

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Wednesday, 8th December, 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:

Michael Braley, Andrew Brazier, Roger Hill and Derek Taylor

Officers:

H Bennett, T Kristunas, S Skinner and A de Warr

Committee Services Officer:

J Bayley and M Craggs

145. APOLOGIES AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES

There were no apologies or named substitutes.

146. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND OF PARTY WHIP

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

147. MINUTES

The minutes of the last meeting were agreed as an accurate record.

148. ACTIONS LIST

Members considered the latest version of the Committee's Actions List. Officers advised Members that all the actions had either already been completed or were due to be completed during the course of the meeting.

RESOLVED that

the Committee's Actions List be noted.

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Chair

149. CALL-IN AND SCRUTINY OF THE FORWARD PLAN

Members were advised that, as detailed in the Decision Notice of 2nd December 2010, all of the Committee's recommendations regarding the Council's Grants Policy had been accepted by the Executive.

Members were referred to the Forward Plan and were advised that the proposed item on North Worcestershire Economic Development and Regeneration Service would be received beforehand at a meeting of the Shared Services Board.

There were no call-ins and no items were selected for pre-scrutiny.

150. TASK & FINISH REVIEWS - DRAFT SCOPING DOCUMENTS

There were no draft scoping documents for consideration.

151. TASK AND FINISH GROUPS - PROGRESS REPORTS

Members considered the following reports in relation to current reviews:

- 1) External Refurbishment of Housing Stock – Chair, Councillor Graham Vickery

Members were advised that this review was to be considered under item 9 on the agenda.

- 2) Joint Worcestershire Hub – Redditch Borough Council representative, Councillor Roger Hill

Members were advised that this review was to be considered under item 8 on the agenda.

- 3) Work Experience Opportunities – Chair, Councillor Peter Anderson

The Chair of the review, Councillor Peter Anderson, informed Members that he had met to discuss work experience opportunities for young people with an Officer from the local Connexions office. A more detailed update would be provided at the following meeting.

- 4) Promoting Redditch

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The Chair of the review, Councillor Graham Vickery, informed Members that the Group had held a number of meetings and were making significant progress in terms of collecting both written and verbal evidence on which to base their final report. The evidence contained both positive and negative perceptions of the Borough. The Group had received a tutorial on social networking sites and how these were increasingly useful tools in terms of communicating with local residents.

The Chair advised Members that the Group was on course to complete their review by March as required and he praised the hard work of the Officers involved.

RESOLVED that

the update reports be noted.

152. JOINT WORCESTERSHIRE HUB TASK AND FINISH GROUP REPORT

Members received the final Joint Worcestershire Hub Task and Finish Group Report for consideration. The co-opted member from Redditch Borough Council on the review, Councillor Roger Hill, provided a verbal summary of the report and referred to the Group's recommendations. Members were also referred to the response of the County Council Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Corporate Services to the report and were informed that the Task Group had also taken on-board the recommendations of the Redditch Overview and Scrutiny Committee that had been proposed in September 2010.

Members expressed some disappointment with the review. There were concerns about the approach that had been adopted to joint scrutiny for this review, the number of recommendations that had been proposed and the potential difficulties involved in monitoring implementation of any approved actions due to the number of recommendations. However they endorsed the presentation of the Group's report and recommendations for the consideration of the Executive Committee.

Councillor Braley informed Members that he would address the Committee's concerns regarding the Hub at a forthcoming meeting with Councillor Adrian Hardman, Leader of Worcestershire County Council.

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- 1) the 22 recommendations contained within the Joint Worcestershire Hub Scrutiny Task Group's final report be noted and presented for the consideration of the Executive Committee;
- 2) a letter be sent to Worcestershire County Council outlining the Committee's concerns with the Hub and the approach that had been adopted to the Joint Scrutiny Review; and
- 3) the Chair raise the Committee's concerns regarding both the Hub and the approach to the joint scrutiny review at the following Joint Scrutiny Chairs' and Vice Chairs' Network meeting.

153. EXTERNAL REFURBISHMENT OF HOUSING STOCK

The Chair of the review, Councillor Graham Vickery, referred Members to the updated details contained within the report. This included the provision of information regarding the pebbledash façade on houses on Ombersley Close and Rushock Close; road surfaces on Rushock Close; and garages in Wishaw Close.

It was suggested that the proposed re-painting of the pebbledash façade on houses on Ombersley Close and Rushock Close could be made available to owner occupiers as well as Council tenants.

