



OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

20th June 2007

Committee

MINUTES

Present:

Councillor Colin MacMillan (Chair), Councillor Andrew Fry (Vice-Chair) and Councillors K Banks, J Brunner, J Cookson, D Taylor and D Thomas

Also Present:

M Braley

Officers:

C Smith

Committee Officer:

J Bayley

1. APOLOGIES AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES

There were no apologies for absence.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND OF PARTY WHIP

There were no declarations of interest or of any party whip.

3. MINUTES

The Chair considered an update on the Committee's role in relation to the Council's Budget and Policy Framework as noted in the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on the 5th of June 2007.

Officers referred to a report prepared for the meeting to explain the current role of Overview and Scrutiny in the development of the Budget and Policy Framework (Appendix A). Members discussed how the Overview and Scrutiny Committee should, in future, address the Budget and Policy Framework.

Officers suggested that relevant Officers could arrange a meeting with Members to explain the Budget and Policy Framework in more detail.

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Chair

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The Chair asked for written details of Worcestershire County Council's approach to involving Overview and Scrutiny in the development of the Framework to be provided for Member consideration at the next meeting.

RESOLVED that

subject to Members' comments as recorded in the preamble above, the Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on the 5th of June 2007 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

4. THE FORWARD PLAN

Members noted a number of areas on the Forward Plan for Overview and Scrutiny consideration.

A) Election by Thirds – Review:

Members discussed the election arrangements currently used by Redditch Borough Council. The Chair suggested that these election arrangements could be reviewed as part of a scrutiny exercise. Officers informed Members that this issue had recently been considered by Members and that local authority election arrangements were likely to be addressed in forthcoming legislation.

B) Fees and Charges – Planning Documents:

The Chair suggested that the proposed Fees and Charges Task and Finish Group would need to organise scrutiny work with due regard to the timing of the Executive Committee's consideration of this subject.

RESOLVED that

subject to Members' comments as recorded in the preamble above, no action be taken in response to the Forward Plan.

5. CALL-IN

RESOLVED that

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no action be taken to initiate call-in procedures on any of the Key Decisions contained in the Executive Committee Decision Notice.

6. SCRUTINY PROPOSAL FORM

The Chair informed Members that Officers had produced the Scrutiny Proposal Form according to the specifications provided by Members at the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the 5th June 2007.

RESOLVED that

subject to Members' comments as recorded in the preamble above, the Scrutiny Proposal Form be approved.

7. COMMUNICATIONS TASK AND FINISH GROUP

Members discussed a draft Council Communications Scrutiny Proposal Form. The Chair suggested that the exercise should be divided into three separate Task and Finish Group exercises that could each be completed in a short space of time. Members agreed that each stage of the Task and Finish Group would produce recommendations for the consideration of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The three stages were described in the following manner.

A) Scrutiny of the Council's Strategic Communications:

Members agreed that this stage would review the Council's strategic corporate communications objectives. Members would also review the methods used by the Council to achieve those objectives and whether the six key tools identified in national guidelines were the most appropriate for Redditch Borough Council.

B) Scrutiny of the Council's Approach to External Communications:

Members concurred that this stage would review the quality of existing external communications arrangements at Redditch Borough Council. Issues for review at this stage were discussed and identified including; the Council's relations with the media, website content management and how the Council monitored the affects of its approach to external communications.

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C) Communications:

Scrutiny of the Council's Internal

Members agreed that the final stage of the review could focus on the Council's internal communications arrangements. The Chair suggested that this area would require further scoping and that some details would be more suitable for an internal management review.

Councillor Brunner was appointed Chair of this Task and Finish Group. Councillors Fry, Banks, MacMillan and Passingham also expressed an interest in participating in the exercise. Members agreed that the Borough Director and other relevant Officers should be involved. Members noted the need to also appoint other non-executive Members to participate in the Task and Finish Group

Members agreed that the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, in consultation with Party Group Leaders, would determine the membership of Task and Finish Group.

RESOLVED that

subject to Members' comments as recorded in the preamble above, the establishment of the Communications Task and Finish Group be approved.

