

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Monday, 2nd April, 2012

MINUTES

Present:

Councillor Phil Mould (Chair), Councillor Mark Shurmer (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Peter Anderson, Andrew Brazier, Bill Hartnett, Gay Hopkins, Brenda Quinney and Alan Mason

Also Present:

Officers:

Committee Services Officer:

J Bayley

196. APOLOGIES AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES

Apologies were received from Councillors Luke Stephens and Andy Fry.

197. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND OF PARTY WHIP

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

198. MINUTES

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the Committee meeting held on Tuesday 6th March 2012 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

199. PORTFOLIO HOLDER ANNUAL REPORT - PORTFOLIO FOR COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP AND PARTNERSHIP - COUNCILLOR CAROLE GANDY

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Chair

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Further to consideration of the Portfolio Holder for Community Leadership and Partnership's written report at the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 6th March 2012 and Members' agreed questions that were based on the report, Portfolio Holder Councillor Carole Gandy provided the following responses as part of her annual report.

- 1) As Portfolio Holder, what are you planning to do to help ensure that the Redditch Partnership remains adequately funded in future?

The Committee heard that the Redditch Partnership required an inconsiderable sum of money to help ensure it remained adequately funded. It already held a small amount of money in reserve. Members heard that the Partnership could turn to its partners in the event of needing greater funding, however this scenario was considered unlikely.

Members felt that the most significant issue relating to funding was to ensure that the permanent post of Redditch Partnership Manager continued to be fully funded.

- 2) Are there any plans to widen the successful use of focus group exercises, such as the Budget Jury, to provide direct public feedback to other areas of Council policy?

Members were advised that plans were being developed to hold a number of consultation events in the coming months on specific areas of Council business. This included an event to be held in the town centre in May 2012 to discuss the future of leisure services for young people. Plans were also in place to consult with young people at the Morton Stanley Festival in August.

Questions relating specifically to Redditch were now being included within the *Worcestershire Viewpoint* surveys. This had helped the Council to gather direct feedback regarding its services from residents in every Borough in the town.

Regarding the Budget Jury itself, the Committee was informed that it had successfully engaged more residents during 2011/12 than compared to previous years. The Council was continuing to invite more residents to become involved in the process. It was hoped that a Budget Jury session would be held to obtain residents thoughts about the Council's landscaping plans.

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- 3) Is there any flexibility for increasing the maximum size of a voluntary sector grant if, in particular instances, this increase could likely benefit a significant number of people?

As part of the *Stronger Communities Grant*, local voluntary and community groups are invited to bid for up to £500 to support local community initiatives. This is administered on a quarterly basis. Members were advised that any organisation / group that submitted a bid in excess of £500 would be informed that their bid did not meet the criteria for the grant.

In this event, the organisation / group could expect to be contacted by Council Officers who would provide a number of options, including an option to re-submit a new bid under the £500 limit. Officers could also either refer them to an alternative pot of funding or grant process at the Council. However, the Council would not be flexible in terms of increasing the £500 limit for applications to the *Stronger Communities Grant*. Members expressed their support for this policy.

The Committee also heard that the Council had received a number of funding applications from residents for holding local street parties to celebrate the Queen's Diamond Jubilee through the *Stronger Communities Grant* process. An article was to be submitted in the local newspapers to help clarify the bidding process.

- 4) Are there any plans to re-introduce the register of activities document which informs residents of what local community activities and events are to be held and whom they can contact to obtain more information?

Members heard that there were no plans to re-introduce this document due to the high costs involved with producing printed publications. Furthermore it was suggested that since production of the booklet was discontinued in the 1990s, a far greater percentage of people now preferred to access documentation online, especially through popular search engines such as *Google*. It was also commented that it is far easier to update information that is electronic.

It was therefore felt that it was more appropriate for the Council to promote and publicise its activities predominantly via the internet.

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On behalf of the Committee, the Chair thanked the Portfolio Holder for her report.