RECOMMENDED that the following additional recommendations be incorporated into the report for presentation to the Executive Committee on 12th January 2011:

- 1) Worcestershire County Council Highways Officers be contacted to require them to repair the road surface entrance to Rushock Close;
- 2) the Portfolio Holder for Housing, the Local Environment and Health be urged to consider the abolition of the garages in Wishaw Close as a priority case due to their bad state of repair; and
- 3) consultation be undertaken with Council tenants and owner occupiers to find out whether they would support repainting of the pebbledash properties on Ombersley Close and Rushock Close using lighter colours and if so what colours; and

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RESOLVED that

- 1) the recommendations previously agreed at a meeting of the Committee on 17th November 2010 be noted;
- 2) the updated details contained within the report in paragraphs 4.7.5; 4.11 - 4.13.2; 19.2; and Appendix 3 be noted; and
- 3) the report be noted.

154. PORTFOLIO HOLDER ANNUAL REPORT - PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR CORPORATE MANAGEMENT

Councillor Michael Braley provided Members with responses to the Committee's list of questions that had been agreed at the previous meeting of the Committee, as detailed below:

1) What is the current role in respect of sickness absence?

Councillor Braley advised that the Council was currently within its sickness absence target for the year of 9.02 days, although it was acknowledged that the sickness absence level might rise during the winter period. He commented that although the Council's absence record was better than average for a local authority, it was worse compared to that of other district councils. He also commented that, with regards to sickness absence rates, the public sector had performed poorly historically compared to the private sector.

The 'return to work' interview process was identified as a useful method to lower sickness absence rates.

2) ICT Shared Services – how successful has Phase 1 been and how is Phase 2 proceeding?

Councillor Braley advised that Phase 1 of the ICT shared services programme had been delivered successfully. Delivery of Phase 2 of the project was dependent on the approval of budget bids that had been submitted as part of the budget setting process. Councillor Braley commented that it was essential to have contingency funds in place to deal with any significant IT issues that might emerge during the course of the year.

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Members raised concern that a number of IT problems did not appear to have been resolved. However, Officers responded that the Shared Services project had uncovered rather than caused a number of existing IT problems and these were being addressed

3) What are the options for the former covered market area?

Councillor Braley advised that Officers were considering a number of short-term options. This included letting out the area to local business for car parking. Emphasis was being placed on ensuring that short-term options would not negatively affect the long-term plans included within the Council's Town Centre Strategy which focused on creating an area with a community focus.

4) What effect have the Shared Services arrangements for the Senior Management Team had on the lower levels of management at the Council?

Councillor Braley advised that the transition to Shared Services had proceeded relatively smoothly. It was acknowledged, however, that the move to Shared Services had created a testing working environment for some staff.

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?

Councillor Braley advised that an action plan drawn up by the Head of Customer Services to improve the performance of the Hub had begun to take effect. He added that Redditch Borough Council was able to feed in any concerns regarding the Hub to the County based Hub Strategic Management Group.

Members were informed that reducing call queues was a priority for Worcestershire County Council and Redditch Borough Council to help improve the overall quality of service. Managing resources to meet public demand and improving the efficiency of responses to enquiries were seen as essential to achieving this.

6) What has been done to sort out recent ICT and phone system failures?

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Councillor Braley advised of the measures taken to rectify recent ICT and phone system failures and to prevent these failures from re-occurring. In particular, the Committee were informed that additional heat and humidity sensors had been installed in the Town Hall's server room to alert ICT to any re-occurrence of overheating.

The Committee was also informed that a budget bid had been submitted for the implementation of a new Council phone system to remove current phone issues. Councillor Braley stressed the importance of having contingency plans in place to help rectify future problems as they arose.

7) Please explain the “systems thinking” method introduced for fourth tier managers.

Councillor Braley explained that the “systems thinking” method was a change management method that looked at how all parts of the organisation influenced one another. Central to the method was an emphasis on improving value for the Council's customers.

8) What problems does he foresee in respect of services within his Portfolio and how will he deal with them?

Councillor Braley suggested that managing the financial risk associated with the grant settlement represented a considerable challenge for the Council. Other significant challenges identified included: managing additional benefit claims in the Borough following an increase in unemployment; monitoring the Worcestershire Enhanced Two-Tier (WETT) shared services to ensure they were delivered in line with the Business Case; implementing new ways of working to address the reduced government grant; and eliminating existing ICT issues.

9) How much has Bromsgrove District Council benefited from Shared Services arrangements?

Councillor Braley advised that the shared service arrangement had delivered £450,000 of savings to Bromsgrove District Council and £514,000 to Redditch Borough Council. He added that the arrangements promised to deliver further substantial savings to both Councils in the long-term.

On behalf of the Committee, the Chair thanked Councillor Braley for his annual report.

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RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

155. QUARTERLY BUDGET MONITORING REPORT - SECOND QUARTER - APRIL TO SEPTEMBER 2010

The Committee received the budget report for the second quarter of 2010/11.

RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

156. QUARTERLY PERFORMANCE MONITORING - QUARTER 2 - APRIL TO SEPTEMBER 2010

Members received the performance monitoring report for the second quarter 2010/11.

Officers explained that over half of the total number of National Indicators (NIs) had shown improvement compared to the same period for the previous year. It was understood that a new set of indicators were to be introduced in the New Year which would allow further opportunity for scrutiny.

Members were supportive of the Council's performance although concern was raised with the decline of the Council's recycling figures.

RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

157. FEEDBACK FROM THE BUDGET SCRUTINY WORKSHOP

The Committee received a summary of feedback provided by Members and Officers on the Budget Scrutiny Workshop held on 22nd November 2010. Members were informed that the feedback received was largely constructive, with the following suggestions given for improving the workshop should it be held in future years:

- (a) the workshop represented an improvement on budget scrutiny in previous years and would be worth revisiting in the future;

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- (b) the workshop was held too early and if a similar event occurs in future it should be held once more detailed information about budget proposals are available;
- (c) the workshop provided a useful opportunity to challenge senior Officers in a constructive manner;
- (d) pre-set questions should not be required in future years;
- (e) the answers provided by Officers during the speed dating sessions should be recorded (consideration would need to be given as to how to record this information and share the ideas discussed during the speed dating sessions);
- (f) the use of a presentation to start the workshop was considered to be a useful introduction; and
- (g) more time should be provided to allow Members to speak to Officers during the speed dating sessions.

RESOLVED that

the points raised regarding the budget scrutiny workshop be noted.

158. PERFORMANCE REPORT FOR THE SERVICES WITHIN THE COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP AND PARTNERSHIPS PORTFOLIO

The Committee received a written report which detailed the performance of services within the remit of the Portfolio Holder for Community Leadership and Partnership, Councillor Carole Gandy. On the basis of the information contained within the report Members requested that the following questions be addressed by the Portfolio Holder in her Annual Report to the Committee, which was scheduled to be delivered on 9th February 2011.

- 1) What did the Educational Attainment Conference achieve? What further action is planned on this by the Council?
- 2) Please clarify what further information will be coming through about tackling Health Inequalities in Redditch?
- 3) What changes to the lives of Redditch people has been achieved by identifying red flag issues?
- 4) What problems do you foresee for the future in relation to the areas for which you have Portfolio Holder responsibility?

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- 5) How have partnerships:
 - (a) improved the delivery of services to Redditch?
 - (b) enhanced the accountability of Officers and Councillors?
- 6) Do you feel that Shopping, Investing and Giving (SIG) has been effectively implemented?
- 7) Are we gathering any evidence from the roadshows? What added value has been achieved by holding the roadshows?

RESOLVED that

- 1) **the Portfolio Holder for Community Leadership and Partnership be invited to answer the questions detailed in the preamble above when delivering her Annual Report before the Committee; and**
- 2) **the report be noted.**

159. REVIEW INTO PUBLIC SPEAKING AT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MEETINGS

Members received a written report which summarised research into the public engagement arrangements at a number of other local authorities across the nation.

Members felt that the Committee already possessed sufficient arrangements for engaging the public in its scrutiny process and that the necessary public guidance was readily accessible on the Council's website. Despite the absence of a formal process for public speaking at meetings of the Committee, Members were satisfied that the Chair could exercise her discretion to allow public speaking at meetings as set out in the Constitution.

It was suggested that the Committee could consider occasionally holding meetings in Council premises away from the Town Hall in order to engage further with the community.

RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

160. FEEDBACK FROM THE WORCESTERSHIRE SCRUTINY CHAIRS AND VICE CHAIRS NETWORK MEETING

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The Chair gave a summary of the Worcestershire Scrutiny Chairs and Vice Chairs Network meeting held on 29th November 2010 in Redditch. In particular, Members heard that no items had been selected for joint scrutiny, and that the possibility of establishing a shared services scrutiny board had been declined. The next meeting was due to be held in Malvern Hills in early March 2011.

Members questioned the need for the Network's continuation. It was felt that the three meetings held so far had failed to yield any significant outcomes. However, Members expressed support for undertaking joint scrutiny on an ad hoc basis as and when required.

Officers informed Members that the draft Joint Scrutiny Protocol would be received for consideration at the next Committee meeting on 19th January 2011.

RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

161. REFERRALS

There were no referrals.

162. WORK PROGRAMME

Officers informed Members that the Sustainable Communities Strategy was scheduled to be received for consideration at the Committee meeting on 2nd March 2011.

Officers advised Members that they had the capacity to commission further Task and Finish reviews. Furthermore, it was argued that the recent short-sharp review into the external refurbishment of housing stock demonstrated the value of undertaking more short-sharp reviews as part of the scrutiny process.

RESOLVED that

the Committee's Work Programme be noted.