

WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

CORPORATE RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

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

THURSDAY, 9TH SEPTEMBER 2010 (6.00PM)

Present:

Councillors: G W Ballinger (Chairman), P B Harrison (Vice-Chairman), J Aston, A J Buckley, H E Dyke, N Gale, M B Kelly, D J McCann, J W Parish, J Phillips, M Price, M A Salter, and J Thomas.

Observers:

Councillors J P Campion and N J Desmond.

CR.30 Apologies for Absence:

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors: J Greener and T Ingham.

CR.31 Appointment of Substitutes:

Councillor J Phillips was appointed as a substitute for Councillor J Greener. Councillor M Price was appointed as a substitute for Councillor T Ingham.

CR.32 Declaration of Interests

No declarations of interest were made.

CR.33 Minutes

Decision: The minutes of the meeting held on 8th July 2010 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

CR.34 Matters Arising

In relation to minute CR.21 'New Waste Collection Arrangements', the Chairman of the Committee advised Members that the Director of Resources was planning to arrange a Member site visit to the Norton Recycling Facility.

CR.35 Forward Plan

The Chairman advised Members that consideration of the Forward Plan would be considered as a standing item on each agenda.

No items for scrutiny within the Forward Plan were identified.

CR.36 Budget Review Panel and Financial Update

The Committee received a presentation from the Director of Resources which

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updated Members on the current financial situation facing the Council, and outlined plans for scrutiny of the forthcoming budget.

A summary of the key points raised in the presentation is provided below:

- The Audit Commission was to be abolished, although the arrangements and implications of this decision were not yet clear.
- The Government had proposed to abolish the cap on Council Tax, with the possibility of local referendums to establish what was deemed to be an acceptable level of tax, and also the possibility of shadow budgets.
- A Government consultation was currently underway regarding local government finance.
- Concessionary Travel funding was expected to move to Worcestershire County Council.
- It was not yet clear by how much Government funding to the Council would be cut, and this was not expected to be clarified until after the spending review on 20th October 2010.
- The budget process was dependent upon the outcome of the spending review, and a budget report was expected to be brought to the 21st December meeting of the Cabinet. A consultation would be undertaken following this.
- The financial strategy would be considered by the Committee at its meeting on the 10th February 2011.
- A presentation for all Members regarding the implications of the spending review would be provided in early November 2010.
- A budget prioritisation process was not planned for the Budget Review Panel this year, as this had been covered as part of an extensive consultation process carried out by the Corporate Plan Development Review Panel.
- Cabinet Members and Directors were planning to attend the Budget Review Panel meetings.
- Dates for the Budget Review Panel were to be confirmed but were expected to be in early January 2011.
- A grant was expected from the Government to cover a freeze in Council tax rates.
- In response to a question from a Member, the Director of Resources advised that proposed Council tax referendums entailed two votes, one of which would be to set a maximum higher rate of Council tax, but that details regarding this were currently unclear.

Agreed: To note the contents of the presentation.

CR.37

Performance Management Action Plan Progress Update

The Committee considered a report from the Policy and Performance Officer, the purpose of which was to inform Members of progress made against the Performance Management Action Plan as agreed by the Audit Commission.

The Policy and Performance Officer advised Members that the monitoring of performance was important in ensuring value for money, and that in 2008 the Audit Commission recommended that the Council took certain steps to further embed its performance management arrangements, which were then set out in the Council's Performance Management Action Plan.

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Members were advised that although the Audit Commission was due to be disbanded, it was considered that the Action Plan was worth continuing with, in order to ensure the Council's performance management arrangements could be further developed and improved.

Members were advised that guidance notes for the use of the Covalent performance management system were available on the intranet.

Members were informed that the Policy and Performance Officer was working closely with the Wyre Forest Matters Partnership Manager in order to ensure that the processes for monitoring performance management within the Local Strategic Partnership and the Council were closely aligned.

Despite the abolition of the Place Survey, the Worcestershire Viewpoint Survey was being undertaken which would provide useful feedback for the Council to assess.

A Member queried why the rolling out of performance management training was listed as ongoing, and in response, the Policy and Performance Manager advised that she would be contacting Members to arrange further training.

Agreed: That the progress made against the Performance Management Action Plan be noted.

CR.38

Performance Update - How are we doing?

The Committee considered a report from the Policy and Performance Officer which updated Members on the performance of the Council up to 31st July 2010, which included Council Priorities and performance indicators.

