview and Scrutiny Members from participating in Overview and Scrutiny this year.

During the discussion, it was noted that this topic might be considered by Constitutional Review Working Party in the first instance; it was insisted by Councillor Warhurst that Executive Committee might be best placed to consider this matter.

The additional recommendation was seconded by Councillor Dormer and on being put to the vote agreed.

RECOMMENDED that

the Executive Committee further review the Council's constitution with a further check on policy to enable past Executive Members to participate in Overview and Scrutiny when they were previously involved in Executive decisions.

RESOLVED that

- 1) the items arising from the Overview and Scrutiny Training and Work Prioritisation Session be added to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme for 2024-25 municipal year as per the pre-amble included in the minute text above; and
 - 2) the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme be updated accordingly as per Member requests.
7. **EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MINUTES AND SCRUTINY OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE'S WORK PROGRAMME - SELECTING ITEMS FOR SCRUTINY**

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The Executive Committee Work Programme was submitted for Members' consideration. It was requested that the following items from the Executive Committee Work Programme be added for pre-scrutiny by Overview and Scrutiny:

- Update Report on the Town Hall Hub – an extra Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting had been arranged on Thursday 25th July 2024 to pre-scrutinise this report.
- Contaminated Land Inspection Strategy

It was reported that in relation to the item on Food Waste Business Case and Associated Waste Related Issues, an all-Member briefing was likely to be arranged in September 2024 to consider this in the first instance.

It was noted that finance-related reports on the Executive Work Programme were due to be pre-scrutinised at meetings of the Budget Scrutiny Working Group (sub-group of Overview and Scrutiny Committee).

RESOLVED that

the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme be updated with items from the Executive Work Programme as per the preamble above.

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

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

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

Councillor Warhurst reported that the Group held a meeting on Friday 5th July.

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

The next meeting was scheduled to take place on Tuesday 16th July.

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

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The Committee Officer was in the process of reviewing progress to date and agreeing the next meeting date with the Chair and Members of the Task Group. This followed a change in the membership of the Task Group following Borough elections in May 2024.

d) Post-16 Education Task Group – Chair, Councillor Warhurst

The date of the first meeting would be arranged once the terms of reference for this Task Group had been approved by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

RESOLVED that

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

9. EXTERNAL SCRUTINY BODIES - UPDATE REPORTS

Updates on the meetings of External Scrutiny Bodies were provided by the representatives as follows:

a) West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) Overview and Scrutiny Committee – Council Representative, Councillor Kane

Councillor Kane reported that a meeting took place on 1st July 2024 and a written report on the meeting was included in the papers for this meeting. The main item on the agenda was the skills scrutiny review. Councillor Kane observed that as a non-constituent authority on the West Midlands Combined Authority, Redditch Council's powers were limited and Redditch Councillors did not have voting rights at meetings of WMCA.

Councillor Kane explained that in respect of skills for authorities in the wider (non-constituent) area, which did not benefit from WMCA Skills Funding, the main benefit of WMCA was in terms of best practice, which was particularly around construction sector.

The Chair reported that there existed occasional opportunities for non-constituent authorities to access Skills grants and funding from WMCA.

b) West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) Transport Delivery Overview and Scrutiny – Council Representative, Councillor Munro

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Councillor Munro reported that he had submitted his apologies for the first meeting of this body, which was held earlier today (8th July). Councillor Munro pointed out that transport arrangements to the venue of this meeting, Summer Lane in Birmingham, were difficult. Councillor Munro reported that the agenda papers contained no items / details that had any implication for Redditch.

c) Worcestershire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC) – Council Representative, Councillor Kane

Councillor Munro reported that he attended the meeting of this body held today (8th July) as Councillor Kane's substitute and was granted an observer status. It was highlighted that two matters discussed at the meeting were of direct interest to Redditch.

The first was in relation to the Adult Mental Health Acute Inpatient and Rehabilitation Redesign. It was of concern to Redditch residents due to the Hillcrest Mental Health Unit. It was noted that rehabilitation of mental health patients should take account of the Royal College of Psychiatrists 'Getting It Right First Time' Programme which insisted, among other things, on the minimum period of inpatient treatment, that patients should be centre of care and that patients should be treated locally. However, Councillor Munro reported that the decision to close the Redditch local mental health setting, Hillcrest, had nevertheless already been taken, and Hillcrest would close by April 2025.

14 inpatient beds at Hillcrest were to be transferred to the Elgar ward at Worcester Royal Hospital, which Councillor Munro commented, represented to him a further reduction in hospital services in Redditch.

The second matter related to voices of carers and patients, with the consensus reported among Members of HOSC that these voices were not being heard enough. This topic, it was reported, also touched on the large health inequalities which existed within Redditch.

RESOLVED that

the External Scrutiny Bodies updates be noted.

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and closed at 7.23 pm