

Redditch Borough Council
Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Annual Report
2024 – 2025



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chair’s Foreword.....	3
The Role of Overview and Scrutiny.....	4
Membership	5
Activities and Outcomes in 2024-25.....	6
Crime and Disorder Scrutiny Panel.....	8
Working Groups	8
Task Groups Established by Overview and Scrutiny	9
External Scrutiny Bodies.....	11
Summary of Overview and Scrutiny Meetings	12
Conclusion	25
APPENDIX A – Task Group Investigation Scoping Document	26

Chair's Foreword

To be provided following discussion of this Annual Report at the Overview and Scrutiny meeting, and will be included for submission for the Council meeting on 24 February.

This annual report outlines the work undertaken by Redditch Borough Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee in the 2024 – 2025 municipal year.

The Role of Overview and Scrutiny

The role of overview and scrutiny is an important one in the Council's governance structure, providing challenge and driving improvement. It is often referred to as the "critical friend" of the Council and can review any issues of concern or interest to local residents.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee has a number of roles within the Council. These include:

- Holding the Executive Committee to account by scrutinising their decisions, either by:
 - 'calling-in' decisions after they have been made by the Executive Committee, requesting that the original decision is reviewed (only used in exceptional circumstances as there has to be a substantial legal/procedural reason before this procedure can be activated);
 - pre-scrutinising items prior to a decision being made on them by the Executive Committee.
- Acting as a 'critical friend' to the Executive Committee by reviewing Council policies and strategies, making recommendations where appropriate.
- Performance and financial monitoring, to ensure the Council's services are sustainable and delivered to the highest possible standard.
- Commissioning reviews of services/topics that impact on the Council or on the lives of Redditch residents.
- Setting up Task Groups to focus on specific subjects and recommend ways to improve existing practices within the Council and community as a whole.

The Council's scrutiny scoping form, which should be submitted before Overview and Scrutiny for their agreement prior to the Task Group being set up, can be found at Appendix A.

Membership

The Committee appoints individual Members at the Annual Council meeting to oversee the work of Overview and Scrutiny. Membership in 2024/25 is as follows:



Cllr Matthew Dormer (Chair)



Cllr Craig Warhurst (Vice-Chair)



Cllr William Boyd



Cllr Andrew Fry



Cllr Joanna Kane



Cllr Sachin Mathur



Cllr David Munro



Cllr Rita Rogers



Cllr Paul Wren
(from Nov 2024)



Cllr Claire Davies
(May – Oct 2024)

Activities and Outcomes in 2024-25

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee held a scrutiny training and work programme planning session at the start of the municipal year in June 2024. This session was held at the Oakenshaw Community Centre and provided an opportunity for both existing and new Members of the Committee to understand the importance of the scrutiny process and the function of the Committee. During the session, topics of interest were identified for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to consider throughout the 2024/25 municipal year. These 'overview' items were chosen based on what Members identified as concerns expressed by residents in the Borough.

These topics have been considered in various forms as part of the Committee's work programme. In addition, the Committee has scrutinised items from the Executive's Work Programme (pre-scrutiny items). Lastly, Overview and Scrutiny has been carrying out two task group investigations, into post-16 education in Redditch and fly tipping and bulky waste.

Live Streaming / Remote Meetings

Although all meetings of Overview and Scrutiny are held in person, there continues to be an option for officers to attend meetings remotely (on Microsoft Teams) to present reports to the Committee – this is dependent on agreement of the Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee on a case-by-case basis. The public can also request a link to attend meetings remotely. They can do this by contacting democratic (committee) services – contact information are provided on each agenda and are also available on the Council's website.

Meetings of Overview and Scrutiny continue to be live streamed where a significant local interest has been identified in the items on the meeting's agenda. Other meetings of Overview and Scrutiny are not live streamed. Meetings of scrutiny Task Groups and Working Groups continue to be held remotely; these meetings are private and not available to the public.

Recommendations submitted to the Executive Committee

Overview and Scrutiny Committee monitors the impact of all recommendations it makes to the Executive Committee. A summary of reports considered by Overview and Scrutiny and its sub-groups to date is given in the "[Summary of Overview and Scrutiny Meetings](#)" section.

Recommendations from Budget Scrutiny and Performance Scrutiny (details of these given in a section below) are also submitted to the Executive via Overview and Scrutiny Committee. This municipal year so far there had been three recommendations made to the Executive, of which one has been accepted, one accepted in part, and one rejected. These are shown in the relevant parts of the "[Summary of Overview and Scrutiny Meetings](#)" section.

