

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Wednesday, 13th April,
2011

MINUTES

Present:

Councillor Diane Thomas (Chair), and Councillors Peter Anderson, Robin King, Brenda Quinney and Mark Shurmer

Also Present:

Councillors Simon Chalk and Roger Hill
M Collins (Vice Chair of the Standards Committee).

Officers:

H Bennett, S Hanley, M Kay, S Morgan, G Revans and J Willis

Committee Services Officer:

J Bayley and M Craggs

220. APOLOGIES AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES

Apologies were received on behalf of Councillors Anita Clayton, Andrew Fry and Bill Hartnett. There were no named substitutes.

Apologies were also received on behalf of Councillor Juliet Brunner who was due to deliver her Portfolio Holder Annual Report for Community Safety and Regulatory Services.

221. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND OF PARTY WHIP

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

222. MINUTES

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 23rd March 2011 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

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Chair

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223. ACTIONS LIST

Members considered the latest version of the Committee's Actions List.

The Committee was informed that the date of the next Joint Worcestershire Scrutiny Chairs and Vice Chairs Network meeting, at which the Joint Worcestershire Hub and Joint Worcestershire Scrutiny Framework were to be raised for discussion, had yet to be confirmed.

All of the other actions had been completed.

RESOLVED that

the Committee's Actions List be noted.

224. 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.

225. TASK & FINISH REVIEWS - DRAFT SCOPING DOCUMENTS

There were no draft scoping documents for consideration.

226. TASK AND FINISH GROUPS - PROGRESS REPORTS

The Committee received update reports in relation to the following reviews.

a) Road Gritting – Chair, Councillor Robin King

The final report of the Road Gritting Short, Sharp Review was considered under a later item.

b) Work Experience Opportunities – Chair, Councillor Peter Anderson

The Chair informed Members that the Group had made good recent progress and was expecting to soon start work on its final report.

RESOLVED that

the reports be noted.

227. PETITION

The Committee considered a petition regarding the removal of a pedestrian barrier from Yardley Close in Winyates approximately two years ago. The removal of the barrier had been undertaken to provide a disabled resident who used a wheel chair with access to the doctor's surgery at the Winyates Centre.

The Chair invited members of the public to speak to the petition. The Committee were advised that the removal of the pedestrian barrier had enabled motorcycles and skateboarders to gain unimpeded access to Yardley Close. This had reportedly resulted in regular noise pollution which was especially disconcerting for the elderly residents who lived on the close. The petitioners also explained that fencing had been damaged due to anti-social behaviour. The petitioners advised the Committee that the disabled resident would not object to the barriers being re-erected if the Winyates Centre was accessible at the opposite end of Yardley Close.

The Committee noted the concerns of the petitioners. It was proposed that a meeting involving the petitioners, the disabled resident, local police, and relevant Council Officers take place to resolve the issue satisfactorily.

RECOMMENDED that

Officers meet with the petitioners, the disabled resident from Yardley Close and representatives from the Police to discuss potential compromise solutions; and

RESOLVED that

the petition be noted.

228. PORTFOLIO HOLDER ANNUAL REPORT - COMMUNITY SAFETY AND REGULATORY SERVICES

Apologies were tendered on behalf of Councillor Brunner due to illness. Members expressed disappointment that the Portfolio Holder would be unable to deliver her Annual Report during the current municipal year. It was suggested that in future the Committee should not arrange to receive a Portfolio Holder's Annual Report for the final meeting of any municipal year. This would ensure that an annual report could be re-scheduled in the event of a Portfolio Holder being forced to submit his/her apologies.

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The Committee instead received the annual report from relevant Officers. Firstly, a brief presentation was delivered that showcased the work of the Redditch Community Safety Partnership during 2010/11. In particular, this presentation depicted: the work of Redditch Roadway Arts, including pictures of the artwork that had been displayed on local bus shelters and pedestrian subways; the work of the partnership on the secure access system at Winyates district centre as part of the area of highest needs project; the Redditch Home Security guide; and the accreditation recently achieved by the CCTV service.

Members were also provided with responses to the Committee's list of questions as detailed below:

- 1) What is being done to address drugs misuse and its implications for community safety in Redditch?

