

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

17th November 2010

MINUTES

Present:

Councillor Diane Thomas (Chair), Councillor Anita Clayton (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Peter Anderson, Bill Hartnett, Robin King, William Norton, Brenda Quinney, Mark Shurmer and Graham Vickery

Also Present:

Councillors Brandon Clayton, Roger Hill, Derek Taylor and Mr M Collins (Standards Committee Observer).

Officers:

D Bennett, H Bennett, J Bough, M Bough, S Hanley, S Horrobin, G Revans and L Tompkin

Committee Services Officer:

J Smyth and I Westmore

130. APOLOGIES AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES

No apologies for absence had been received.

131. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND OF PARTY WHIP

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

132. MINUTES

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 27th October 2010 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

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Chair

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133. ACTIONS LIST

Members considered the latest version of the Committee's Actions List. Officers advised that, in relation to item 2 on the list, a report on options for public speaking at Overview and Scrutiny Committee meetings would be presented to the Committee at its meeting on 8th December 2010.

In respect of Item 1 on the Actions List, the Chair requested that Officers address the outstanding query on what courses would not be provided following the closure of the REDI Centre, as soon as possible.

RESOLVED that

the Actions List be noted.

134. CALL-IN AND SCRUTINY OF THE FORWARD PLAN

There were no specific call-ins relating to the Decision Notice of the Executive Committee meeting held on 10th November 2010.

It was noted that, whilst not all of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's recommendations on the Climate Change Strategy had been accepted, the Executive had agreed an additional recommendation on a policy being approved for all new public buildings to aim to exceed nationally set Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Method (BREEAM) standards. It was further noted that of the Committee's recommendations relating to the Review of the Dial A Ride Service had been accepted and incorporated in the Executive Committee's recommendations to Council.

There were no pre-scrutiny requests in relation to items scheduled on the Forward Plan for consideration by the Executive Committee.

135. TASK & FINISH REVIEWS - DRAFT SCOPING DOCUMENTS

There were no draft scoping documents for consideration.

136. TASK AND FINISH GROUPS - PROGRESS REPORTS

It was noted that the final report on the External Refurbishment of Housing Stock Short-Sharp Review was to be presented later in the meeting under Item 9 on the agenda.

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The Committee received the following reports in relation to current reviews:

a) Joint Worcestershire Hub

The Council's Co-opted representative, Councillor Roger Hill, reported that the report on the review of the Worcestershire Hub was due to go to the County Council's Cabinet for consideration on 25th November. Members further noted that an e-link could be provided to access the report on the County's website if they wished to view the report online.

b) Work Experience Opportunities

The Chair of the review, Councillor Peter Anderson, reported that investigations had revealed that an organisation, the Worcestershire Education Business Partnership had been set up to provide assistance and access to a substantial database that schools and young people could tap into to help them find work experience placements and which had, in the previous year, assisted with placing 6,000 students.

He further reported that some schools in Redditch were not, it would seem, taking advantage of this database or enabling their students to make use of it and the Task and Finish Group would be investigating if this was the case and why. He commented that, between this organisation, Careers Advisers and Connexions, there should be plenty of opportunities for work experience placements.

Members also noted that a planned visit by the Chair to a Student Council meeting on 16th November to consult with them on work experience issues had been postponed due to unforeseen circumstances and that he would be meeting with them at the end of January 2011 instead.

c) Promoting Redditch

On behalf of the Task and Finish Group Chair, Councillor Graham Vickery, Officers reported that the Group had held their first meeting on Friday 5th November, at which they received a presentation on the subject of the "Its My Place" Pride Campaign. The Group's next meeting would be held on 23rd November when the work of the Council's Economic Development Unit in promoting Redditch and opportunities for Redditch, given its close proximity, for tapping into Stratford's tourist market and providing places to stay would be discussed.

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Members further noted that the Group had also organised an interview with a representative from North East Worcestershire Tourism (NEWT) on 30th November and was also organising an interview with Sir William Lawrence, former Chair of the defunct Heart of England Tourist Board which, it was hoped, would take place some time in December.

Councillor Derek Taylor, reported that he had received a few responses from Councillors on his research survey "What's good about Redditch", but would welcome more. Members suggested that other external groups, such as businesses, voluntary groups, young and older people should also be consulted on the survey.

RESOLVED that

the update reports be noted.

137. CRIME AND DISORDER SCRUTINY PANEL - CHAIR'S UPDATE

The Committee received a report from the Chair of the Crime and Disorder Scrutiny Panel which provided details on discussions held with Officers from the Worcestershire PCT on the possibilities for establishing a Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC) in the West Mercia Police area and the impact the lack of funding and changes to the NHS and PCT's would have and were asked to endorse the Panel's request that the Council write to the Health and Wellbeing Board on the issues highlighted in the report.