Pre-Scrutiny of Executive Reports by Overview and Scrutiny Committee

To date in 2024-25, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee has pre-scrutinised the following Executive Committee items:

- Productivity Plans (8th July)
- Update Report on the Town Hall Hub (25th July)
- Award of a Contract to Upgrade the Town Hall and Update on Towns Fund (29th August)
- Shopmobility Future Options (2nd September)
- Contaminated Land Inspection Strategy (14th October)
- Carbon Reduction Strategy and Implementation Plan Annual Review (25th November)
- Independent Remuneration Panel Recommendations (13th January 2025)
- Damp and Mould Additional Resources (13th January)
- Food Waste Business Case and Associated Waste Related Issues (13th January)
- Housing Ombudsman's Findings Report (13th January)

Overview items considered by Overview and Scrutiny Committee

In addition to pre-scrutiny of the Executive Committee Work Programme items, the following 'overview' items of consideration have been considered at meetings of Overview and Scrutiny to date:

- Overview and Scrutiny Training Event – Consideration of Items Suitable for Scrutiny (8th July)
- Motion on Notice Concerning Acute Mental Health Services – Referral from Council (2nd September)
- Proposed Reconfiguration of Adult Mental Health Inpatient and Rehabilitation Services and Closure of Hillcrest Ward in Redditch (14th October)
- Health Inequalities – Review of Previous Discussions by Redditch Councillors (25th November)
- Redditch Borough Play Audit and Investment Strategy – Update Report (13th January 2025)

Portfolio Holders for the relevant reports are invited to each meeting of the Committee in order to answer questions and to feed back to the Executive Committee on the comments raised by the Overview and Scrutiny Members as well as any recommendations.

Crime and Disorder Scrutiny Panel

Membership: Councillor Craig Warhurst (Chair) and Councillors Claire Davies, Andy Fry, Joanna Kane, and Rita Rogers

Local authorities are required to have a committee designated with responsibility of reviewing and scrutinising the work of the local Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership. In Redditch this role is undertaken by the Crime and Disorder Scrutiny Panel, which is a permanent sub-committee of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The Panel is responsible for holding the North Worcestershire Community Safety Partnership (NWCSP) to account for its work in Redditch.

This year the Crime and Disorder Scrutiny Panel met on 3rd December 2024. At the meeting, Members received an update in respect of the work of the Partnership in the Borough. This included a report outlining the role of the NWCSP and its updated priorities from 2024 and an update on community safety programmes and schemes delivered by NWCSP from March to November 2024. Information was also provided in respect of tools and powers used to tackle Anti-Social Behaviour and the work undertaken by the Community Safety Team in order to carry out one of the priorities of the NWCSP.

Working Groups

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee has two permanent scrutiny working groups (sub-groups), the Budget Scrutiny Working Group, and the Performance Scrutiny Working Group.

Budget Scrutiny Working Group

Membership: Councillor Craig Warhurst (Chair) and Councillors Matthew Dormer, Chris Holz, Joanna Kane, and David Munro

The Budget Scrutiny Working Group has held 4 meetings so far in 2024-25 with 3 more meetings scheduled to take place. To date, the Group has pre-scrutinised the following finance and budget-related Executive reports:

- Combined Financial Outturn and Q4 Revenue Monitoring 2023-24 (5th July 2024)
- Q4 Performance Monitoring Report (5th July)
- Q1 Revenue and Performance Monitoring Report (30th August)
- Financial Recovery Programme Update (30th August)
- Q2 Revenue and Performance Monitoring 2024/25 (21st November)
- Medium Term Financial Plan – Tranche 1 Budget including Fees and Charges (prior to consultation) (21st November)
- Council Tax Base 2025-26 (9th January 2025)
- Final Council Tax Support Scheme 2025-26 (9th January)

- Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Rent Setting 2025-26 (9th January)
- Medium Term Financial Plan 2024-25 to 2026-27 – Tranche 1 (following consultation) (9th January)

The outcomes of discussions at Budget Scrutiny are relayed to Overview and Scrutiny Members through updates provided by the Chair of Budget Scrutiny at each meeting of Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Performance Scrutiny Working Group

Membership: Councillor Craig Warhurst (Chair) and Councillors Matthew Dormer, Chris Holz, Joanna Kane, and Rita Rogers

The Performance Scrutiny Working Group (a sub-group of Overview and Scrutiny looking at performance across council service areas) has held 4 meetings to date in the municipal year 2024/25. It looked at ‘overview’ topics chosen by Members of the Group to date in 2024/25, and has not looked at any Executive Committee reports. The topics discussed by the Group were:

- Demonstration of the Council’s Performance Measures Dashboard (16th July)
- Place Team operational update with focus on Upkeep of Verges (16th October)
- Place Team operational update with focus on Street Cleansing (18th December)
- Tree Team operational update with focus on Tree Management (8th January 2025)

The outcomes of discussions at Performance Scrutiny are relayed to Overview and Scrutiny Members through updates provided by the Chair of Budget Scrutiny at each meeting of Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Task Groups Established by Overview and Scrutiny

Task Groups are established by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in order to conduct an in-depth review of any service, policy or issue that affects the Borough. During the 2024-25 municipal year, one Task Group review has been launched and one review is due to be finalised by spring 2025.