RESOLVED that

- the report be noted.**
- 200. APRIL - DECEMBER (QUARTER 3) FINANCE MONITORING REPORT 2011/12**

The Committee considered the third quarter finance monitoring report for 2011/12.

Further to the information provided, Members heard the Council was budgeting for a further 21% cut in funding that was expected to be imposed by Government for 2014 – 2016 on top of the current cuts.

The Committee returned a number of comments and requested clarification on certain figures contained within the report. In particular, Members were advised that there were no forecasted under-spends for the final quarter four figures despite a number appearing in some areas for quarter three.

Concern was expressed that the Council's borrowing figures appeared to be too high – especially in the event of interest rate rises. However, Members were reassured that the Council maintained tight control of its borrowing. Officers agreed to provide more detailed information on this matter at the next meeting of the Committee.

Members expressed disappointment that the Kingfisher Shopping Centre had refused to contribute to the Christmas Lights for 2010/11 and 2011/12. Officers were encouraged to request that the centre reconsider its decision.

Finally, it was clarified that the actual spend from April to December 2011 for the Leisure and Cultural Services department should correctly read £2561k as opposed to the figure of £3435k which had been included within the report.

RESOLVED that

- 1) the Committee receive a report regarding the Council's financial borrowing position at its next meeting on Tuesday 17th April 2012; and**
- 2) the report be noted.**

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201. CORPORATE PERFORMANCE REPORT (QUARTER 3) PERIOD ENDING 31ST DECEMBER 2011

The Committee considered the third quarter corporate performance report for 2011/12.

Members heard that a reduction in the number of performance indicators enabled Officers to focus on the areas that were most important to the Council. The number of performance indicators had been reduced with the impending transformation process in mind. It was explained that the way in which the Council measured its own performance would change considerably from 2012/13 onwards. It was expected that the introduction of capability charts would enable Officers to react to changes in performance much more quickly.

Of the two main areas of relative concern referred to within the report, Members expressed concern that the recent change in legislation to pay housing benefits directly to the applicant rather than the landlord would create many problems for both parties involved. It was therefore suggested that the Council submit an open letter to the Government to express its concern about these changes. Members felt that the Council must continue to focus on providing assistance to tenants who are in receipt of housing benefits.

Regarding the other area of relative concern, Officers noted the suggestion that it was more important that the Council pay its invoices directly rather than concentrating on paying these within a target of 30 days.

RECOMMENDED that

the Council issue an open letter to the Government expressing its concern with the recent changes to housing benefits, especially concerning its direct payment to the applicant and not the landlord; and

RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

202. INCREASING RECYCLING RATES REVIEW - FINAL REPORT

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Councillor Gay Hopkins, Chair of the Increasing Rates of Recycling Review, provided the Committee with a presentation which summarised what Members of the Task Group had done during the review, what they had found, and what they proposed by way of their final recommendations.

It was reported to the Committee that through the introduction of the *100% Project* in 2007, many more properties in Redditch now had recycling facilities. Presently only 3.6% of properties in the town did not have a regular recycling collection service. It was also reported that it was costing the Council approximately £93,000 per year to unnecessarily provide residents with new or replacement grey bins. The need to tackle this problem was reflected in recommendation 6(c) of the final report.

Members heard that Councillor Anthony Blagg, Worcestershire County Council Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Environment and Waste Management, had recently accepted the Group's request that the Borough Council be moved up to the top of the waiting list for the recycling of street sweepings. It was expected that this would significantly help to increase the Council's recycling rates.

Councillor Hopkins thanked the Officers who had supported the group during the review and felt that overall it had been a very successful exercise.

The Committee returned a number of comments on the report and recommendations. In terms of reducing the number of new or replacement grey bins being issued to residents, Members queried whether a new bin identification system could be introduced. Officers explained that a number of options were being considered, however the installation of electronic chips in grey bins had previously been problematic.

Members were pleased to hear that the waste collection crews the group had spoken to were very enthusiastic about recycling. It was thought that the operations at the Crossgates Depot had considerably improved during the previous year.