A recent report from the Worcestershire DAAT (Drug and Alcohol Action Team) stated that individuals from Redditch were more likely to leave adult drug treatment either drug free or having cut down their drug usage compared to other districts in Worcestershire. Available data also indicated that there had been a fall in drugs offences during the year.

The Worcestershire DAAT had recently re-commissioned all of its drugs and alcohol services for the county in an attempt to further reduce drug and alcohol abuse. New integrated alcohol and drug treatment programmes were to be delivered in Redditch under a "Pathways to Recovery" service from 1st April 2011. This service was to combine a range of alcohol and drug services and would provide a holistic approach to substance misuse with a strong focus on abstinence and recovery. The Employment, Training, Education, and Volunteering Service would help individuals overcome any barriers to work and employment following their treatment from drugs misuse.

Members were advised that a misleading report on the subject of a recent short-term police exercise, Operation Vellum, had appeared in the local press. This operation was in fact designed to target a small number of individuals involved in alcohol related anti-social behaviour in the Church Green area and did not indicate an increase in drugs misuse in Redditch.

- 2) How is the Council working with the Police to mitigate the affects of police budget cuts and an expected reduction in police force numbers on community safety?

Detailed information had yet to be received on how the police budget cuts would impact on police force numbers. The Council was working hard to ensure that the affect of reduced resources for partner agencies on community safety was minimised. Indeed, many Council services were already working closely with the police around a number of crime prevention and community safety projects.

Members were referred to a number of projects being undertaken by the Redditch Community Safety Team to help reduce crime and disorder. This included the Redditch Roadway Arts programme of renovating and repainting bus shelters and underpasses. Measures like this helped the Police to focus resources on areas of greatest need. Also, the Environmental Services team was working with the Police to reduce the possibility of criminal activity by cutting back on vegetation to improve visibility in public areas.

Members were supportive of the strong working relationship that had developed between the Police and the Council to reduce crime and disorder. In particular, the Committee welcomed the lack of graffiti that existed in Redditch compared to other areas.

- 3) How is Redditch's CCTV system to be protected from funding cuts? What are your plans for CCTV in Redditch going forward?

Members were informed that Redditch's CCTV system had been allocated mainstream funding within the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan. Redditch Borough Council and Bromsgrove District Council had already accrued savings through sharing services for CCTV. The Councils were also exploring further areas where savings could be made. This included undertaking a review of the current CCTV maintenance contract.

The draft 'Protection of Freedoms Bill, which aimed to ensure that CCTV was being used effectively and appropriately, was currently out for public consultation. The Council would develop a list of actions to ensure it was compliant with the Bill following its publication.

4) Do you have plans to review the licences of alcohol retail outlets in the centre? If so, to what extent?

An alcohol licence could be brought under review if evidence was forthcoming that any of the terms of the license had been breached. A review could be requested by any responsible statutory authority; an interested party; or a councillor. It would be at the discretion of the Licensing Sub-Committee to make a final decision.

Officers were constantly liaising with the Police and other responsible authorities to identify potentially problematic premises. Preventative action, including holding discussions with the relevant licence holder and premises supervisor, would take place as and when necessary. However, Members heard that very few premises in Redditch had had their licence reviewed.

Members were further informed that the Police could strongly recommend that a premise alter its closing hours if there had been a number of alcohol related disturbances in the local area. Attempts were also being made to reduce the number of intoxicated people in a given premise to prevent disturbances from occurring in the neighbouring area.

Members praised the work of Officers and the Police in keeping Redditch safe from alcohol induced crime and disorder and suggested that this should be further communicated to help boost the night-time economy.

5) What challenges do you foresee in your service area in the future?

Officers provided a summary of current and future challenges that needed to be met under each main service area:

A business strategy for the Lifeline service was to be developed to ensure that that service was self-sustaining. This would involve a robust marketing plan to help attract new customers and generate extra income. The new service would also benefit from advances in available technology.

The funding for Supporting People was currently under review at the county level. The decision had also been made to undertake a tendering process for the Call Alarm services. Redditch Borough Council had decided to tender for the business of incorporating Telecare into support packages at

the initial stage. As part of this process the option of working in conjunction with Worcestershire Telecare to potentially provide a county-wide service was to be explored.