Fly Tipping and Bulky Waste Task Group

Membership: Councillor Matthew Dormer (Chair), and Councillors William Boyd, Brandon Clayton, and Gary Slim

This Task Group review carried on from the 2023-24 municipal year. Among the main aims of the review, as stated in the Council motion of November 2022, is to consider the costs, consequences, and benefits of a pre-booked, free household bulky waste

collection service for those Redditch residents who are low paid, elderly, disabled or in receipt of benefits.

Before the commencement of this review in the 2023/24 municipal year, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee received a detailed presentation on fly tipping and bulky waste collections (2nd February 2023). The presentation enabled Members to better understand the Council's current position on these issues.

The first meeting of the Task Group took place on 24th October 2023. There were five meetings of the Task Group in 2023/24 with a further two meetings held over the current municipal year 2024/25 with the current members in place.

The Task Group is due to submit its final report to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in March 2025.

Post-16 Education Task Group

Membership: Councillor Craig Warhurst (Chair) and Councillors William Boyd, Matthew Dormer, Sachin Mathur, and Paul Wren

This Task Group was launched in October 2024 municipal year, with the aim of reviewing the range of post-16 education provision in Redditch, focusing on what vocational courses for post-16 learners are available in the Borough.

The Task Group has also decided to focus on how colleges, training providers and businesses in Redditch can work to ensure that post-16 courses can deliver better employability opportunities for people of Redditch and that skill-sets are developed through courses that match the needs of employers in the Redditch area.

The Group has met three times to date, holding discussions with stakeholders including the Herefordshire and Worcestershire Chamber of Commerce, the Local Enterprise Partnership, Worcestershire County Council, Heart of Worcestershire College and the West Midlands Combined Authority.

The Group is expected to submit its final report and recommendations in April 2025 or at the start of next municipal year.

Speeding and Road Safety Task Group

The Committee agreed to establish this Task Group at its meeting on 3rd February 2022. On 1st December 2022, the Committee agreed to prioritise the undertaking of Fly Tipping and Bulky Waste Task Group. Following the conclusion of that Task Group, the Committee will be asked to decide if this Task Group remains necessary.

Health Inequalities in Redditch

The Committee agreed to establish this Task Group at its meeting on 5th September 2022. At the meeting on 25th November 2024, the Committee agreed to receive a briefing note on the issue, produced in partnership with public health consultants at Worcestershire County Council, before deciding further on whether a review is necessary.

External Scrutiny Bodies

The Council's representatives on external scrutiny bodies have provided regular updates to Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the work undertaken by these regional bodies.

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

During the year Councillor Kane provided written and verbal updates on the work of this WMCA committee that were of relevance to Redditch. During those updates, the importance of WMCA as a regional partner for Redditch Borough Council (the Council was a non-constituent member) was underlined as well as the lessons that could be learned from WMCA in terms of applying best practice in areas such as public works. The WMCA was also highlighted as an example of devolution to regional areas that may be followed by two-tier county areas such as Worcestershire in the near future.

Worcestershire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC) – Council Representative, Councillor David Munro

The Committee had received regular updates from Councillor Munro about the work of the Worcestershire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC), highlighting matters pertinent to the Borough, for example relating to health inequalities and health provision facilities within Redditch. Some of the issues highlighted through the updates have been discussed as agenda items at separate agenda items at meetings of Overview and Scrutiny Committee, for example:

- Proposed reconfiguration of adult mental health inpatient and rehabilitation services and closure of Hillcrest ward in Redditch
- Health inequalities in Redditch and plans to address these inequalities in Redditch by Worcestershire County Council's Public Health through targeted initiatives.

The updates provided useful information of the scrutiny undertaken at the county and regional level that were of relevance to Redditch. The Committee was thankful for the time taken by Councillors Kane and Munro to prepare these updates.

SUMMARY OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MEETINGS

The section below provides a summary of the main items considered at each meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in 2024-25 to date. Further information on the agendas and minutes from these meetings can be found using the link below:

[Overview and Scrutiny Committee Meetings - 2024-2025](#)

8th July 2024

Productivity Plans – Pre-Decision Scrutiny

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.

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

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 at meetings of the Committee in the 2024-25 municipal year.

The following items were selected as suitable for scrutiny, either at meetings of Overview and Scrutiny, or in alternative formats (stated in brackets):

- Modelling financial implications of various decisions relating to Redditch Library
- Decarbonisation of the Council's Capital Programme (written update to be circulated to Members)
- Play and Parks Provision
- Review of Health Inequalities – revisiting previous discussions by Redditch Members
- Parking Enforcement – Management of Contract (Executive report on this to be pre-scrutinised when it becomes available)
- 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)
- Pension fund investments: strategies for divestment from carbon-intensive investments (Approach the Chairman of Pensions Investment Sub-Committee at Worcestershire County Council for a briefing paper on the current position)

During consideration of this item, a recommendation was proposed as follows:

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.

