

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Wednesday, 9th February,
2011

MINUTES

Present:

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

Also Present:

Councillors Carole Gandy and Andrew Brazier

Officers:

Hugh Bennett, Matthew Bough, Elise Hopkins, Jayne Pickering, and Deborah Poole

Committee Services Officers:

Jess Bayley and Michael Craggs

176. APOLOGIES AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES

There were no apologies or named substitutes.

177. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND OF PARTY WHIP

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

178. MINUTES

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting of the Committee on 19th January 2011 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

179. 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.

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Chair

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Members heard that the Chair had received a written response from Ms Trish Haines, Chief Executive, Worcestershire County Council, in reply to the Chair's letter of 13th January 2011, outlining the Committee's concerns with the Joint Worcestershire Hub Scrutiny Review. The letter acknowledged the Committee's concerns regarding the number of recommendations within the report, although it was argued that the number of recommendations was relative to the size and scope of the review.

RESOLVED that

- 1) Officers circulate a copy of the letter from Ms Trish Haines amongst members of the Committee; and**
- 2) the Committee's Actions List be noted.**

180. CALL-IN AND SCRUTINY OF THE FORWARD PLAN

There were no call-ins and no items were identified on the Council's Forward Plan as suitable for further scrutiny.

181. TASK & FINISH REVIEWS - DRAFT SCOPING DOCUMENTS

Members were informed that a draft scoping document would be received for consideration under the Referrals item.

182. TASK AND FINISH GROUPS - PROGRESS REPORTS

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

- a) Promoting Redditch – Chair, Councillor Graham Vickery

The Chair informed the Committee that the review was nearing completion. No further evidence was being collected and the final report was in the process of being drafted. It was fully expected that the Group would meet its deadline and submit its final report for consideration at the Committee meeting on 2nd March 2011.

The Committee heard the report would be wide ranging and comprehensive following a thorough evidence collection process. The Group had met with a range of expert witnesses and had considered written evidence.

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

The Chair informed the Committee that the Group had recently met with Forward Consortium, a consortium of secondary schools and colleges in North East Worcestershire that provides students with the opportunity to achieve a Diploma Certificate, involving a mixed element of academic and vocational learning. Work experience was an important component of the Diploma.

The Group had discovered that there was uncertainty regarding the ongoing role of Forward Consortium and other local organisations that facilitated work experience opportunities. The Chair suggested that the significance of this was increased by the fact that legislation would soon require children to remain in education beyond the current minimum age of 16. School children would continue to need to be provided with vocational learning opportunities, including work experience placements.

The Committee was further informed that the Group was due to consult with local schools and colleges regarding work experience opportunities and to discuss how these could be increased.

RESOLVED that

the update reports be noted.

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

The Chair of Crime and Disorder Scrutiny Panel provided a summary of his written report which detailed the Panel's most recent meeting held on 20th January 2011.

The Chair referred the Committee to a formatting error within the report that misrepresented a comment regarding the effect of changes to the licensing law to mistakenly state that the new licensing laws *had* produced the expected outcomes expected that were hoped for, that of reduced alcohol consumption, sensible drinking and the café culture. Officers agreed to amend the report as necessary.

The Committee queried whether the Alexandra Hospital's policy of admitting intoxicated under age alcohol users was consistent with the policies of other hospitals. Concerns had been raised that this policy might have created a misconception of the town's drinking culture when compared to that of other areas. The Chair of the Panel undertook to contact relevant authorities to ascertain whether the hospital's policy was rare or common practice. The Chair did

suggest, however, that it was useful to have a clear picture of the town's drinking patterns in order to provide appropriate support for those in need.

RESOLVED that:

- 1) **the Chair of the Crime and Disorder Scrutiny Panel write to both Worcestershire County Council and the relevant Government Minister to clarify the alcohol related admissions practices at hospitals outside Redditch; and**
- 2) **the report be noted**

184. PORTFOLIO HOLDER ANNUAL REPORT - COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP AND PARTNERSHIPS

Councillor Carole Gandy, Portfolio Holder for Community Leadership and Partnership, 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 did the educational attainment conference achieve? What further action is planned on this by the Council?

