

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

17th July 2012

MINUTES

Present:

Councillor Juliet Brunner (Chair), Councillor Simon Chalk (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Andrew Brazier, David Bush, Andrew Fry, Pattie Hill, Gay Hopkins and Pat Witherspoon

Officers:

A Guida-Jones, J Pickering, L Tompkin and A de Warr

Democratic Services Officers:

J Bayley and M Craggs

31. APOLOGIES AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES

An apology for absence was received on behalf of Councillor John Fisher.

32. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND OF PARTY WHIP

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

33. MINUTES

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on Tuesday 19th June and Monday 25th June 2012 be approved as true and correct records of the meetings and signed by the Chair.

34. EXTERNAL REFURBISHMENT OF HOUSING STOCK - TRANSFORMATION UPDATE REPORT

The Committee received an update on external refurbishment works in Woodrow and a presentation regarding the outcomes of the transformation process on repairs and maintenance arrangements at Redditch Borough Council.

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Chair

Officers explained that as part of the External Wall Insulation Project works had already been undertaken on properties located in Winyates. The works had been offered to both Council house tenants and owner occupiers in Winyates, particularly residents who lived in Dolben Lane, Fownhope Close, Kinnersley Close, Lingen Close and Mordiford Close.

The majority of feedback that had been received regarding the External Wall Insulation Project had been positive. Indeed, whilst initially there had been some resistance amongst a number of residents to the works, by July 2012 every eligible resident had agreed to undertake insulation works on their properties.

The choice of the surface colour for the external insulation works was discussed in detail. Some concerns were expressed that the cream colour, which had been selected for the insulation works in Winyates, might attract graffiti and could require extensive cleaning. However, Members were advised that the colour had been selected because it was considered to be neutral and the material was supposed to be self-cleaning which would minimise the risk of deterioration in appearance of the properties. Furthermore, Members noted that the use of a cream surface colour had helped to improve the level of lighting in some parts of Winyates, particularly in the alleyways located in the estates.

Members were advised that a similar external wall insulation project was due to be delivered in Woodrow. A feasibility study of the works had been completed and suitable sites for the project had been identified. The main focus of this work would be on Ombersley Close and Rushock Close, which had formed a significant part of the focus of the External Refurbishment of Housing Stock Short, Sharp review in 2010. In total 261 properties would be eligible for the insulation works, including 112 Council houses and 149 private homes.

Lessons had been learned from the Winyates project which would be addressed in Woodrow. In particular, Officers had been concerned about the level of consultation that had been undertaken in advance of project delivery in Winyates. To minimise the potential for similar problems to occur in Woodrow Officers had sent written correspondence to every property in eligible areas. This correspondence had explained the purpose of the project and had provided information about the additional repairs and maintenance services that would be available. In addition, all residents had been informed that the works could be delivered free of charge. A community bus, which would act as a base where residents could

learn more about the project, would also be utilised for consultation purposes in Woodrow.

As part of the project loft insulation works and boiler replacements would be provided alongside external insulation works. In addition, there would be an opportunity to replace gutters and down pipes and to undertake painting works on the roofs of properties. Similar works had been undertaken in Winyates where existing structures were observed to have been in a condition of disrepair.

The insulation works in Winyates had been delivered at a cost of £450,000. This had represented a significant reduction in relation to initial estimates that the project would cost £750,000 to deliver. By contrast, the project was due to be delivered at no cost to the Council in Woodrow. A utilities company, E.ON, had been approached to help finance the project on the basis that it would enable the company to meet specific carbon debt targets. There was a risk that if E.ON was unable to address this debt the company would receive a significant fine from the Office of Gas and Electricity Markets, (Ofgem). Through funding the insulation project the company would be able to demonstrate that it was helping to meet carbon management targets.

There was the potential that a similar amount of funding would be available to fund a further insulation project in another part of the Borough. Abbeydale had been identified as a suitable location for an insulation project, though further work was required to identify specific properties in the ward that required insulation works.

