

WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

COMMUNITY & REGENERATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

THE EARL BALDWIN SUITE, DUKE HOUSE, CLENSMORE STREET,
KIDDERMINSTER

WEDNESDAY, 3RD FEBRUARY 2010 (6:00PM)

Present:

Councillors: H E Dyke (Chairman), J Phillips (Vice-Chairman), G H Eeles, D R Godwin, P V Hayward, M A W Hazlewood, M B Kelly, D J Millis, M Price, K H Prosser, M J Shellie, D R Sheppard, S J Williams, and G C Yarranton.

Observers: There were no members present as observers.

C&R.86 Apologies for Absence

There were no apologies for absence.

C&R.87 Appointment of Substitutes

No substitutes were appointed.

C&R.88 Declaration of Interests

Councillors M B Kelly, M J Shellie and G C Yarranton declared personal and prejudicial interests in Agenda Item No. 5 "Report on the Re-commissioning of the Home Improvement Agency", as they are Members of the Community Housing Group's Management Board, and proposals contained in the report had implications for the financial affairs of that organisation.

C&R.89 Minutes

The Chairman advised the Committee that minute C&R.80 was inaccurate, and should instead be reworded as follows: Agenda Item 7. "Scrutiny Proposal Form: Bewdley Resident's Season Tickets" be brought forward to allow Cabinet Members and Officers to attend another meeting, that had had to be rescheduled at short notice because of wintry weather.

Decision: That subject to the above amendment, the minutes of the meeting held on 7th January 2010 be confirmed as a correct record, and signed by the Chairman.

18:04 Councillors M B Kelly, M J Shellie and G C Yarranton left the room at this point.

C&R.90 Report on the Re-commissioning of the Home Improvement Agency

The Committee considered a report from the Strategic Housing Services Manager which updated Members on proposals to re-commission the current Care and Repair Agency Services (also known as Home Improvement Agency (HIA) services) in

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partnership with Worcestershire County Council, Supporting People, the Worcestershire Primary Care Trust (PCT) and the six District Councils, and also updated Members on the progress in joining the Kickstart programme.

The Strategic Housing Services Manager informed the Committee of a long standing desire across the six Worcestershire District Councils to bring together the two existing HIA's, and that in addition several important sources of funding were dependent upon an eventual move towards one Countywide HIA body.

Members were advised that a similar report had been previously agreed by Cabinet in March 2009, but that the details of the planned arrangements had changed significantly, which necessitated the report being reconsidered by Scrutiny and Cabinet.

The Committee was informed that work had been carried out on a draft specification for the Worcestershire HIA Services, which was attached as Appendix 1 to the report. Furthermore, Officers had cooperated with the Worcestershire Primary Care Trust (PCT) and Worcestershire County Council Adult and Community Services, which had attracted additional funding to improve signposting and advice services.

In addition, the new plans included provisions for a Hospital Liaison Service, with the intention of facilitating faster moves from hospitals to prevent bed blocking.

Members were advised that the cost to the District Council of the new plans was the same as per the existing arrangements.

The Chairman enquired about point 3.9 of the report which referred to NHS involvement in the existing arrangements, and specifically asked how the new arrangements planned to address delays which were perceived to be attributable to Occupational Therapy Assessments. The Strategic Housing Services Manager advised that such delays were to be addressed by several measures including alterations to the draft specification, increased cooperation with an Occupational Therapy Manager to tighten the referrals process, and that the possibility of the HIA employing its own Occupational Therapist was also being considered. Furthermore, the Officer commented that there were some functions related to the assessments which could be undertaken under the legislation relating to the HIA, without the involvement of an Occupational Therapist.

A Member asked how many Occupational Therapists were currently allocated to the District. In response, the Strategic Housing Services Manager advised that there was an office base in the District, but that for involvement with the existing HIA arrangements, there were less than eight Occupational Therapists across the County. Furthermore, the Strategic Housing Services Manager agreed to email Members with clarification of the figure for capital spending which was allocated to the existing Occupational Therapists as part of the HIA agreement.

In response to a question from a Member, the Strategic Housing Services Manager advised that Worcestershire Social Services were not currently part of the planned HIA arrangements, but that it was hoped that they would be at a later date. The committee was informed that both Social Services and Age Concern held budgets for small adaptation works, such as grab rail installation, and basic handyman services, and it was hoped that the new HIA arrangements, would in the future, be able to link into these funding arrangements.