The prevailing message from the conference was that a school's success was largely dependent upon the effectiveness of its governors. For example, the improved performance of a local school was attributed to the excellent performance of its governors to ensure that the school's decision makers were robustly challenged. However, there was a shared sense at the conference that the general standard of the governors at some local schools required improvement.

Members were advised that a number of Council staff and members of the local police had recently become school governors. All local schools were said to have become more aware of mentoring opportunities following a move to bring together mentoring organisations.

Councillor Gandy had met with the Head of Children's Services at Warrington Borough Council to discuss adopting measures in Redditch that had been introduced in Warrington to improve pupil's performance. Instilling a sense of pride amongst pupils in where they lived, predominantly through incorporating references to the heritage of the town into all facets of education, had worked very successfully in Warrington.

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The conference had also addressed the merits of a two-tier education system against that of a three-tier system. Members were informed that a piece of research had subsequently been commissioned to investigate why approximately twenty per cent of school age children in Redditch were educated outside the town.

An Education Action Plan for Redditch had been compiled and was due to be considered for pre-scrutiny by the Committee as part of the Sustainable Community Strategy on 2nd March 2011.

- 2) Please clarify what further information will be coming through about tackling health inequalities in Redditch.

Members were advised that the Local Strategic Partnership had been tasked with assessing local health inequalities following the publication of the Comprehensive Area Assessment in December 2009. This had allocated a red flag to Redditch for quality of life issues, and had identified problems with health inequalities in the Borough.

Having undertaken a survey at the Morton Stanley Park Festival, obesity and smoking had been identified as the main public health barriers to overcome. A Health Action Plan had been developed which was specifically aimed at promoting healthy lifestyles and actions such as smoking cessation. The action plan was due to be considered for pre-scrutiny by the Committee as part of the Sustainable Community Strategy on 2nd March 2011.

The Committee was informed that the Local Strategic Partnership had held an away day to consider measures to improve people's health. It was agreed during the course of the discussions that the Council should have a clearer focus on planning applications to establish a fairer balance between fast food and healthy food outlets in order to assist the long term health prospects of many residents.

- 3) What changes to the lives of Redditch people has been achieved by identifying red flag issues?

Members were advised that a long term strategy was required in order to address the issues identified in the red flag in a way that would have a positive impact on people's lives. Work was being undertaken by the Local Strategic Partnership to address both health education and local employment opportunities.

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It was suggested that by concentrating on specific local areas the work of the LSP could make a significant impact.

4) What problems do you foresee for the future in relation to the areas for which you have Portfolio Holder responsibility?

Councillor Gandy advised the Committee that funding constraints represented an obvious challenge for the partnership to overcome. However, the partnership would retain focus on its priorities and would take difficult decisions in order to keep jobs in Redditch and improve the lifestyles of its residents.

Members heard that residents and staff members would continue to be fully informed about the difficult decisions that were being taken by the Council to meet its priorities in light of funding constraints.

5) How have partnerships:

(a) Improved the delivery of services to Redditch?

The Committee was informed that the Council's work with a range of different partners was generally helping to improve the delivery of services to Redditch. However, it was acknowledged that the Council's relations with some partners could be strengthened.

Members expressed concern that the Council appeared to be unfairly burdened in terms of its partnership work. However, it was stressed to the Committee that it was necessary in many cases for the Council to take a lead in partnership work as part of the local authority's responsibility for Community Leadership.

(b) Enhanced the accountability of Officers and Councillors?

The Committee was advised of the current arrangements for holding both the Local Strategic Partnership and Community Safety Partnership to account. This included an active role for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Crime and Disorder Scrutiny Panel.

Members expressed concern that LSP minutes had not been subject to sufficient scrutiny when received by Council. It was subsequently suggested that the Constitutional Review Working Party could address whether the LSP minutes could

be made to feature more prominently on the future Council agendas.