The presentation from Officers focused in detail on the impact of the Council's trial transformation process on repairs and maintenance services. Prior to the launch of the trial Officers had listened to verbatim requests that were made directly to Customer Service Advisers over the phone. A number of key issues were consistently raised as areas of concern by customers. This included; a request for the Council to clarify when an operative would be visiting their property; ensuring that Officers understood the customers' interpretation of their problem and that staff could meet the customer's needs; and helping to prevent issues that would impact on the condition of a home, such as a damp problem.

Repair and maintenance job tickets could be raised by a variety of teams. Unfortunately, Officers discovered that many job tickets were being raised for inspection purposes rather than for the trade operatives, thereby delaying works. Furthermore, Officers discovered that there was a relatively high rate of failure demand, or actions which had not met the customers' expectations. Trade

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operatives were also found to be undertaking a number of jobs which could be considered to be waste. Generally, waste occurred as a result of the trade operative needing to return to stores for particular tools and materials in order to complete a job.

A total of 1,370 repair and maintenance job tickets were considered by Officers. 76 per cent of the jobs had been completed following an issue of a single job ticket. However, 26 per cent of the jobs reviewed had required between 2 – 7 additional tickets. Multiple tickets were issued for a variety of reasons, including due to a need for an external contractor to deliver work, referral to another department and the need to await of additional parts.

To address these problems the Housing Team had launched a new trial repairs and maintenance system as part of the transformation process. A group of four trade operatives had participated in this trial and the work that they had undertaken had been closely monitored. The vans utilised by the trade operatives had been fully stocked with standard equipment to minimise the requirement for trade operatives to leave properties in order to obtain necessary tools.

The outcomes of the trial had been largely positive. Out of 215 demands received by the operatives only three had resulted in failure demands, representing a 99 per cent value demand rate. In addition the end to end time for completing the works required had reduced from a maximum of 75 days to a quicker completion rate of 6.52 days. The tradesmen had reported an increase in job satisfaction whilst tenants had predominantly complimented the new service arrangements.

Additional work remained to be completed in order to establish the new process as the standard working practice in repairs and maintenance. The system would need to be extended to encompass a total of 43 staff from the four tradesmen who were already participating in the process. In addition, the Council's ICT team were in the process of developing a system that would enable the Council to more effectively control repair and maintenance work and appointments. Officers were considering introducing a single base for all repairs and maintenance and housing staff, though there was also the possibility that only the housing capital and housing repairs teams would be based at the same sites. The housing team would continue to work with the stores as part of transformation at the site, to ensure that further improvements could be made.

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The Committee praised Officers for the improvements that had been made to repair and maintenance arrangements as a result of transformation and thanked Officers for the presentation.

RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

35. CO-LOCATION OF THE ONE STOP SHOP AT WOODROW LIBRARY - PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY

The Committee received a presentation and report on the subject of the Co-location of the One Stop Shop at Woodrow Library for Pre-Scrutiny.

(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:

- the financial or business affairs of a particular person (including the authority holding that information) and;
- any consultations or negotiations, or contemplated consultations or negotiations in connection with labour relation matters arising between the authority and employees of the authority).

36. CORPORATE PERFORMANCE REPORT - QUARTER 4, PERIOD ENDING 31ST MARCH 2012

The Committee received the quarter four corporate performance report for 2011/12 for comment.

The report focused on 18 indicators, of which 11 had improved in performance and three had declined in performance when compared with the same time the previous year. The indicators which demonstrated improvements in performance included: the time taken to process housing benefit and Council Tax Benefit; the time lost to the organisation due to sickness absence; a reduction in the amount of residual household waste collected by the Council; and a reduction in the amount of rent owing from Council tenants.

There were two indicators which were highlighted as showing relative concern in relation to declining performance. This included the number of households requiring temporary accommodation, which had increased from three households in 2010/11 to 14 households in 2011/12. In addition, Officers had raised concerns

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that the number of invoices paid by the Council within 30 days of receipt had remained relatively static for the last eight quarters.

The Committee noted that there had been a decline in the average time taken to re-let local authority housing. This increase in time was largely as a result of high maintenance requirements in January 2012 resulting from a heavy workload and staff shortages. Members noted that the rate for re-letting Council housing impacted to an extent on the number of households in temporary accommodation and it was therefore important to increase the average time taken to re-let local authority housing in order to increase accommodation provision for people at risk of homelessness.