In relation to recommendation 6 (a), it was felt that clarification was required in terms of to whom the waste collection crews should feedback to. It was subsequently suggested that the wording 'to management' be inserted into the recommendation to make this clearer.

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It was also suggested that Officers investigate the percentage of the larger green bins that are actually filled with recyclable waste. This could help establish the optimum number of large green bins that the Council needed to issue to residents.

RECOMMENDED that

further to the wording 'to management' being inserted into recommendation 6(a), all of the final recommendations of the review be approved.

RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

203. DRAFT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT 2011/12

The Committee received the draft Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2010/11 for consideration. The Annual Report was due to be presented at the final full Council meeting of the municipal year on 16th April 2012.

No changes were agreed to the report.

RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

204. WEST MIDLANDS REGIONAL SCRUTINY NETWORK - UPDATE REPORT

Members received a brief written report which summarised the main points that were made at the West Midlands Regional Scrutiny Network meeting on 8th March 2012.

RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

205. ACTIONS LIST

There were no updates to report on the outstanding actions.

RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

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206. EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MINUTES AND SCRUTINY OF THE FORWARD PLAN

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee held on 13th March 2012 be noted.

207. TASK & FINISH REVIEWS - DRAFT SCOPING DOCUMENTS

There were no draft scoping documents for consideration.

208. TASK AND FINISH GROUPS - PROGRESS REPORTS

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

a) Access for Disabled People – Chair, Councillor Alan Mason

Councillor Mason explained that the final report had been approved by group members and was due to be considered by the Committee at its next meeting. The group had considered proposing that a review, currently being undertaken by the Law Commission into licensing legislation, should be considered as part of a final recommendation as the definition of an adapted vehicle remained to be confirmed. However, the review by the Law Commission was focusing more generally on all forms of licensing legislation and it had therefore not been considered relevant to the review though might be of interest to the Licensing Committee in due course.

A letter had been sent to the Chief Executive of the Alexandra Hospital regarding disabled parking arrangements in February. The Chair had recently received a response to this letter which had confirmed that the Acute Hospital's NHS Trust's board was in the process of reviewing the hospital's concession policy to ensure that patients experiencing the greatest financial hardship would receive some support towards the costs.

b) Improving Recycling – Chair, Councillor Gay Hopkins

There was no update as the final report had already been considered by the Committee.

c) Promoting Sporting Participation – Chair, Councillor Luke Stephens

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The group had recently agreed a number of draft recommendations. Members were now focused on obtaining more evidence until the conclusion of the review to support these recommendations.

d) Youth Services Provision – Chair, Councillor Simon Chalk

Members heard that the final report was almost completed and would be considered by the Committee at its next meeting on 17th April 2012.

RESOLVED that

the update reports be noted.

209. HEALTH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Councillor Quinney provided a verbal update on the recent work of the Worcestershire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC).

Members heard that the HOSC had recently been focusing on the quality of elderly care across the county. A number of national reports on the subject had been developed, most notably by the Care Quality Commission (CQC), and were available to download.

The role of Health and Wellbeing Boards, which were due to be fully functioning by 2013, was also discussed. A conference was due to be held in London on 23rd April to discuss their ongoing development.

The HOSC was continuing to review the most appropriate location of a new Stroke service for the county and also proposed changes to ambulance services in Worcestershire.

Finally, the HOSC was to receive a presentation on proposed new dental services at its next meeting on 17th April 2012.

Following the update, Members expressed concern that a number of foreign doctors and nurses were struggling to communicate effectively to their patients in English. Members felt that this was a potentially dangerous situation and requested that Councillor Quinney raise this concern at a forthcoming meeting of the HOSC.

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the report be noted.

210. REFERRALS

There were no referrals.

211. WORK PROGRAMME

RESOLVED that

the Committee's Work Programme be noted.

The Meeting commenced at 7.00 pm
and closed at 9.05 pm