Councillor Gandy also informed Members that progress was being made in delivering the objectives set in the Town Centre Strategy. This would help to deliver significant improvements in the town centre in the long-term.

6) Do you feel that Shopping Investment and Giving (SIG) has been effectively implemented?

The Committee was informed that the Council had received a huge number of applications from local organisations for funding through the Council's grant allocation process. Members would soon be provided with the full list which contained many innovative proposals. Each bid would be objectively assessed to see if it was in the interests of local residents.

Members were advised that the shopping element of the scheme had yet to be fully realised. Shopping would require significant investment in a third sector organisation through a contractual arrangement. Due to the financial and accountability implications, careful consideration would need to be given as to how this could be applied in the long-term.

Significant concern was raised that the Council's interpretation of 'Investing' within the scheme was not consistent with that of the County Council's. It was suggested that the Council should be looking to place greater emphasis on upskilling local organisations through the scheme. However, Members were informed that the Council possessed the freedom to establish its own definition and had developed its own guidance in relation to investing which was outlined in the Council's Grants Policy.

Members were further informed that Officers were attempting to identify alternative funding streams for local Voluntary Sector organisations to ensure that these organisations did not become dependent on local authority funding.

7) Are we gathering any evidence from the roadshows? What added value has been achieved by holding the roadshows?

The Council had met with more than 500 residents at roadshows held during the previous six months. Nearly half of these residents consulted expressed satisfaction with the performance of the Council. A number of suggestions for improvement had been received, including providing further

details about both the Tourist Information Centre and the Reddicard.

The vast majority of residents contacted stated that they enjoyed living in Redditch. Those who were critical tended to have lived in the town for their whole life and therefore could not compare living in Redditch with the experience of living within another town.

Significantly, the four priorities that had been identified for the new version of the Sustainable Community Strategy were consistent with the priorities of local residents who were consulted.

The roadshows were described as an extremely useful opportunity for Officers to meet directly with local residents and to hear not only their suggestions for improvement, but to also learn about how they were their views of Council services.

RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

**185. FURTHER INFORMATION ON DRAFT BUDGET PROPOSALS
WITHIN MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN 2011/12 - 2013/14**

Members were updated on alterations to the draft budget proposals within the Medium Term Financial Plan since the previous meeting.

A number of budget bids had been re-classified from a medium to high priority by the Executive Committee and were therefore to be included within the Medium Term Financial Plan. Under the revenue bids, this included: town centre regeneration; aftercare service; business start up grant; and the careers fair for Year 8 students. This amounted to approximately £37,000 additionally per annum.

Under the capital bids, the installation of a new telephone system had been reclassified from a medium to a high priority bid. Members were advised that significant potential repair costs for the current system were behind the rationale of the reclassification.

It was re-iterated that although there was a significant initial outlay for the Solar Panels capital bid, it was expected that this would eventually be off-set in the long-term through the Government's commitment to rewarding green measures introduced by local authorities. The proposals to install solar panels on listed buildings had been legally approved.

It had been proposed that the budget gap for 2011/12 would be recovered from balances, while the budget gap for 2012/13 would be met through shared services and other savings.

RECOMMENDED that:

the draft revenue bids 2011/12 – 2013/14 and draft capital bids 2011/12 – 2013/14, be approved; and

RESOLVED that:

the additional information requested by the Committee regarding the budget bids be noted.

186. PERFORMANCE REPORT FOR THE SERVICES WITHIN THE PLANNING, REGENERATION, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND LOCAL TRANSPORT PORTFOLIO

The Committee received a written report which detailed the performance of services within the remit of the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Regeneration, Economic Development and Local Transport Portfolio, Councillor Jinny Pearce. 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 2nd March 2011.