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In response to a further question, the Strategic Housing Services Manager advised that the PCT were involved with the planned arrangements via the input of an Occupational Therapy Manager, and that this was relationship was intended to become part of the longer term management arrangements. Furthermore, some PCT staff working in Acute Discharge Units were planned to be employed under the new HIA arrangements by the HIA itself as opposed to the PCT.

A Member queried how the services provided by the existing District HIA compared to others across the County, and also how the quality of service of the District HIA compared to others. In response, the Strategic Housing Services Manager advised that where Disabled Facilities Grants were concerned, there was little difference across the County, as the implementation of this scheme was governed by the relevant legislation. Furthermore, The Officer felt that the Decent Homes aspect of the District HIA's work was particularly successful.

In response to a comment from the Chair, the Strategic Housing Services Manager advised that the District HIA was trying to prevent adaptations being removed from homes after previous tenants moved out, but that where this wasn't practical, a recycling scheme was being undertaken by Festival Housing, which was able to recycle items such as stair lifts.

A Member asked how loans from the HIA were repaid. In response, the Strategic Housing Services Manager advised that loans under the new Kickstart scheme were repaid from potential equity increases in sold homes, without interest payments.

A Member asked what support the new service could provide for dementia sufferers. In response, the Strategic Housing Services Manager advised that the new HIA would have links with Worcestershire Telecare, but that she would look into this aspect further.

The Officer confirmed that the proposed date for implementing a Service Level Agreement was 1st April 2010, but advised that this might be subject to delays.

Agreed:

- 1. The Strategic Housing Services Manager to distribute to Members information detailing the budget for Capital Spending which was held by the County-wide Occupational Therapy Department, and also the number of Occupational Therapists involved within this.**
- 2. The Strategic Housing Services Manager to look into how the new HIA could support dementia sufferers.**
- 3. To recommend to Cabinet:**
 - i. To approve the commencement of the Home Improvement Agency in April 2010.**
 - ii. To grant delegated authority to the Director of Legal and Corporate Services, in consultation with the Director of Planning and Regulatory Services and the Portfolio Holder, to finalise the necessary contractual arrangements for the commencement of the new arrangements.**

18:27 Councillors M B Kelly, M J Shellie and G C Yarranton entered the room at this point.

C&R.91 Kidderminster Town Centre Manager – Annual Update Report

The Committee considered a report from the Kidderminster Town Centre Manager which updated Members on the work, progress and achievements of the Kidderminster Town Centre Manager over the previous 12 months.

The Town Centre Manager advised Members that the post was part funded by the District Council and Henderson Global Investors, owners of the Weavers Wharf site.

Members were advised that the Town Centre Manager had overseen a Skillsmart Audit of the town, which resulted in the town being ranked 4th place nationally. Three of the winning retailers from the Skillsmart Audit were being featured in editorials in the inKidderminster Magazine, to promote various aspects of the town. In response to a query from a Member it was clarified that these winners were Phoenix Fireplaces, Lawrence's Pine, and Foster's Jewellers.

Members were informed of reduced levels of funding from retailers for the Kidderminster Christmas Lights, due to the economic climate.

The Committee was advised that a fashion show was planned to be held, to sell Kidderminster's strengths as a clothes shopping destination.

In response to a query from a Member, the Town Centre Manager advised the inKidderminster magazine had not been distributed to the entire District, and not to Chaddesley Corbett. The magazine had been distributed with the Kidderminster shuttle, which had distribution limitations within Kidderminster, but was the most cost effective method.

A Member queried whether the Town Centre Manager could provide increased support for the Kidderminster Carnival, and the Town Centre Manager responded that she had suggested the Carnival become a winter event, in order to tie in with the Christmas lights switch on, but that this was not currently favoured. Furthermore, she perceived that the hours and the nature of the work required to support this event outside of work might conflict with her current role.

A Member asked the Town Centre Manager whether there was any evidence that her activities increase footfall in Kidderminster, and also asked why she was involved in a meeting between the Kidderminster Industrial Chaplains, Marks and Spencers and Debenhams. In response, the Town Centre Manager informed the Committee that it was difficult to argue that her role had increased footfall, in the light of the current economic climate, but perceived that Kidderminster Town Centre was performing well for its size, and stated that since she had been in post, the number of empty units in Kidderminster had seen a slight decrease, whereas some other towns had seen up to 15% increases in their levels of empty units. Furthermore, she perceived that her role included a duty to look after traders as well as trade, and praised the role of the Kidderminster Industrial Chaplains in doing so.

