

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

24th May 2011

MINUTES

Present:

Councillor Phil Mould (Chair), Councillor Mark Shurmer (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Peter Anderson, Andrew Fry, Bill Hartnett and Gay Hopkins

Also Present:

Councillors Alan Mason, Michael Braley and M Collins (Vice-Chair, Standards Committee)

Officers:

M Bough, C Felton, A Fox, M Kay, K Lethbridge and J Pickering

Committee Services Officer:

J Bayley and I Westmore

1. APOLOGIES AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Andrew Brazier, Simon Chalk and Luke Stephens.

There was some discussion as to the new Constitutional arrangements and the prohibition on named substitutes for the Committee. Officers agreed to take this matter back for further consideration as there appeared to be some misunderstanding as to previous advice provided in this regard.

RESOLVED that

the prohibition of named substitutes on the Overview and Scrutiny Committee be referred to the Constitutional Review Working Party for further consideration.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND OF PARTY WHIP

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

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Chair

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3. MINUTES

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 13th April 2011 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

4. ACTIONS LIST

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

The first two actions listed were still pending the arrangement of a further meeting of the Joint Worcestershire Scrutiny Chairs' and Vice Chairs' Network meeting, the third was awaiting the next meeting of the Budget Jury and the final action was subject to the preparation of the quarterly performance monitoring reports.

RESOLVED that

the Committee's Actions List be noted.

5. CONSIDERATION OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE'S MINUTES 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.

The Committee discussed Minute 214 (Member Development Steering Group, 31st March 2011 - Referrals) in respect of the policy on Members' ICT facilities. There had been some unease amongst Members following the Executive Committee meeting at the proposals contained within the Policy. However, discussions had taken place subsequently with Officers and Lead Members which had served to alleviate many of these concerns. It was noted that the Leader of the Council was to meet with the Leader of the Opposition shortly in order to address these matters further.

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee held on 12th April 2011 be received and noted.

6. TASK & FINISH REVIEWS - DRAFT SCOPING DOCUMENTS

There were no draft scoping documents for consideration.

7. TASK AND FINISH GROUPS - PROGRESS REPORTS

The Committee noted that an update report in relation to the Work Experience Opportunities would be considered under a later item on the agenda.

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

Councillor Bill Hartnett, Chair of the Crime and Disorder Scrutiny Panel, provided an update on the most recent meeting of the Panel, referring Members to the written report attached to the agenda.

The meeting had focussed on a presentation from the Chair of the Redditch Community Safety Partnership and this had allowed for some reflection on the work of the Panel during the preceding year. A particular highlight was reported to be the recent establishment of a Sexual Assault Referral Centre in Worcester following pressure for such a facility within the area. Another area considered during the year had been hospital related admissions for underage drinkers where it was noted that a response to a letter from the Panel to the relevant Minister was still awaited.

A proposal for the coming year was periodic reporting from the Police on their activities within the Partnership area. In other respects the Panel was reported to be content with current arrangements and the manner in which it was carrying out its function.

RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

9. WORCESTERSHIRE HEALTH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - UPDATE

The Committee noted that, in future, it could expect to receive periodic reports from the Council's representative on the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Given that the nomination of the Council's representative, Councillor Brenda Quinney, had only taken place the previous evening, a report was not available for the present meeting.

10. WORK EXPERIENCE TASK AND FINISH GROUP - FINAL REPORT

The Committee received the Work Experience Task and Finish Group's final report for consideration. The Chair of the Group,

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Councillor Peter Anderson, presented the report to the Committee on behalf of the Task and Finish Group.

It was noted at the outset that the reality of the situation, as it became apparent to the Members engaged upon the review, had led to a change in emphasis and direction from that set out in the original scoping document. This was largely dictated by national factors outside of local or regional control.

The Committee were provided with a summary of the work undertaken by the Group. Members were informed that evidence had been gathered from a number of sources, the principal of these being the Worcestershire Education Business Partnership (WEBP), work experience coordinators from local schools, Forward Consortium, representatives of Connexions and local students. The main finding from the review was that work experience opportunities for school students in Redditch should continue whether or not the provision of these opportunities ceased to be mandatory.