A policy and vision was to be developed for offering the lone worker monitoring service to outside organisations. The service worked well for existing staff and had the potential to become a revenue generating service.

Proposed legislative changes regarding the powers used to deal with anti-social behaviour were currently open for consultation. It was expected that any new powers to deal with anti-social behaviour would be introduced in spring 2012. In the meantime, the Council would continue to help enforce existing national policies.

The Council was identifying how other partners' budget and resource reductions would impact on community safety. Work would need to be carried out in partnership with relevant partner bodies to establish links with the new Police and Crime Commissioner to help attract increased future funding. The Redditch Community Safety Partnership had recently received an increased budget for 2011/12 as funds had been allocated in accordance with need rather than the size of the local population.

- 6) To what extent does the night-time economy in Redditch impact on levels of crime and disorder? What is being proposed to address this?

It was agreed that this answer had already been provided under a previous question.

The Chair thanked Officers on behalf of the Committee for delivering the Portfolio Holder's Annual Report.

RESOLVED that:

- 1) **the Committee would not arrange to receive any Portfolio Holder Annual Report at the final meeting of each municipal year in future; and**
- 2) **the Portfolio Holder's Annual Report be noted.**

229. CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S PLAN - PRE-SCRUTINY

The Committee received the draft Children's and Young People's Plan 2011-14 for pre-scrutiny and an accompanying presentation. It was explained that the plan had been produced by the Worcestershire Children's Trust as the single plan for all children and young people in Worcestershire aged up to 19 years, and some groups of vulnerable young people up to 25 years.

Members discussed the plan and expressed concerns that the proportion of funding that was likely to be allocated to Redditch based activities (£189,000) was insufficient. Members also commented that there was a focus on academic achievement at the expense of other forms of achievement at the national level. It was suggested that this focus did not help to address the proportion of young people who are not in employment, education, nor training (NEET) in any given area.

It was suggested that parental support was as important to a child's success as the support provided by mentors and school governors and there was a need to ensure that parents were engaged to support their child's education. As such more needed to be done to help raise the aspirations and ambitions for many young people.

Worcestershire County Council Officers noted the comments made by the Committee and undertook to ensure that the Committee's comments were noted as part of Worcestershire County Council's consultation process for the plan.

The Chair thanked Officers for presenting the report.

RECOMMENDED that

subject to the Committee's comments being noted, the Worcestershire Children and Young People's Plan be approved.

230. ROAD GRITTING SHORT SHARP REVIEW - FINAL REPORT

The Committee received the Gritting Short, Sharp Review Group's final report for consideration.

Members were informed that the Committee had been unable to engage with the responsible Portfolio Holder and relevant officers at Worcestershire County Council during the course of the review. The Group were, however, aiming to submit the final report for the

consideration of the County Council, subject to the approval of the Executive Committee.

Members praised the report for its thoroughness and agreed that more could be done to preserve the condition of the roads in Redditch during future periods of inclement weather. Members commented that arrangements suitable for gritting and clearing snow in a hilly area should be applied in Redditch as many of the town's roads were located on steep gradients. It was commented also that more action needed to be taken to mitigate the affect of inclement weather on concentrated residential areas of elderly and vulnerable people.

Instances of anti-social behaviour that had taken place on local roads during the winter were discussed. This included cars being parked at the top of hazardous roads which restricted road access for other vehicles. The report recommended that smaller snow ploughs should be utilised to clear snow on the narrower roads in the Borough, to help reduce this problem in future years.

Members were advised that Officers at Worcestershire County Council and Redditch Borough Council had worked closely during the winter in 2010/11 to help ensure that the finite resources to maintain the condition of the roads were used most appropriately. This collaboration had been appreciated at both levels and had helped to prevent further difficulties.

