

Executive Committee

13th March 2012

MINUTES

Present:

Councillor Michael Braley (Chair) and Councillors Juliet Brunner, Greg Chance, Malcolm Hall, Jinny Pearce, Debbie Taylor and Derek Taylor

Also Present:

Councillor Andrew Brazier

Officers:

M Bough, J Cochrane, R Dunne, C Flanagan, S Hanley, A Heighway, T Kristunas, S Morgan, J Pickering, D Taylor and A de Warr

Committee Services Officer:

I Westmore

182. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors Brandon Clayton and Carole Gandy.

183. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

184. LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair commenced by referring to the recent sad death of Councillor Robin King. The meeting rose and observed a minute's silence as a mark of respect to Councillor King.

The Chair advised that the following item of business, scheduled on the Forward Plan to be dealt with at this meeting, had been rescheduled to a later meeting of the Committee:

- Tenancy Strategy and Policy 2012 – 2014

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Chair

He also advised that he had accepted the following item as Urgent Business:

- Redditch Borough Council / Choose How You Move in Redditch Co-Promotional Agreement

(Not on the Forward Plan and not meeting the publication deadline)

185. MINUTES

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meetings of the Executive Committee held on 20th and 21st February 2012 be confirmed as correct records and signed by the Chair.

186. REDDITCH BOROUGH COUNCIL / CHOOSE HOW YOU MOVE IN REDDITCH CO-PROMOTIONAL AGREEMENT

Officers reported that an opportunity had arisen during the previous week to gain a substantial sum of sponsorship money through the Choose How You Move programme, a programme funded by the Department for Transport. The additional funding stream was linked to the Council's co-promotion of the Halfords Tour Series national cycle race in the town on 24th May and would supplement existing budgets for the provision of public information about and the promotion and marketing of the Council's events programme.

It was noted that the Choose How You Move initiative was focussed on changing people's habits and behaviours over a period of time with the funding spanning a period of three years. Officers suggested that the new promotional tools could be used to support the Voluntary and Third Sector in the leisure and cultural arenas.

RESOLVED that

- 1) the agreement proposal be noted and agreed; and**
- 2) the Council be requested to note that £70,000 will be received from Worcestershire County Council in advance for inclusion to the Arts and Events budgets for the above proposal over the next three financial years.**

(This report had been accepted as a matter of Urgent Business – not having met the publication deadline and not on the Forward Plan – and was considered at the meeting as such, with the approval of the Chair, in accordance with the Council's constitutional rules and powers vested in the Chair by virtue of Section 100 (B) (4) (b) of the Local Government Act 1972 to agree

to matters of urgency being discussed by reason of special circumstances.

In this case the special circumstances were that the report needed to be considered at the current meeting in order to formally notify Members of the securing of, and to seek agreement for the receipt of, a significant amount of programme funding prior to its incorporation into the Council's budget for the coming financial year).

187. PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING ENFORCEMENT POLICY

The Committee considered a report regarding a draft Private Sector Housing Enforcement Policy which set out the legal responsibilities, principles and priorities that the Private Sector Housing Service would follow when enforcing legislation to demonstrate compliance with national regulatory requirements.

Members welcomed the Policy, recognising that it would enable the Council to assist those in private sector accommodation, both owner-occupiers and those in private rented accommodation, in part through the support it would provide to responsible private landlords. Officers stated that, as with any new Policy, the Council would periodically review the provisions put in place to demonstrate that they were operating effectively.

There was some surprise expressed at the numbers of properties within the Borough which had failed to reach the Decent Homes standard as measured by the Building Research Establishment. Officers confirmed that the numbers were correct, but that the proportion was in line with, and even slightly better than, the national average.

RESOLVED that

the Private Sector Housing Enforcement Policy attached at Appendix 1 to the report be approved and adopted.

188. CORPORATE PERFORMANCE REPORT - QUARTER 3, PERIOD ENDING 31ST DECEMBER 2011

Members received the latest quarterly monitoring report setting out the Council's performance over a range of services and against a number of measures.

The areas where the Council was performing particularly well were highlighted as were several areas of current concern. Members raised a number of matters. There was some doubt expressed as to the value in recording the numbers of British Crime Survey

comparator crimes reported as these, by their very nature, failed to include any crimes that were not reported, thereby rendering the data somewhat subjective. Officers reported that there was currently a national trend of increasing levels of acquisitive crime. In response to the suggestion that decreasing the funding for the Police Service would not assist in tackling an upsurge in crime, it was noted that the West Mercia Police Force was unusual in still recruiting Officers at the present time.

There was some concern expressed that the pricing structure for performances at the Palace Theatre might preclude any improvement in visitor numbers at that facility. The relevant Portfolio Holder responded that bench-marking exercises had demonstrated that the Palace was performing better than the majority of its competitors in attracting audiences. However, he did undertake to investigate the pricing structures for shows at the Theatre and report back to Councillor Hall.

The Benefits Service was commended for continuing to achieve a reduction in the time taken to process claims from those in receipt of benefits.

RESOLVED that

the update on key performance indicators for the period ending 31st December 2011 be noted.

189. APRIL - DECEMBER (QUARTER 3) - FINANCE MONITORING REPORT 2011/12

The Committee received a monitoring report detailing the Council's financial position at the end of the third quarter of 2011/12. Officers reported that the Council was on course to achieve the savings included within the budget agreed in February 2011, including savings relating to shared services, Transformation, vacancy management and changes to Terms and Conditions.

RESOLVED that

the current financial position on Revenue and Capital be noted as detailed in the report.