The Group had been very impressed by the work of the WEBP which was considered to be one of the best of its kind in the country. The staff of the Partnership were regarded as highly skilled and motivated and the opportunities and support offered to young people were considered to be of great benefit to those involved in the scheme. Evidence from school work experience coordinators indicated very high take up of work placements in Redditch.

Concern was expressed that recent proposals at the national level would lead to diminishing work experience opportunities and a corresponding rise in those neither in education, employment and training (NEET). The raising of the school participation age in 2013 and 2015 was considered to be an inadequate response to the problem of those designated as NEET in that it was seeking to address the problem at too late a stage in the students' schooling.

It was acknowledged that the actions recommended were not directly within the power of the Council to influence but the Group was keen that influence should be brought to bear on those organisations who had responsibility in the areas where issues had been identified. To this extent, the Chair of the Group expressed his concern that the scope of the present report was too narrow.

Other Members of the Group who were present, Councillors Andy Fry and Mark Shurmer, supported and reiterated the points set out within the report and recognition was given to the Officer support provided by Michael Craggs.

RECOMMENDED that

- 1) **the current work experience scheme, which provides work experience opportunities for 14 and 15 year olds at Key Stage 4 at school, should be continued locally;**
- 2) **Worcestershire County Council should plan immediately for an increased number of pupils at schools across the County due to the raising of the participation age in 2013 and 2015;**
- 3) **the continued function of the Worcestershire Education Business Partnership should be supported by the Council;**
- 4) **a greater number of local employers should show a commitment to visit schools in Redditch to provide presentations on life in the workplace; and**
- 5) **there should be a central RBC Officer point of contact for schools to arrange work experience placements at Redditch Borough Council.**

11. PETITION - UNICORN HILL - TAXI RANK

The Committee considered a petition regarding the siting of the taxi rank on Unicorn Hill and its effect on local businesses.

The Chair invited a member of the public to speak to the petition. Mr Peter Mitchell, a local businessman who had traded from a premises on Unicorn Hill for ten years reported that he had been approached by other local businesses who wished to see the taxi rank relocated or the hours of operation altered as it was seen to be having a detrimental effect on trade.

The Committee briefly discussed the current location and possible alternative locations for the rank. The point which had been made in respect of limiting the hours of operation of the taxi rank was considered relevant as it was recognised that the issue for many of these businesses was the effect on custom during normal trading hours.

Given the nature of the petition and the course of action which the petitioners were seeking the Committee determined that the matter might more properly be referred to the Licensing Committee for further consideration.

RECOMMENDED that

the petition and an accompanying Officer report be submitted to the Licensing Committee for consideration by that body.

12. THIRD SECTOR TASK AND FINISH GROUP - MONITORING REPORT

The Committee received an update on the implementation of recommendations that had been made by the Third Sector Task and Finish Group following their presentation to the Executive Committee in January 2009.

Progress on implementation of the specific recommendations was provided, demonstrating that, overall, the proposals had been addressed satisfactorily. It was noted that the Shopping element of the Shopping, Investing and Giving framework was still in the process of being implemented with the introduction of the first Shopping element due to come on stream in 2012/13. This was in part a reflection of the increased complexity of disbursing grant funding for this purpose. It was anticipated that a small but significant part of the budget would be allocated through this element of the framework.

RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

13. STAFF VOLUNTEERING POLICY

Members received an update on the potential to introduce a staff volunteering policy for Redditch Borough Council.

Officers explained that this proposal had come about through a similar scheme being introduced at Bromsgrove District Council. However, the scheme at Bromsgrove had only been in operation for one year and the effectiveness of the arrangement was still awaiting review. Given these circumstances it was suggested that a more detailed report back might be submitted once a review of the Bromsgrove scheme had been undertaken.

In response to the contention that volunteering was essentially a private activity, Officers made the point that the policy was explicit recognition that the third sector often required the assistance of individuals with professional skills.

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RESOLVED that

a report be submitted to the Committee following the conclusion of the review of the volunteering scheme at Bromsgrove District Council.

14. REFERRALS

There were no referrals.

15. WORK PROGRAMME

Members were informed that, in addition to the report back on the review undertaken into the External Refurbishment of Housing Stock, the next meeting of the Committee would incorporate a brainstorming session to identify future areas for review.

RESOLVED that

subject to the comments in the preamble, above, the Committee's Work Programme be noted.

The Meeting commenced at 7.30 pm
and closed at 9.02 pm

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Chair