The Deputy Chief Executive and Chair of the Redditch Community Safety Partnership reported that she had already received the Panel's letter on funding issues and that the matter would be taken to the full Partnership for consideration.

Members also noted updates on public consultation responses the Panel had received in relation to the Home Office White Paper "Policing in the 21st Century – reconnecting police and the people".

RECOMMENDED that

- 1) Redditch Borough Council endorse and support the need for a Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC) in the West Mercia Police area; and**
- 2) the Council issue a letter to the Health and Wellbeing Board highlighting the level of uncertainty for future provision of a SARC within the West Mercia Police Area**

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and the apparent gaps in the NHS White Paper *Equity and Excellence: Liberating the NHS*” in this regard.

138. EXTERNAL REFURBISHMENT OF HOUSING STOCK SHORT-SHARP REVIEW - FINAL REPORT

The Committee considered the final report from the External Refurbishment of Housing Stock Short-Sharp Review Group on proposals for a number of actions to be taken to improve the appearance of properties in the Council’s housing stock and surrounding environment in Woodrow specifically, but also potentially for future implementation in other parts of the Borough, at a relatively low financial cost to the Council.

The Chair of the Review Group, Councillor Graham Vickery, reminded Members of the reasons behind the review, which was to address concerns about the appearance of some of the Council’s housing stock and the impact it had on local residents and their environment. He outlined the stages of the review namely a walkabout in Woodrow with Officers, during which various issues were identified, followed by a further meeting of meeting of the Group when a number of recommendations were formulated for the Committee’s consideration.

Supported by photographic evidence, Councillor Vickery briefly went through each of the proposed recommendations and the reasons behind them. He considered, however, that there were still a number of outstanding issues that needed to be considered, namely:

- a) the colouring of the rough cast pebble dash on houses in Ombersley and Rushock Close; what colours tenants might prefer and consideration as to what might be achievable within existing budgets;
- b) the condition of the road surface at the entrance to Rushock Close; and
- c) the demolition of under-used garages and potential use of some Section 106 monies allocated for use on capital landscape work on soft landscaping work in the courtyard area located in Wishaw Close.

In respect of the rough cast work to houses at a) above, Members were referred to Appendix 1 of the report, which provided estimated costs. Officers advised, however, that there was currently no budget available to undertake the work.

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It was noted that the issue of the road surface in Rushock Close would be the responsibility of the County Council.

The Portfolio Holder with the responsibility for Housing, Councillor Brandon Clayton, advised that Wishaw Close was currently listed on the Council's Estate Enhancement Programme but he was not in a position to advise on timescales for works to be undertaken as the Close was one of thirty-plus in the programme.

Officers reported, in responses to a Member's query, that should tenants be interested in undertaking external redecoration of Council properties themselves, they would have to write to the Council as Landlord and that any requests would be judged on a case by case basis as appropriate.

RESOLVED that

- 1) the report be noted; and
- 2) **Officers provide clarification on the three outstanding issues highlighted in the preamble above for Members at the next meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee; and**

RECOMMENDED that

subject to Resolution 2 above and further consideration of the outstanding issues by the Committee, the following recommendations be approved:

- 1) **light colour paints be utilised to decorate garage doors to improve their visual appearance;**
- 2) **the lintels featured on Council properties be decorated to improve the visual appearance of those properties;**
- 3) **the retaining wall to the rear of 1-12 Martley Close be redecorated as part of a Council arts project;**
- 4) **the Council assume responsibility for the maintenance of small strips of land located close to private properties and public spaces;**
- 5) **the Council ensure that, when replacing diseased and dead plants, different types of plants are introduced to ensure there is a variety of leaf colours and foliage in any given area;**

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- 6) the remaining section 106 money available for use on capital landscaping work on the Greenlands Open Spaces be allocated to soft landscaping work in the courtyard area located in Wishaw Close;
- 7) in order to minimise the level of disruption experienced by local residents, there should be a holistic approach to the delivery of frontline services;
- 8) representatives of local schools be invited to participate in estate walkabouts; and
- 9) representatives of the local GP's Consortium be invited to participate in the estate walkabouts once the consortia have been introduced in 2012/13.