The Executive considered this recommendation at its meeting on 9th July 2024 (Minute No. 11 refers). The Executive had received legal advice from the Council's Principal Solicitor for Governance and the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) in respect of this recommendation. Following discussion of the advice that had been offered, the Executive Committee rejected the above recommendation.

25th July 2024

Update Report on the Town Hall Hub - Pre-Scrutiny

Members pre-scrutinised the report regarding the Town Hall redevelopment. It was noted with respect to progress on the Town Hall hub, that the NHS had taken a lease of and subsequently refurbished the ground and first floors to the west side of the Town Hall building which were to be used to deliver mental health services. The NHS had fully self-funded these works.

Following the local elections in May 2024, Officers had been asked to review options available for the community hub that would not involve moving the library into the building from its existing location in the town centre. Members were asked to note that if the library did not relocate into the community hub, the library's subtenant would also not be able to move into the building at this time.

Officers highlighted the proposals for the Town Hall in relation to the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP), and it was noted that in 2022/23 the Council had been anticipating £400,000 in budget savings arising from the move of the library into the community hub from 2025 onwards. The Council was already receiving some income from the NHS but there was also due to be a loss of income from Bromsgrove District Council as a result of a reduction in the use of office space at the Town Hall to accommodate staff working in shared services. Therefore, as a result of a decision to

not move the library and their subtenants into the Town Hall Hub, the Council would need to take action to address a £400,000 gap in the budget. The Council would also need to write off as revenue expenditure amounts that had already been spent on the existing design to allow the library and their subtenant to move into the building, which were presently capital in nature.

Discussions had been held with the former Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) about the options available to the Council moving forward in terms of using Town's Funding previously allocated to Redditch for the project. The Council had been advised about the following options if the Council were not to proceed with the library relocation:

- Invest the funding in the Digital Manufacturing and Innovation Centre (DMIC) with better Metrics.
- Invest in an alternative building that would give similar outputs to the library site.

The Council would also be required to complete a Project Adjustment Form, which would need to be agreed by the Towns Board and the MP for Redditch.

Members debated this item in detail. A motion was proposed to not endorse the recommendations as printed in the report based on there being too great a risk with the Town Hall hub programme if Redditch Library did not move into the community hub. In supporting this motion, it was commented that there were too many risks and uncertainties associated with the revised proposals for the Town Hall hub project, including the need to undertake detailed negotiations with the Towns Deal Board and the potential considerable funding gap.

On being put to the vote, the above motion was lost.

The motion proposed to endorse the recommendations as printed in the report was put to the vote and agreed.

29th August 2024

Award of a Contract to Upgrade the Town Hall and Update on Towns Fund – Pre-Scrutiny

The Committee was advised that, following the Executive Committee's decision to endorse the proposals detailed in the previous report on the subject of the Town Hall Hub, which had been considered in July 2024, Officers had completed a number of actions. This had included notifying Worcestershire County Council that the library would no longer be moving into the Town Hall Hub.

A significant portion of the Towns Funding that had been allocated to Redditch had been due to be allocated to the move of the library into the Town Hall. As this would no longer be happening, alternative potential uses of that funding needed to be considered. A number of options had been considered and use of a portion of the funds on public realm works had been identified as a potential suitable route forward. As part of this process, Members were asked to note that up to 20 per cent of the Towns Funding could be allocated to public realm works without the need for further Government approval.

Other options that had been suggested by the former Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) had been:

- To invest the £4.2 million funding in the Digital Manufacturing and Innovation Centre (DMIC).
- To invest in a building that would result in similar outputs to those that had been intended when the library had been due to move into the Town Hall Hub.

The Towns Board was in the process of considering the available options. Members were represented on this Board by Councillor Bill Hartnett. Consideration was being given to requesting an extension for use of the funding and the MP for Redditch was liaising with DLUHC in respect of this matter.

Following a detailed debate, Members considered and voted on each of the recommendations detailed in the report in turn. Whilst discussing these recommendations, an alteration was proposed to the wording of the fourth recommendation detailed in the report. This alteration was proposed as follows:

“Members continue to note and approve the consequential risks associated with the revised proposals detailed within the report, subject to more action being taken to mitigate those risks.”

On being put to the vote, the alteration was defeated.

The recommendations as printed in the report were then considered and on being put to the vote agreed.

2nd September 2024

Motion on Notice Concerning Acute Mental Health Services – Referral from Council

The following referral from Council to Overview and Scrutiny Committee was considered: "That the Council asks Herefordshire and Worcestershire Health and Care NHS Trust to reconsider the proposed closure of Hillcrest Ward in Redditch and the consequential transfer of all adult mental health inpatient treatment to the Elgar Unit at the Worcester Royal Acute Hospital site."