Members noted that there had been a slight reduction in the percentage of household waste which was re-used, recycled or composted. This reduction had largely occurred prior to the conclusion of the Increasing Rates of Recycling Scrutiny Review and it was anticipated that the actions proposed by the group would start to impact on the Council's performance in subsequent quarters.

RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

37. ACTIONS LIST

RESOLVED that

the Committee's Actions List be noted.

38. EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MINUTES AND SCRUTINY OF THE FORWARD PLAN

The Committee received the minutes of the Executive Committee meeting held on 26th June 2012 and the latest edition of the Forward Plan. The following discussions ensued.

a) Executive Committee minutes

The Committee noted that the Executive Committee had received and endorsed all of the recommendations that had been proposed by the Promoting Sporting Participation Scrutiny Group. However, the Committee's recommendations on the subject of the revision of the Medium Term Financial Plan 2012/13 had been rejected by the Executive Committee.

b) Forward Plan

Members noted that a number of items were due to be subject to pre-decision scrutiny in September 2012. To ensure that Members completed evidence based pre-scrutiny the Committee agreed that Short, Sharp Reviews should be established to scrutinise these subjects in further detail during July - September 2012. In particular, it was agreed that Short, Sharp Reviews should be established to scrutinise the *Concessionary Rents Policy* and the *Sickness Policy – Review*, scheduled for the Executive Committee's consideration on 18th September 2012.

The Committee noted that Members were also scheduled to pre-scrutinise the Tenancy Strategy and Policy 2012-14. However, Members did not consider that it was necessary to establish a Short, Sharp Review of this subject and it was concluded that the item should be removed from the Committee's Work Programme.

RESOLVED that

- 1) **the minutes of the Executive Committee meeting that was held on 26th June 2012 be noted;**
- 2) **a Short, Sharp Pre-Scrutiny Review of the Concessionary Rents Policy take place in July – September 2012;**
- 3) **Councillors Brunner and Brazier be appointed to the Short, Sharp Pre-Scrutiny Review of the Concessionary Rents Policy;**
- 4) **A Short, Sharp Pre-Scrutiny of the Sickness Policy – Review take place in July – September 2012;**
- 5) **Councillors Fisher and Witherspoon be appointed to the Short, Sharp Pre-Scrutiny of the Sickness Policy – Review; and**
- 6) **the Tenancy Strategy and Policy 2012-14, scheduled for pre-scrutiny in September 2012, be removed from the Committee's Work Programme.**

39. TASK & FINISH REVIEWS - DRAFT SCOPING DOCUMENTS

Councillor Hopkins presented a completed scoping document containing the proposed terms of reference for a review of whether to establish an Arts Centre in Redditch.

The Committee was advised that the potential to establish an arts centre for Redditch had been discussed in previous years, though no centre had been introduced to date. Members were advised that a central venue could help to increase opportunities for residents to participate in the arts. Furthermore, there were a number of arts groups which would benefit from the introduction of an arts centre as many arts bodies were struggling to secure permanent premises in which to operate.

Councillor Hopkins acknowledged that there was a risk that the review would raise expectations within the local community that could not necessarily be met. However, there was significant support within the local community for the introduction of a Redditch Arts Centre and a review would help to establish in a transparent fashion whether this objective would be feasible.

The Committee was generally receptive to the proposed review and concurred that it could represent a useful exercise. However, concerns were raised that the review needed to take into account additional leisure and cultural activities; such as arts and crafts and youth activities as well as ongoing campaigns to retain community assets such as the Redditch Youth House. To address these concerns it was agreed that the title of the review should be altered to Arts and Culture Centre Task Group.

Members noted that the Redditch Town Centre Partnership had submitted a bid for funding in the second round of the Mary Portas Pilot to revitalise towns in Britain. As part of this bid process the Redditch Town Centre Partnership was proposing that funding would be utilised to create a community arts centre in one of the vacant units located in the town centre. Success in this bidding process would create the potential for an Arts Centre scrutiny review to duplicate existing work. For this reason Councillor Hopkins explained that she was proposing that the review should be launched in September 2012 only in the event that the partnership's bid was unsuccessful.