139. PORTFOLIO HOLDER ANNUAL REPORT - PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR HOUSING, LOCAL ENVIRONMENT AND HEALTH

Further to consideration of the Portfolio Holder for Housing, Local Environment and Health's written report at the previous meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 27th October 2010, and Members agreed themed questions to be put to the Portfolio Holder, Councillor Brandon Clayton, in respect of his Annual Report to the Committee, the following responses were provided:

1. How are Government policy changes to housing benefit expected to impact on Redditch residents?

The Committee was advised that, as the Government's proposed changes to Housing Benefit policy was still being debated in the House of Commons, it was too early to gauge the impact on residents. Decisions on single payments to banks or rent accounts were also yet to be finalised but could potentially provide savings on administration costs and proposed changes in social housing could potentially help with housing figures.

2. What impact is expected of the Government White Paper *Equity and excellence: liberating the NHS* on local health provision?

Cllr Clayton advised that the White Paper was still being discussed and until the final outcomes were known it was difficult to know what impact the proposals would have on local health provision at this time.

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Members were informed, however, that the potential for some health funding to be transferred to the County Council from the PCT was already known and the proposed changes to PCTs could also potentially impact on services; discussions had taken place with the PCT and some GP's had also been approached for their views.

Some concerns were raised relating to the County Council having control of funding and whether it would be detrimental to Redditch. Whether GP's were ready and willing to take on a bigger role in local health provision and the potential changes to NICE and the allocation of drugs at a more local level was also highlighted with some Members concerned that local determination on drug allocation could lead to inequitable provision according to location.

Councillor Clayton reiterated that until final decisions had been made and all of the details were known on Policy proposals for local areas to determine their own needs in local health provision, it was too early to speculate on how it would affect the Borough.

3. What progress has been made on the 10:10 Climate Change agreement?

Members were advised that the Executive Committee had already agreed an Action Plan, including those for CO₂ emissions. The Executive Committee had agreed the Salix funding, 100% of which would go into Climate Change. The Crematorium, Abbey Stadium and Council vehicles were also being looked at for potential improvements as was the use of solar panels to reduce usage at the Palace Theatre (with the potential for it to become an "A" rated building) and St David's House. It was also noted that all new buildings would have to comply with climate change requirements.

It was suggested that the Council was still using large quantities of gas and electricity and needed to be more proactive in reducing its basic energy usage. Councillor Clayton advised that long term solutions were being investigated and every effort would be made to continue reducing emissions and costs.

4. What have been the outcomes following the implementation of the Introductory Tenancies Service?

Councillor Clayton advised that five hundred and forty new tenancies with good levels of security had been achieved since the implementation of the Introductory Tenancies Service, with only three tenants currently in notice of eviction and being reviewed. It was noted that no additional information had been received from the Government on Introductory Tenancies at present.

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5. What effect has there been the switch of the Care and Repair service from a local service to the Worcestershire Care and Repair Agency?

Councillor Clayton advised that he had attended a recent Agency Board meeting and understood that there had been a reduction of 2% in overhead costs. However, given the changes to the service had only recently taken place and that there were no figures to compare performance to at this time, this information could not be verified. Members were also advised that there had been no reduction in the number of people receiving help since the switch.

6. What recent action has been undertaken to tackle health inequalities?

Councillor Clayton advised that a number of actions had been taken to tackle health inequalities such as:

- a) Health Trainers being able to see more people as a result of contract changes;
- b) County Councillors in Redditch providing funding for projects to improve quality of life;
- c) action to promote smoking cessation within the Borough; and
- d) the Sustainable Community Strategy Plan was due to be considered by the Executive Committee in March 2011.

7. What is your position regarding transition towns?

Councillor Clayton advised that he considered transition towns to be a good concept and one that the Council supported.

8. What costs does the Council accrue by ridding the roads of detritus?

The Committee was advised that it was difficult to cost removal of detritus from the Borough's roads as it was not possible to separate the detritus from other debris picked up such as leaves. In response to a suggestion that removal of detritus be re-evaluated, it was reported that cleaning regimes had been revised to improve the situation at no additional cost.

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9. What plans are there to work with partners to provide social housing during the next twelve months?

The Committee was advised that, the Council had been working with other Social Housing providers for many years and would continue to do so, to provide different types of housing to meet its targets and Officers were in regular contact with the town's Social Landlords. Members also noted that the Council was willing to assist social landlords who were looking to formulate business plans.

In response to Members questions on the number of housing units currently in the planning process, Councillor Clayton advised that it was difficult to say, but in general terms, over a hundred new units had been provided in the previous year and it was hoped to provide similar numbers this year.

On redeveloping other areas of land for social housing, such as Church Hill District Centre, Councillor Clayton reported that all appropriate land, including Redditch Borough Council land, was considered and the Council was prepared to work in partnership with developers to provide as much social housing as possible.

In response to a Member's speculation that the Council was to be given funding to build Council homes and questioned whether the Portfolio Holder had been aware of this, it was noted that Officers had received an indication that there was something in the pipeline but that nothing had been confirmed.