When this Motion was discussed at the Council meeting on 29th July 2024, the following was added to the start of the Motion:

"Council asks the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to scrutinise the proposals for Reconfiguration of Adult Mental Health Inpatient and Rehabilitation services."

At the invitation of the Chairman, Councillor Munro explained that he had proposed the Motion on Notice, following his attendance at the Worcestershire HOSC meeting held on 8th May 2024, whereby discussions as detailed in the preamble above had taken place.

Councillor Munro stated that questions needed to be asked as to what was happening / going to happen. Had the decision already been made to close Hill Crest Ward, which was another erosion of services in the Borough. The nearest adult mental health services would be in Worcester or Hereford. A recent Care Quality Commission (CQC) review of mental health services was quite damaging. The Council had no statutory powers to compel health bodies to attend meetings in order to provide evidence or to consider any recommendations the Council may make. However, questions needed to be asked and residents of Redditch needed to be reassured that the Council would be asking questions, as follows:-

- Suitability of the building. Were there structural issues with the building?
- Was only the secure acute inpatient services closing?
- Would outpatient services be retained at Hill Crest Ward?
- Would Community Mental Health Services continue?
- What acute adult mental health services would be provided for the residents of Redditch, who used or needed to access services?
- Were there staffing issues at Hill Crest Ward?
- How would future Adult Mental Health Inpatient and Rehabilitation Services look / be funded for Redditch?
- Where would the nearest secure facility be located for anyone sectioned under the Mental Health Act 1983?

Whilst Members acknowledged that service delivery and organisational arrangements for the NHS Acute Health Trusts were out of the Council's remit, Members agreed that questions should be asked; and that further information was needed. Members were

of the opinion that no real consultation had taken place and people should be held accountable for reducing / cutting services in the Borough without any consultation.

Members were in agreement that the quickest way to achieve answers would be to invite the Chair of Worcestershire HOSC and the relevant representative(s) from Hereford and Worcestershire Health and Care NHS Trust to a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee; with regards to questions being asked on the future of Adult Mental Health Inpatient and Rehabilitation Services for the Borough.

RESOLVED that

the Overview and Scrutiny Committee investigate the subject of the reconfiguration of Adult Mental Health Inpatient and Rehabilitation Services Redditch, and the closure of Hill Crest Ward, by inviting the Chairman of Worcestershire HOSC and the relevant representative from Hereford and Worcestershire Health and Care NHS Trust to attend a meeting with Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee; for the reasons as detailed in the preamble above.

Shopmobility Future Options – Pre-Scrutiny

The report was presented and the Committee was informed that the Redditch Shopmobility Service customer visits had declined since Covid-19 and had never fully returned to the 15,000 customer visits each year that the service used to have; the customer visits now were approximately 3,000 per year.

Members' attention was drawn to the 5 possible future operating models for the service, that Officers had considered; with a 6th option of no longer providing the service, as detailed on pages 8 and 9 of the additional papers 1 agenda pack. The Vice-Chair commented that the opportunity to move the control of the service to Kingfisher Shopping Centre had been considered quite a while ago, why was this not Option 1 now?

The Assistant Director Community and Housing Services referred to Option 4 – The service was to transition to Kingfisher Shopping Centre and the one-off cost implications, of £54,000, to transfer the service. To move the service to a retail unit provided the opportunity to promote and expand the service. The other risk associated would be that the Council would lose control of the service and that Kingfisher Shopping Centre could decide that they did not want the service. The Vice-Chair queried as to where was the public consultation, and that only 83 people had completed the survey, which was not deemed to be a public consultation. With regards to the survey, 69% of respondents said maybe or no, when asked 'If the location of Redditch Shopmobility was to move to be within the Kingfisher Centre, would this help make the service more accessible?'.

Members referred to the cost implications, as detailed in the report, of moving the service to a retail unit within the Kingfisher Shopping Centre, as follows: -

- The first-year cost of improving the facility and service cost would be approximately £125,000.
- The future annual cost to the Council would be approximately £107,000.

In comparison the report showed that Kingfisher Shopping Centre would require the Council to purchase 5 new scooters, this would equate to a one-off cost to the Council of £54,000 if the service were to transition to Kingfisher Shopping Centre; as detailed in Option 4 (page 9 of the additional papers 1 agenda pack).

Following a debate the Vice-Chair proposed an Alternative Recommendation in that Members considered Option 4 - The service was to transition to Kingfisher Shopping Centre; this was seconded by the Chair.

On being put to the vote, the Alternative Recommendation was lost.

The recommendations as printed in the report were then considered and on being put to the vote it was agreed that Option 3 – To move to a site within the Kingfishere Retail Unit – 9 George Walk – be recommended to the Executive. It was therefore recommended that:

- 1) Redditch Borough Council provide the Shopmobility service from a rented retail unit within the Kingfisher Centre as set out as Option 3 in the report; and
- 2) The caveats / conditions as detailed in the preamble above, be included.
- 3) The additional costs of £46,835 the Shopmobility Service in 2024/25 are met from balances; and
- 4) The ongoing position be integrated with the Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) 2025/26 process to reflect the additional ongoing costs of £28,835 thereafter.