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RESOLVED that

- 1) **subject to funding not being secured in the second round of the Mary Portas Pilot, an Arts and Culture Centre Task Group review be launched in September 2012;**
- 2) **Councillor Gay Hopkins be appointed to Chair the review; and**
- 3) **the contents of the scoping document be noted.**

40. TASK GROUPS - PROGRESS REPORTS

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

- a) Access for Disabled People Task Group – Chair, Councillor Andrew Fry

The Committee was informed that the group had recently visited Shopmobility. Members had visited Shopmobility using a Dial a Ride vehicle and the Chair had travelled in a wheelchair to provide him with an understanding of the customers' experience. The wheelchair had been securely fastened in the vehicle and the journey had felt safe and secure.

The group was on target to complete their review according to schedule in August 2012. The review findings would be jointly presented by the current Chair of the group as well as the former Chair of the group, Councillor Alan Mason. The Committee was advised that the need for consistency in the chairmanship of Task Group reviews would be raised and suggestions would be made about the potential for changes to be made to the Council's constitution on this subject.

- b) Redditch Market – Chair, Councillor Andrew Brazier

The Chair advised that the group had held two meetings. At the first meeting former reviews that had focused on relevant subject areas had been considered by Members. A brainstorming exercise had also been undertaken to provide Members with an opportunity to identify appropriate sources of evidence that would need to be considered during the review.

A second meeting had taken place on 17th July 2012. During this meeting representatives of the Redditch Town Centre

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Partnership had been interviewed. The group had also arranged to interview representatives of the North Worcestershire Economic Development Unit as part of the exercise.

RESOLVED that

the update reports be noted.

41. HEALTH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Councillor Witherspoon, the Committee's representative on the Worcestershire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC), provided an update on the latest meeting of HOSC which had taken place on Tuesday 17th July 2012.

During the course of the meeting Members had been consulted about the application for Foundation Trust Status for Worcestershire Health and Care NHS Trust. The implications of Foundation Trust status for community hospitals in the county had been discussed in detail. Concerns had been expressed about the potential difficulties that would occur as a result of the consultation process coinciding with the ongoing Joint Services Review for the Acute NHS Trust, though Members had been assured that no difficulties were anticipated by Officers.

The Strategic Modernisation Programme of the Adult Acute and Community Mental Health Services had also been considered during the meeting. These services were in the process of being reviewed and a number of beds for patients receiving mental health support services were due to be removed. However, many of the centre where mental health services were provided in the county would remain open.

RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

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

The Chair of the Crime and Disorder Scrutiny Panel, Councillor Andrew Brazier, provided an update on the latest meeting of the Panel which had taken place on Thursday 5th July 2012.

The meeting of the Panel had taken place a few days after the launch of the North Worcestershire Community Safety Partnership. For this reason it had not been possible to consider the work of the

partnership in detail. However, Members had been assured that the specific community safety needs of Redditch residents would continue to be addressed by the partnership.

RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

**43. WEST MIDLANDS REGIONAL SCRUTINY NETWORK -
FEEDBACK REPORT**

Councillor Witherspoon provided an update on the recent meeting of the West Midlands Regional Scrutiny Network, which took place on Friday 22nd June 2012 in Stoke-on-Trent.

The meeting had provided Members with an opportunity to speak with representatives of other local authorities about best practice in Overview and Scrutiny. During the course of the meeting the potential for development training sessions to be provided at meetings of the West Midlands Regional Scrutiny Network had been discussed. These training sessions could be facilitated by representatives of the Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS) at a cost of £40.00 per delegate. Fifteen topics had been identified as potential subject for consideration during these development sessions.

The Committee was advised that participation in the network meetings represented value for money. Members were urged to consider participating in future sessions.

RESOLVED that

1) Members of the Committee should inform Officers about their preferred subjects for development sessions; and

2) the report be noted.

44. REFERRALS

There were no referrals.

45. WORK PROGRAMME

RESOLVED that

the Committee's Work Programme be noted.

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46. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND 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 3 and 4 of Part 1 of Schedule 12 (A) of the said Act, as amended.

Item 5: Co-Location of the One Stop Shop at Woodrow Library –
Pre-Decision Scrutiny

The Meeting commenced at 6.58 pm
and closed at 8.50 pm