8. FEES AND CHARGES TASK AND FINISH GROUP

The Chair explained that he had prepared his "Review of RBC's Fees and Charges" report to inform discussion and that the terms of reference and key objectives for this Task and Finish Group remained to be finalised. The Chair suggested that a Task and Finish Group would need to discern which charges were discretionary and which were mandatory, would need to scrutinise charging policies and would be expected to review issues such as variable cost recovery. Officers informed Members that this review of fees and charges could influence preparations for the 2008/09 financial year.

Member attention was directed to the two National Audit Commission reports attached to the agenda. Members discussed these reports and noted the Audit Commission's advice not to focus on revenue generation when reviewing local authority fees and charges.

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The Chair suggested that a Fees and Charges Task and Finish Group should focus on reviewing the Council's strategic objectives in relation to fees and charges. Officers suggested that Members could progress from the strategic level to consider issues such as subsidies and social inclusion. Members agreed that these areas could be reviewed by the Task and Finish Group on a stage by stage basis.

The appointment of Councillor MacMillan as the Chair of the Fees and Charges Task and Finish Group was approved by Members. Councillor Fry also expressed an interest in participating in this review. Members agreed that the Borough Director and other relevant Officers should be involved in the exercise. Members noted the need to also appoint other non-executive Members to participate in the Task and Finish Group.

As in the previous case, it was agreed that the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, in consultation with Party Group Leaders, would finalise membership arrangements.

RESOLVED that

subject to Members' comments as recorded in the preamble above, the establishment of the Fees and Charges Task and Finish Group be approved.

9. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MARKETING BROCHURE

The Chair informed Members that relevant Officers had produced the Marketing Document and that this document had explored various options for marketing the Overview and Scrutiny process. Members agreed that the suggestions contained in the document would produce a brochure that would be more complex than originally intended. The Chair suggested that a marketing document with this level of detail would be more appropriate for use following the introduction of the Community Calls for Action process in spring 2008.

Officers noted that further information about the design and distribution of a Scrutiny Marketing Brochure was required to determine the costs of the document. Members discussed options for the design and distribution of a Scrutiny Marketing Document. It was agreed that Officers should provide examples of Scrutiny Marketing Documents used by other local authorities for consideration at the next Committee meeting.

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RESOLVED that

subject to Members' comments as recorded in the preamble above, Members discuss this matter further at the next meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

10. MEMBER TRAINING

The Chair informed Members that Councillor Brunner had requested this item to be included on the agenda. Members discussed the training courses provided by the Improvement and Development Agency and agreed that these courses were relatively expensive.

It was noted by Councillor Fry that Member development was a wider issue that needed to be addressed by the Council. The Committee discussed developing a portfolio of key skills for Overview and Scrutiny Members as the basis for identifying training needs. The Chair reminded Members that training requirements could vary and suggested that Officers would need to address these with Members on an individual basis.

Officers suggested that Overview and Scrutiny training for Members could be developed in consultation with existing internal training providers. It was suggested that Members could undertake to discuss and identify the training and development needs of Overview and Scrutiny Members in an informal group setting. This information could then be conveyed to internal training providers to facilitate the development of bespoke training courses.

It was agreed that a small group of members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee should meet to identify Overview and Scrutiny Members' training needs. Members agreed that this small group of Members would then meet David McGrath to discuss training provision.

Councillors Banks, Brunner, Fry and Thomas expressed an interest in participating in this exercise. Members agreed that Councillor Thomas would Chair the group's activities.

RESOLVED that

subject to Members' comments, as recorded in the preamble above, Member consultation with David McGrath to identify Overview and Scrutiny training provision be approved.

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11. REFERRALS

There were no referrals.

12. WORK PROGRAMME

During consideration of the Committee's future Work Programme, Councillor Thomas proposed that Member remuneration might be an additional item for Member consideration. Attention was directed to the lack of parity between the financial remuneration of Members of the Executive Committee and Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Councillor Thomas suggested that Overview and Scrutiny Committee Members should be similarly remunerated this year because they were expected to Chair Task and Finish Groups.

RECOMMENDED that

the Council remunerate Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the basis of financial parity with members of the Executive Committee.

The Meeting commenced at 7.00 pm
and closed at 9.00 pm