At the meeting of Executive Committee, on 3rd September 2024, these recommendations were accepted (Minute No. 33 refers).

14th October 2024

Contaminated Land Inspection Strategy – Pre-Scrutiny

It was noted, however, that the Redditch Borough review was the first area to undertake such a review due to the number of contaminated land sites within the Borough.

During the presentation of the report the following was highlighted:

- Part 2A of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 placed a duty on local authorities to review and assess risks through the contaminated land regime. On occasions, local authorities could cause their area to be inspected in order to ensure that this regime was being adhered to. The term 'Contaminated Land' covered a range of sites including petrol stations, factories, depots and launderettes. The presence of a harmful substance did not mean that land would meet the definition of "contaminated land". However, it was reported that a very high bar must be met in order to deem it as not contaminated.
- Statutory guidance stated that action under contaminated land legislation should only be used when there was no other appropriate alternative. These included the planning and development control processes, as well as voluntary action taken by landowners to minimise the unnecessary burdens placed on taxpayers, businesses, and individuals.
- The new strategy had been amended in order to reflect the gradual reduction and withdrawal of central Government funding for Local Authority contaminated land work. It also outlined the inspection process, and the methodology applied.
- The strategy did not change the statutory responsibilities, and local authorities still had to adhere to the current statutory guidance.
- There were nine thousand three hundred contaminated land sites across Worcestershire and seven hundred and fifty of these were located in Redditch. This would necessitate a large number of inspections and investigations being carried out.

The recommendations as submitted in the report to Executive were endorsed.

Proposed Reconfiguration of Adult Mental Health Inpatient and Rehabilitation Services and Closure of Hillcrest Ward in Redditch

Following on from the resolution agreed at the 2nd of September 2024 meeting, the Chairman of Worcestershire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC) and the representative from Herefordshire and Worcestershire Health and Care NHS Trust (H&W NHS Trust) have attended the meeting for this item to discuss the subject of the reconfiguration of Adult Mental Health Inpatient and Rehabilitation Services, Redditch, and the closure of Hill Crest Ward.

The HOSC Chairman explained that the Worcestershire County Council's Health Overview and Scrutiny (HOSC) was the only committee within Worcestershire which the different NHS organisations were required by law to consult when any changes to health services were planned. HOSC could request the relevant health professionals to attend its meetings to explain the change of service. It was reported that in relation to the topics of the reconfiguration of Adult Mental Health Inpatient and Rehabilitation Services, Redditch, and the closure of Hill Crest Ward, health professionals have appeared before HOSC on a number of occasions.

It was noted that the Hill Crest Mental Health ward was for acute care designed to admit people experiencing mental health difficulties, including patients detained under the Mental Health Act, for a period not exceeding one month.

The Trust's Director of Nursing provided background information into the situation at Hill Crest ward. The Trust's Director Strategy and Partnerships explained that in light of inherent building and staffing layout challenges at Hill Crest, it was proposed to relocate the acute mental health unit to a vacant Athlon Ward located on Elgar Unit on the Worcestershire Royal Hospital site. This was deemed the most effective and safest option as the Athlon ward was well designed and able to be adapted to most modern standards. The remaining acute mental health beds in Worcestershire were also located at the Worcestershire Royal Hospital site, and the Athlon ward was located next to a psychiatric intensive care unit, which provided additional back-up staff support when required.

It was highlighted that acute mental health provision at Hill Crest was a county-wide service and there were people from across the county accessing Hill Crest the unit. From October 2023 to the end of September 2024, 144 individuals had been admitted to the Hill Crest ward, of which 39 were Worcester residents at the time of admission, 24 from Redditch Borough, and 14 from Herefordshire. It was reiterated that the advantages of putting all beds into one campus area were that of safety and the ability to respond to emergency situations. It was highlighted that local mental health provision remained unaffected as a result of this change. Community, children and adolescent mental health provision would remain in Redditch, with mental health crisis team operating from the Town Hall.

Following a detailed debate of this item by Members, the Committee thanked the NHS officers for attending the meeting and asked that an update be provided on the repurposing of the space vacated at Hill Crest when this became available.

Post-16 Education Task Group

The Terms of Reference for this Task Group were agreed by the Committee.

25th November 2024

Carbon Reduction Strategy and Implementation Plan Annual Review – Pre-Scrutiny

The Carbon Reduction Strategy was introduced two years' previously. At the time the strategy was introduced, Members had agreed that progress should be monitored on an annual basis and that a new strategy should be presented every three years. The new strategy was due to be introduced in 2025-26.