- a) What proposals for investment in economic development do you have?
- b) What measurements will the Council use to gauge that effectiveness of the Economic Development Strategy?
- c) What steps does the Council plan to take to address:
 - (i) Changes in bus pass provision?
 - (ii) Changes in bus pass subsidies and the impact on routes in Redditch?
- d) How many actual jobs have been created by the Economic Development Unit? Do we have mechanisms for counting these jobs?
- e) What problems do you foresee in the future for your service areas?
- f) Why is it taking so long for town centre landscaping improvements to be implemented?

- g) Is the Town Centre Strategy overly ambitious?
- h) How are we placing Redditch on the map in terms of business tourism?
- i) What success has the Learn Direct service that replaced the REDI Centre had so far to date?

RESOLVED that

- 1) **the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Regeneration, Economic Development and Local Transport 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.**

187. JOINT WORCESTERSHIRE SCRUTINY FRAMEWORK

The Committee was informed that Councillor Anderson had developed a response to the Framework. This was unfortunately not available at the meeting. It was therefore suggested that the item should be re-considered at the next meeting.

RESOLVED that:

the Joint Worcestershire Scrutiny Framework be reconsidered at the following meeting.

188. REFERRALS

The Committee considered a draft scoping document for a proposed short, sharp review into road gritting following a referral from Council.

Members heard that the proposed review had emanated from residents complaints about a lack of gritting on local highways. The complaints appeared to indicate that measures identified within the County Council scrutiny review, *Gritting: Winter Service Review*, published in 2010, to preserve the road system during inclement weather had so far been ineffective. The referral therefore proposed closer examination of the report's agreed actions.

The Committee was informed that Worcestershire County Council was due to monitor the implementation of the actions that had been recommended in their report during 2011. The Group's findings could be inputted into County's monitoring process.

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The Committee felt that it would not be appropriate to undertake the proposed review as an exercise in joint scrutiny due to the distinct road systems between Redditch and neighbouring local authorities.

RESOLVED that

- 1) the Overview and Scrutiny Committee undertake a short, sharp review into road gritting in Redditch, to be completed no later than 13th April 2011;**
- 2) Councillor Graham Vickery be appointed as Chair of the Review;**
- 3) Political Party Group Leaders be contacted to nominate representatives onto the review;**
- 4) Councillors be consulted for their thoughts on the issue and for any reports of gritting problems during the inclement weather during the winter of 2010/11; and**
- 5) the Committee's Work Programme be amended accordingly.**

189. WORK PROGRAMME

Members were advised of recent amendments to the Work Programme as agreed at the previous meeting.

The Chair suggested that as the agenda for the meeting on 23rd March was currently very full, the following items be deferred to the meeting on 13th April:

- (a) Private Sector Home Support Service – Post Scrutiny;
- (b) Youth Employment at Redditch Borough Council – Update Report; and
- (c) Disabled Facilities Grants and the Lifetime Grant - scrutiny of the Countrywide Scheme.

RESOLVED that

- 1) the Committee's Work Programme be amended accordingly; and**
- 2) the remainder of the Work Programme be noted.**

190. PETITION - URGENT BUSINESS

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Under the Council's new procedures for the consideration of Petitions, the Committee received a Petition in relation to anti-social behaviour in Winslow Close.

Members were advised that their remit was limited to considering whether the Council's Housing Team was following appropriate housing allocations procedures. The Committee could not propose any final decision in relation to the outcome of the petition.

The Committee was advised that proper policies and procedures were being followed by the Council when allocated housing. However, Members expressed concern that providing alternative accommodation to evicted tenants was failing to adequately address anti-social behaviour problems within Council accommodation. Officers acknowledged the concern and responded that the Council tried to allocate accommodation accordingly if problems around mental health were detected. However, it was often difficult for the Council to prevent anti-social behaviour when these instances occurred. The Council was committed to balancing support for tenants with behavioural problems with support for neighbouring tenants who had been affected by anti-social behaviour.

Officers explained that set procedures were adhered to in the event of a possible eviction. This followed a legal course of action if it had been agreed that an eviction notice would be enforced.

RESOLVED that

the Petition be noted.

The Meeting commenced at 6.30 pm
and closed at 9.10 pm