A Member perceived that Kidderminster lacked shopping facilities for older women's clothing, to which the Town Centre Manager proposed that the Member might wish to suggest relevant store names for her to look into.

Agreed: To note the comments made and to endorse the Town Centre Manager's Report.

C&R.92 Recommendation Tracking

The Committee considered the Recommendation Tracking Form which detailed the outcomes from recommendations, which fell within this Committee's terms of reference, which were put forward to Cabinet during the municipal year 2008 – 2009.

A summary of the comments made in relation to this item is provided below:

- In relation to the item "Customer Services Review" a Member perceived that funding for the Worcestershire Hub should not be cut, in the light of plans to increase the workload of the Hub.
- The Chairman drew attention to the item "Local Land and Property Gazetteer (LLPG)" and requested the Assistant Scrutiny / Committee Officer enquire as to its progress, and to respond to Members with the information.
- In response to the item "Recommendations from the No Surprises Review Panel" a Member commented that he had made repeated requests for an Internal Telephone Directory and not received one. In response the Chairman requested the Assistant Scrutiny / Committee Officer distribute a copy of the Telephone Directory Electronically to Members, and suggested that Members might wish to contact the Committee Section should they require a hard copy.
- The Chairman drew Members' attention to the item "Countryside Service and Implications of Taking on Additional Land" and the Cultural Services Manager advised that a delay in a transfer of land had meant that only one year's funding had been available for the post in question, and that recruitment for the post had been delayed until sufficient funding had become available to facilitate a longer, and more worthwhile post.

Agreed:

1. **The Assistant Scrutiny / Committee Officer to respond to Members with information relating to the progress of the Local Land and Property Gazetteer (LLPG).**
2. **The Assistant Scrutiny / Committee Officer to circulate an electronic copy of the Internal Telephone Directory. Members to contact the Committee Section should they desire a hard copy.**
3. **The comments made be noted.**

C&R.93 Feedback from Cabinet

Agreed: The contents of the Feedback from Cabinet item be noted.

C&R.94 Work Programme

Agreed: The changes to the Work Programme be noted.

C&R.95 Press Involvement

Agreed: No items requiring press involvement were identified.

C&R.96 Exempt Information

Decision: Under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act, 1972 the press and public be excluded from the meeting during the consideration of the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of “Exempt Information” as defined in paragraphs 1, 2 and 3 of Part I of Schedule 12A of the Act.

Summary of Minutes

The following proceedings were considered after the press and public had been excluded from the meeting. A summary of the minutes relating to these items has been made as “exempt information” would be disclosed if the minutes were published in full.

C&R.97 The Provision of a new District Cemetery, Crematorium and Associated Facilities

The Committee considered a report from the Director of Community and Partnership Services which provided an update on progress in delivering the new District cemetery and crematorium.

The Cultural Services Manager updated Members on the progress of contract negotiations for the construction of the new Cemetery.

A Member commented that he had been involved in the initial Cemetery Review, and requested that a line drawing of the proposed site be sent to Members.

The Cultural Services Manager agreed to provide an update report on the Cemetery to the April meeting of the Committee. A Member enquired as to whether a detailed timeline and development plan had been drawn up, to which the Cultural Services Manager responded that such details would be included in the update report to be provided in April.

In response to a question from a Member, the Cultural Services Manager advised that the update report would include a timeline for the construction of the Crematorium. Furthermore the report would clarify whether there were any proposals for green burials, and artist’s impressions of the proposed development. In addition, the Cultural Services Manager agreed to establish which town boundary the site was located within.

Agreed:

- 1. A further report on the topic be provided to the April meeting of the Committee, which will include the following information:**
 - i. Line drawings and artist’s impressions of the proposed development;**
 - ii. A detailed timeline and development plan.**
 - iii. A timeline for construction of the Crematorium.**
 - iv. Clarification of any proposals for green burials.**
 - v. Clarification of which town boundary the site was located within.**

The contents of the report and comments made be noted.

The meeting ended at 19:14 pm.