RECOMMENDED that

- 1) **when monitoring the implementation of their recommendations Worcestershire County Council's Environment and Economy Overview and Scrutiny Panel should observe that the following recommendations proposed in their report, *Gritting: Winter Service Policy*, were not fully implemented in Redditch during the inclement weather in December 2010: recommendations 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 10, 11 and 15;**
- 2) **the co-ordination of responses to inclement weather should be delegated to the district level; and**
 - a) **responses should involve local stakeholders planning local solutions to local problems;**
- 3) **Redditch Borough Council should urge Worcestershire County Council to adopt this local approach to co-ordinating responses to inclement weather;**

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- 4) resources, suitable for local needs, should be available to access in Redditch when needed;
- 5) the precautionary gritting route map needs to be agreed with district Councils to make use of local knowledge;
- 6) Worcestershire County Council and Redditch Borough Council should:
 - a) identify and use local private resources, including farmers' tractors, for snow clearance;
 - b) identify and use smaller, more suitable vehicles to clear snow on smaller urban roads; and
 - c) identify and develop a list of emergency additional labour forces that could be used to clear snow during inclement weather;
- 7) there should be a service available to deploy 24 hours a day 7 days a week locally in response to inclement weather;
- 8) Worcestershire County Council should meet with representatives of Redditch Borough Council to clarify the standards expected from each other in relation to snow clearance;
- 9) grit bins should be filled when requested. (However, we recognise that it may not be possible to fill grit bins immediately). Therefore:
 - a) members of the public who request that their grit bin be restocked should be clearly advised when this will take place;
 - b) a schedule for restocking grit bins should be published for public consideration in a clearly accessible format; and
 - c) if the snow is worse than expected one tonne tote bags should be distributed to roads where needed as an emergency measure;

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- 10) **Worcestershire County Council ensure that following information on the Council's website is presented in a more user friendly manner:**
 - a) **general information about gritting and snow clearance;**
 - b) **gritting routes;**
 - c) **snow ploughing routes together with clarification as to whether these routes are the same as the gritting routes;**
 - d) **grit bin locations; and**
 - e) **when gritting, snow ploughing and the filling of grit bins will take place;**
- 11) **the successful approach that Worcestershire County Council has adopted to communicate road conditions to the schools should be extended to all stakeholders;**
- 12) **Worcestershire County Council and Redditch Borough Council should ensure that clear information about both the road conditions and public transport is provided when communicating with the public during inclement weather;**
- 13) **Worcestershire County Council's Highways Department should:**
 - a) **be available for all relevant bodies, particularly the emergency services, to contact directly and quickly and at all times; and**
 - b) **be more responsive to residents.**

RESOLVED that

the report be noted

231. REDDITCH COUNCIL PLAN 2011-14 - PRE-SCRUTINY

The Committee considered the draft Redditch Council Plan 2011-14 for pre-scrutiny.

Members were informed that the plan was essentially the Council's business plan for the following three years and explained how the

Council would achieve the overall vision for the Borough as set out within the Redditch Sustainable Community Strategy.

Concerns were expressed that the implementation of the plan might provide difficult to monitor as it did not appear to contain many specific quantitative targets.

The Committee suggested that consideration should be given to the presentation of the plan to make it clearer for the public and that plain English should be used wherever possible. It was further proposed that a more digestible summary of the plan could be included on the Council website. Members were informed that the key points contained in the draft plan had already been publicised in previous versions of *Redditch Matters* to help explain to local residents why the plan had been produced and what the Council was aiming to achieve.

Members suggested that in cases where they were considering lengthy strategic documents like the Council Plan consideration should be given to providing Members with a longer lead in time to analyse and potentially suggest changes to the report.

Finally it was suggested that Budget Jury members should be asked about how the public would prefer to be informed about service performance by the Council.

RECOMMENDED that

Subject to the Committee's comments being noted, the Redditch Council Plan 2011/14 be approved.

232. QUARTERLY BUDGET MONITORING REPORT - QUARTER 3 - SEPTEMBER TO DECEMBER 2010

The Committee received the quarterly budget monitoring report for September – December 2010 for comment.

Members were advised that for the period from April – December 2010, the the Council's revenue budget showed an underspend of £815,000 compared to an estimated target of £350,000. The main reasons for this were: higher than anticipated savings generated through vacant posts; lower than anticipated borrowing costs on investments; and the Council's success in reclaiming £279,000 of previously paid VAT.