During the presentation, the recent actions and updates from the review of the Carbon Reduction Implementation Plan were covered in detail with information highlighted including on the use of low carbon fuels (HVO) by the Council's fleet, works to improve the energy efficiency of Council's housing stock, and works on introducing electric vehicle charging points in the Borough.

Members then held a discussion around matters such as helping businesses across the Borough adopt cleaner technologies, recycling rates, and locations and timescales for installation of electric charging stations across the Borough.

The recommendation as contained in the report to the Executive was endorsed by the Committee.

Health Inequalities – Review of Previous Discussions by Redditch Councillors

A report on the previous decisions of Overview and Scrutiny with respect to Health Inequalities Task Group was presented to Members.

During discussion, the Council's Representative on the Worcestershire County Council's Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC) reported that the County Council's Public Health was investigating the possibility of delivering intensive small area community development in areas (LSOAs) suffering from high health inequality, including those in Redditch. This would begin with exploration of key causes of poor health outcomes in those areas and would involve work with a number of agencies.

Some Members highlighted that the County Council was responsible for public health budget, and Borough Councillors ultimately had no decision-making role in how that budget was spent. The role of Borough Councillors was therefore to raise and highlight specific concerns that required funding intervention to the County Council. It was noted that there was a role of Borough Councillors in terms of advising the County Council's Public Health team about local groups in each of those areas and how any funding that might become available for health interventions may best be spent in those areas. A concern was raised in this regard by some Members about potential inequalities in funding provided by the County Council to Redditch, as compared with other parts of the county.

Overview and Scrutiny resolved that a briefing note on health inequalities in Redditch be provided, following consultation with Worcestershire County Council's Public Health team.

13th January 2025

Independent Remuneration Panel Recommendations – Pre-Scrutiny

The Independent Remuneration Panel (IRP) report in respect of recommendations for Members' allowances for 2025-26 was presented. It was noted that the Council was required to consider the recommendations of the Panel, however, it was not obliged to agree with them. The Council could choose to implement the Panel's recommendations in full or in part, or not to accept them. It was noted that the IRP had recommended a basic allowance of £5,826 which represented a 5.58 per cent increase from its recommendation last year. However, since the Council did not accept last year's IRP recommendation concerning the basic allowance, the current proposal to the basic allowance would represent a 19.6 per cent increase, if approved.

During Members' discussion, it was noted that over the past 6-7 years there were some years when the Council had chosen not to increase the basic allowance in line with IRPs recommendation. And this year, as the IRP recommendation was not accepted last year, the percentage gap between the level of basic allowance set and the IRP recommendation for the next year had become larger.

During consideration of the item, a recommendation was proposed in respect of this item to the effect that the basic allowance and Special Responsibility Allowances (SRAs) should be increased approximately in line with the rate of inflation at the time of the Council making a decision on this matter for 2025-26. On being put to the vote, this recommendation was carried and it was:

RECOMMENDED that the basic allowance and the special responsibility allowances (SRAs) should be increased by approximately the rate of inflation.

The Executive Committee considered this recommendation at its meeting on 14th January 2025 and following consideration accepted in part the recommendation of the Overview and Scrutiny in that it recommended to Council that the current Basic Allowance should be increased by 2.9% for 2025-26 (approximately in line with inflation), whilst deciding to recommend that there should be no change to the current Special Responsibility Allowances in 2025-26.

The final decision on this matter is due to be made by full Council at its meeting on 27th January 2025 (after this Annual Report has been published).

Damp and Mould Additional Resources – Pre-Scrutiny

The report was presented in respect of the additional resources proposed for the Council to deal with damp and mould issues in its capacity as a social housing provider.

The Council's Housing Property Services had made significant efforts to minimise the problem of damp and mould in council homes over the last few years acting with the

limited resources available. However, in light of the new legislation, the Council did not have sufficient resources to further improve its delivery of repair services and ensure action was compliant with the appropriate timescales set out in legislation. Accordingly, the report proposed that a dedicated “Damp and Mould” team be established to address the prevalent issue of mould and dampness in council homes and to ensure that the council could meet the challenging timescales to investigate and remedy issues that had been set out in Awaab’s Law.

The recommendations as contained in the Executive report submitted were endorsed. It was recommended that the contents of the Damp and Mould Business Case be approved and the Damp and Mould team be established. It was further recommended to Executive that they recommend to Council that £115,770 be released from the HRA budget for the financial year 2024/25 to cover the costs of the new team and that thereafter the costs summarized at paragraph 4.3 of the report of £463,078 be met from the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) budget.

Redditch Borough Play Audit and Investment Strategy Update Report

An update on progress in implementing the play audit and investment strategy proposals was provided to the Committee. Members were informed that the Play Audit and Investment Strategy was adopted on 9th January 2024, following consideration by both the Overview and Scrutiny and Executive Committees.