190. BENEFITS IMPROVEMENT PLAN - QUARTERLY MONITORING - OCTOBER - DECEMBER 2011

A report was received setting out information relating to the performance of the Benefits service and on a number of major changes arising from forthcoming legislation which were due to impact on the service over coming months and years.

The meeting was provided with an update on the major implications of the Welfare Reform Bill, key amongst which was the proposal to introduce a Universal Credit in place of a range of existing benefits, intended to simplify the system of claiming benefits and encourage and reward employment.

Concern was expressed that there may be unintended consequences from the legislation, with measures such as the size restrictions in social tenancies and Council Tax Benefit replacement leading to increasing levels of homelessness within the Borough and more widely. A question was also asked concerning the low numbers of prosecutions and cautions resulting from the large volume of investigations carried out. Officers explained that the majority of cases were generated by either data matching or referrals from official sources, including other members of Council staff.

RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

191. QUARTERLY MONITORING OF WRITE OFFS - 1ST APRIL - 31ST DECEMBER 2011

The Committee received a report demonstrating the action taken by Officers with respect to the write-off of debts in the first three quarters of the financial year and the profile of the outstanding debt to the Council. It was noted that the level of debt written off to date was within the limits for bad debt provision as agreed by the Council.

RESOLVED that

the contents of the report be noted.

192. MAKING EXPERIENCES COUNT - QUARTERLY CUSTOMER SERVICE REPORT

The Committee considered the quarterly monitoring report on customer service. The report provided Members with a breakdown of the numbers of complaints and compliments recorded across the Council. Officers informed the Committee that further steps were being introduced to gain a fuller picture of failure demand and to receive feedback from customers and complainants.

Members noted that the report listed the numbers of justified and unjustified complaints as assessed by the Council and there was some concern that the assessment was somewhat subjective. It

was conceded that this may be true to an extent and Officers undertook to add a number of 'unjustified' complaints to future reports for Members' information.

RESOLVED that

the update for the period 1st October 2011 – 31st December 2011 be noted.

193. SICKNESS ABSENCE PERFORMANCE AND HEALTH FOR PERIOD ENDING 31ST DECEMBER 2011

Officers presented a report detailing sickness absence performance across the Council up until the end of the third quarter of 2011/12.

Generally, the Council was exceeding its target and was headed for a decrease of 2.41 days in the projected outturn figure for 2011/12 compared to the previous year. It was noted that Housing services were going against this overall trend.

Further comparative information was being sought to contextualise the performance in Redditch. It was also reported that the Council was struggling to fill the joint post with Bromsgrove District Council of Occupational Health advisor at the present time.

Members expressed some disquiet that a lot of work was being devoted to the preparation of this information. It was suggested that the data for future reports might be tailored to allow its use more readily as a management tool for Officers and Members.

RESOLVED that

subject to the comments noted, above, the contents of the report be noted.

194. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Committee received the minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 14th February 2012. It was noted that the recommendations contained therein had been considered at previous meetings of the Executive Committee.

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 26th January 2012 be received and noted.

195. SHARED SERVICES BOARD

The Committee considered the minutes of the meeting of the Shared Services Board held on 26th January 2012.

RESOLVED that

the minutes be noted.

196. MINUTES / REFERRALS - OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE, EXECUTIVE PANELS ETC.

There were no minutes or referrals to consider under this item.

197. ADVISORY PANELS - UPDATE REPORT

Members considered the latest version of the report on the activity of the Council's Advisory Panels and similar bodies. It was noted that the next meeting of the Planning Advisory Panel would be taking place on 3rd April and that the most recent meeting of the Grants Panel had been held on 8th March. Officers reported that the operation of the Procurement Group would be held in abeyance whilst work on Transformation was progressed.

198. ACTION MONITORING

Members considered the most recent version of the Committee's action monitoring report. It was noted that the report on concessionary rents for voluntary sector organisations had been deferred to a meeting at the end of May.

199. EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC

RESOLVED that

under S.100 I of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006, the public be excluded from the meeting for the following matters on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraphs 1, 2 and 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12 (A) of the said Act, as amended.

Item 18 – Property for Compulsory Purchase – Property A; and

Item 19 – Property for Compulsory Purchase – Property B.

200. PROPERTY FOR COMPULSORY PURCHASE - PROPERTY A

The Committee received a report recommending the compulsory purchase of a property which had been empty since 2007 and was currently uninhabitable. The property was considered to be a blight on the neighbourhood and the former tenant had failed to prove legal right to the property.

It was questioned whether the Council had a strategy for identifying properties which might be subject to such action in a systematic manner. Officers disclosed that there were only a very small number of such properties that had been empty for five years or more and, of those, only two which met the Council's current criteria for compulsory purchase.

(During consideration of this item Members discussed matters that necessitated the disclosure of exempt information. It was therefore agreed to exclude the press and public prior to any debate on the grounds that information would be revealed relating to an individual, which would identify an individual and relating to the financial or business affairs of a particular person (including the authority holding that information).)

201. PROPERTY FOR COMPULSORY PURCHASE - PROPERTY B

Further to the previous item, the Committee was requested to consider the compulsory purchase of a property which had been empty since 2001. It was reported that the Council would look to bring this property back into the Council's housing stock should the purchase be agreed, given the nature and location of the property.

(During consideration of this item Members discussed matters that necessitated the disclosure of exempt information. It was therefore agreed to exclude the press and public prior to any debate on the grounds that information would be revealed relating to an individual, which would identify an individual and relating to the financial or business affairs of a particular person (including the authority holding that information).)

The Meeting commenced at 7.00 pm
and closed at 8.09 pm

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Chair