Members were advised that it was unlikely that the Council could expect to achieve this level of underspend in future years. In

particular, it was anticipated that inflation would rise in the following years and this would impact on the financial position of the Council.

RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

**233. QUARTERLY PERFORMANCE MONITORING REPORT -
QUARTER 3 - SEPTEMBER TO DECEMBER 2010**

The Committee received the quarterly performance monitoring report for September – December 2010 for comment.

Data was provided in the report for 41 performance indicators. Performance in relation to 19 of these indicators had improved when compared to the same quarter in the previous year and performance with regards to one of the indicators had remained static. Unfortunately, performance had declined in relation to 21 of the indicators compared to the same period the previous year.

The decline in performance for 21 of the indicators could be explained relatively easily in some instances. In particular, this quarter had coincided with the inclement weather, which had inevitably impacted on the delivery of public services.

However, there were a number of areas of performance which were considered to be concerning. Firstly, BV012, the number of working days or shifts lost to the local authority due to sickness absence per full time equivalent staff had increased from 6.71 days to 7.84 days. To address this problem Officers were due to meet to review the levels of sickness absence.

Secondly, BV079b(i), the amount of housing benefit overpayments recovered as a percentage of all housing benefit overpayments had decreased from 77.35 per cent to 73.82 per cent. Whilst this decrease was concerning it was anticipated that the council would achieve the 80 per cent target by the end of the year.

Thirdly, NI192, the percentage of household waste sent for reuse, recycling and composting had dropped from 28.68 per cent to 27.6 per cent. This was considered to be concerning, particularly as the Council had achieved a 31.26 per cent rate on this indicator in 2008/09 suggesting that there had been a decline over a two year period. The Council would attempt to address this trend and had ensured that improving recycling rates was a key target in the 2011/12 Business Plan for the service area.

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The committee suggested that a further, useful measure, concerning the amount saved through landfill charges, could be incorporated into the quarterly performance monitoring reports. Provision of this information would be dependent upon obtaining relevant details from Worcestershire County Council. However, this measure would enable Members to monitor the extent to which the Council was contributing to landfill.

Members expressed concerns about performance in relation to NI 041, perceptions of drunk or rowdy behaviour as a problem. Members suggested that these perceptions did not correspond with the situation outlined in the annual report for the community safety portfolio. Under these circumstances Members suggested that further action needed to be taken to communicate effectively the constructive work of the Community Safety Partnership to address the potential for anti-social behaviour and crime.

RESOLVED that

- 1) **performance in relation to landfill costs should be monitored as part of the Council's quarterly performance monitoring process; and**
- 2) **the report be noted.**

234. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 2010/11 - REVIEW OF THE YEAR

The Chair expressed the view that 2010/11 had been a successful year for the Committee. This had been evidenced by the fact that the majority of the Committee's recommendations had been approved by the Executive Committee. The Chair suggested that the Committee could further improve in future years if the choice of issues for consideration, particularly for pre-scrutiny, was more selective. This would help to minimise a recurrent problems during the year whereby the meeting agenda had often been relatively lengthy.

Members commented that the Committee had completed a number of excellent reviews during the course of the year. In particular, the delivery of a lot of policy review work through short, sharp scrutiny exercise was regarded as a positive development and members agreed that it would be useful to continue to utilise this mechanism in future years.

Concerns were expressed about the extent to which all non-executive Councillors had participated in the scrutiny process

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during the year. Whilst a significant number of Councillors had acted as members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, the Crime and Disorder Scrutiny Panel and the various reviews that had been established during the year a few Councillors had not actively engaged in the scrutiny process. Under these circumstances, it was suggested that consideration should be given as to how all non-executive councillors could be encouraged to contribute to the scrutiny process in future.

The Chair concluded by thanking Members for their contribution and Officers for their support during the course of the year.

RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

235. REFERRALS

There were no referrals.

236. WORK PROGRAMME

Members were informed that the update report on fly tipping and progress with the *Worth It* campaign, which the Committee had agreed to defer, would be received at a meeting on 5th July 2011.

RESOLVED that

the Committee's Work Programme be noted

The Meeting commenced at 6.00 pm
and closed at 8.20 pm