10. Will the Council consider selling off any of the existing housing stock?

Councillor Clayton advised that the question was difficult to answer in so far as residents themselves would have to opt out of any whole sale voluntary transfer of the housing stock. The Council was, however, still selling housing stock through the Right to Buy scheme and, as appropriate, looking to dispose of specific housing stock like that at Upper Norgrove House.

Members were further advised that the matter was a HRA issue in that the Council had to consider how much debt it was able to take on. It was considered, however, that selling off stock would not be to the Council's benefit in the future as there was no funding available.

On behalf of the Committee, the Chair thanked Councillor Clayton for his Annual Report.

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140. 2011/12 GRANTS POLICY

The Committee considered a report which detailed proposed changes to the Grants Policy 2010 to ensure the Council's voluntary sector grant funding provided value for money and increased access for voluntary and community sector organisations.

Members welcomed and supported the proposed changes which would also provide for more rigorous monitoring of how grants were being spent and assist organisations to move away from their dependence on the Council for funding.

RECOMMENDED that

- 1) the updated Voluntary Sector Grants Policy, as attached at Appendix 1 to the report, be approved;**
- 2) the option for themes and percentages of funding being allocated for the 2011/12 voluntary and community sector grants process, as detailed in the report, be approved;**
- 3) the option for funding being made available from the main Grants scheme to deliver a support programme to the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) organisations, be approved; and**
- 4) the option for authority being delegated to the Head of Community Services, in consultation with the Grants Panel, to agree the allocation of community grants under the Local Strategic Partnership 'Stronger Communities' theme, be approved.**

141. CAMPAIGN TO DISCOURAGE DOG FOULING

The Committee considered a report which detailed results of the dog fouling awareness campaign that had been running since late August 2010.

Officers reported on the work undertaken to draw the public's attention to the problem of dog fouling and the monitoring exercises that were undertaken in the targeted areas, which had been highlighted specifically as hot-spots. Members were referred to the before and after figures detailed in the appendix to the report.

Members noted the successful reductions in dog fouling incidents in all but one of the targeted areas, Brockhill Park and Officers

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advised that further monitoring would be needed in the area initially to gather more evidence before any enforcement action could be carried out. Officers advised, however, that limited resources would not allow for constant monitoring of the areas at the same level but work with community support officers and taking enforcement action where appropriate would hopefully help to maintain the campaign which Officers hoped to refresh in the Spring.

Officers agreed to contact one of the Members on two other areas that she had previously reported, in relation to dog fouling issues, namely Terry Springs Field and the Redditch Rugby and Cricket Club.

Members welcomed the report and successful outcomes and congratulated Officers for their work on the campaign.

RESOLVED that

the outcomes of the dog fouling campaign detailed in the report; the ongoing work on raising awareness; and enforcement action being taken to tackle dog fouling, be noted.

142. PERFORMANCE REPORT FOR THE SERVICES WITHIN THE CORPORATE MANAGEMENT PORTFOLIO

The Committee received a written report which detailed the performance of services within the remit of the Portfolio Holder for Corporate Management, Councillor Michael Braley. In response to the Chair emphasising that questions be based on the information contained in the report, Members requested that the following questions be addressed by the Portfolio Holder in his Annual Report to the Committee, which was scheduled to be delivered on 8th December 2010.

- 1) What is the current position in respect of sickness absence?
- 2) ICT Shared Services - how successful has Phase 1 been and how is Phase 2 proceeding?
- 3) What are the Options for the former Covered Market area?
- 4) What effect have the Shared Service arrangements for the Senior Management Team had on the lower levels of management at the Council?

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- 5) How can we improve Customer Services when the Council is beholden to the Worcestershire Hub which does not perform well and over which we have no control?
- 6) What has been done to sort out recent ICT and Phone system failures?
- 7) Please explain the “systems thinking” method introduced for 4th tier Managers.
- 8) What problems does he foresee in respect of services within his Portfolio and how will he deal with them?
- 9) How much has Bromsgrove District Council benefited from Shared Service arrangements?

RESOLVED that

- 1) **the Portfolio Holder for Corporate Management be invited to answer the questions detailed in the preamble above when delivering his Annual Report to the Committee; and**
- 2) **the report be noted.**

143. REFERRALS

There were no referrals.

144. WORK PROGRAMME

Members received an update on the programme for the forthcoming Budget Scrutiny Workshop on Monday 22nd November.

RESOLVED that

the Committee’s Work Programme be noted.

The Meeting commenced at 7.02 pm
and closed at 9.20 pm

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CHAIR