The play area locations where repair and refurbishment works were due to be carried out in 2025 and 2026 were outlined, as well as play area that was earmarked for creation and those that were marked for removal. It was highlighted that for areas where these actions were proposed, consultation with ward members and local community was scheduled. It was noted that decisions about locations of play areas and their ongoing suitability were carried out based on Redditch Play Accessibility Model, which considered accessibility (walking distance, safety of access) of play provision at local and neighbourhood levels across the Borough. It also took account the health deprivation and factors in locations across the Borough when considering decisions about play areas in the Borough.

The update was noted by the Committee.

Food Waste Business Case and Associated Waste Related Issues – Pre-Scrutiny

The report concerning the introduction of a food waste collection service was presented. It was noted that the Government had set a new statutory duty under the Environment Act 2021 to introduce a dedicated separate weekly collection of food waste from all households by 31st March 2026.

A range of options was outlined for Members based on the issues encountered when dealing with introduction of the food waste service in the Borough. Taking into account

existing pressures and uncertainties, Officers were proposing that the Council should procure the food waste collection service through a private sector company (for a period of 8 years). Ideally, the Council would have aimed to deliver the service inhouse, but this was not considered to be feasible at this stage. The proposal was to procure the service for a period of up to eight years.

To maximise interest in this opportunity within the private sector, Redditch Borough Council would aim to procure this service jointly with Bromsgrove District Council and Wyre Forest District Council. There was no guarantee that the procurement exercise would be successful. However, if the procurement process was unsuccessful, the Council could report back to the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) highlighting the issues that had been experienced and a request could then be submitted to extend the deadline for the introduction of the service in the Borough.

The recommendations as set out in the Executive report were endorsed by Overview and Scrutiny for onward recommendation to the Executive Committee.

Housing Ombudsman's Findings Report – Pre-Scrutiny

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee were asked to note the findings, orders and recommendations from the Housing Ombudsman, relating to severe maladministration in the Council's response to damp and mould and reports of a ticking noise and regarding maladministration in the Council's response to repairs and complaint handling. It was noted that the orders and recommended actions had been completed and the case was closed by the Housing Ombudsman on 13th November 2024.

The Officers present provided sincere apology on behalf of the Council for the circumstances and the failings in this case. It was noted that the Council had reviewed causes of the failing in this case and was taking actions to improve matters. An apology and a compensation had been provided to the affected resident in line with the Housing Ombudsman's decision. Following this review and the Ombudsman's orders and recommendations to the Council, the Council had been taking a number of actions to ensure improvement in its handling of customer enquiries and complaints, which were highlighted at the meeting. The Committee noted the report.

Remaining Meetings in 2024/25

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee is due to hold a further three meetings in 2024-25 on the 3rd of February 2025, 18th of February 2025, and the 17th of March 2025. At these meetings, the Committee will consider the remaining items on its work programme:

- Consideration of recommendations arising from Budget Scrutiny Working Group in relation to the Medium Terms Financial Plan
- Redditch Partnership Annual Update
- Report on Health Inequalities in specific wards in Redditch (TBC)

Overview and Scrutiny may also consider further items from the Executive Committee's work programme, subject to Members' selecting further Executive reports for pre-scrutiny at future meetings of the Committee.

CONCLUSION

This year the Committee has carried out detailed scrutiny of issues of high relevance to the Borough, including on such topics as the closure of the Hillcrest mental health ward. The Committee has pre-scrutinised a number of Executive reports of interest and where necessary made recommendations and comments for consideration by the Executive. In addition, there are two ongoing task groups undertaking investigations into post-16 education in Redditch and fly tipping and bulky waste. There are two permanent working groups of Overview and Scrutiny looking at the Council's budget and finance issues (Budget Scrutiny) and issues relating to Council's performance in carrying out its functions (Performance Scrutiny). Further work, including final reports of the two task groups, are expected to be published over the last quarter of 2024-25 municipal year.

The Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee expresses his thanks to all Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, recognising in particular the valuable contribution made by Members through Task Group investigations and on the Budget and Performance Scrutiny Working Groups.

For any background information on the work of Overview and Scrutiny Committee in Redditch, please visit <https://www.redditchbc.gov.uk/council/the-council.aspx>

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APPENDIX A – Task Group Investigation Proposal Scoping Document

(This form should be completed by sponsoring Member(s), Officers and / or members of the public when proposing an item for Scrutiny).

Note: The matters detailed below have not yet received any detailed consideration. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee reserves the right to reject suggestions for scrutiny that fall outside the Borough Council’s remit.

Proposer’s name and designation		Date of referral	
Proposed topic title			
Link to local priorities including the strategic purposes			
Background to the issue			
Key Objectives Please keep to SMART objectives (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Timely)			
How long do you think is needed to complete this exercise? (Where possible please estimate the number of weeks, months and meetings required)			

Please return this form to: Democratic Services, Redditch Borough Council, Town Hall, Walter Stranz Square, Redditch, B98 8AH

Email: democratic@bromsgroveandredditch.gov.uk