A discussion ensued, a summary of which is provided below:

- In response to a query from a Member, the Policy and Performance Officer advised that the target 'NI 155 - Number of affordable homes delivered' was a Local Area Agreement (LAA) target set over three years, which the District had met.
- The Policy and Performance Officer advised that the Affordable Housing Toolkit was overdue, but that the majority of it had been completed, and was expected to be completed by the end of September 2010.
- The Cabinet Member for Resources commented that he expected the next set of performance figures for the recycling and green waste collections to show a considerable improvement, and that compared with August 2009, the Council had seen a 26% increase in the level of recycling. In response to a question, he advised that at the last count, over 1,200 green waste bins had been distributed.
- The Policy and Performance Officer advised that in Q1 2010/11 no Empty Shops Grants had been awarded, but that some grants had been awarded since.
- In response to a question from a Member, the Policy and Performance Officer advised that 43% of 2000 residents in a General User Satisfaction Survey had indicated that they were satisfied with the Council.
- The Policy and Performance Officer informed Members that the Strategic Car Parking Review was expected to be completed by October 2010.
- Several performance figures for the Worcestershire Hub had declined in Q1

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2010/11 and the Policy and Performance Officer informed Members that this was likely to be due to the high call volumes received following changes to the Refuse and Recycling Service. In response, a Member commented that he had visited the Kidderminster Hub several times during this period, and that the Hub were very busy with Refuse and Recycling queries.

The Chairman advised Members that he had asked the Policy and Performance Officer to provide performance management information in a regular Performance Update, and thanked her for the new format of the report.

Agreed: That the progress made to date for Priorities and Performance Indicators be noted.

CR.39 Communications Quarterly Update

The Committee considered a report from the Strategic Partnerships & Projects Manager which provided Members with a quarterly update on the Council's Communication Programme.

A summary of the key points raised is provided below:

- On average, over 90% of the Council's press releases issued made it into the local press.
- The Wyred Weekly newsletter had proved popular with Officers.
- The Strategic Partnerships and Projects Manager advised that whilst she wasn't sure how many Members read Wyred Weekly on a regular basis, all Members were welcome to submit items for inclusion in the newsletter.
- The Intranet was being redesigned, and one of the intended benefits of this was that it would reduce paper consumption. It would also include a message board.
- Communications Champions had been appointed in each directorate, with the intention of improving communications within and across directorates.
- The Council's Media Protocol was being updated to reflect the use of Social Media such as blogs and Twitter.
- An online magazine for the public was being developed, the only cost of which would be design time.
- The Chairman commented that the online magazine would only reach the computer literate, and suggested that private funding could be sourced to enable the magazine to be printed and distributed to hard to reach groups.
- A Member suggested that the magazine could be made available at the Worcestershire Hubs.

Agreed:

- i) That the Communications update be noted.**
- ii) To note that further updates will be published in the Members' Information Bulletin, particularly Viewpoint results and Community Conversation feedback.**

CR.40 Single Site

The Committee received a report from the Chief Executive which gave an update on progress with purchase of the site and the project generally.

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The Director of Legal and Corporate Services advised Members that intrusive ground testing was underway at the site, following the acquisition of title. Most of the tests related to contamination, and every result so far had been excellent.

A planning application for the building would soon be presented at the Planning Committee.

Members were advised that tender documents were due to be issued in November 2010, and investigations were ongoing with regard to what sustainability features could be included in the design.

A Member felt that it was unfortunate that there were currently no partner organisations committing to the building.

Agreed: The developments outlined in the report be noted.

7:15 Councillor J P Campion left the meeting at this point.

CR.41 Co-Opted Members Protocol and Review Panel Protocol and Proposal Form.

The Committee received a report from the Principal Committee Officer which apprised Members of proposed changes to scrutiny procedures regarding the appointment of Co-Opted Members, and the Review Panel Protocol and Proposal Form.

The Assistant Committee / Scrutiny Officer advised Members that a Review Panel Protocol had been written in order to make the procedure for establishing a Review Panel as clear and simple as possible, and to ensure that it was in line with best practice. As part of this, the Review Panel Proposal Form had been revised and simplified in order to make suggesting a Review Panel more straightforward.

In addition, a protocol had been written which set out the procedure for Co-Opting Members onto a Scrutiny Committee. The purpose of this was to set out the procedure, but it also made provision for substitute Co-Optees where they were appointed from an organisation, e.g. the Police Authority. It also made clear that should a Committee decide to terminate a Co-Option, they could do it with immediate effect at any meeting.

The Assistant Committee/Scrutiny Officer advised Members that the revised procedures had been adopted without amendment by the Community and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee.

In response to the Co-Option Protocol, a Member suggested Co-Opting a person onto the Committee. A discussion ensued, and the Member subsequently retracted the proposal before a decision was sought.

A Member suggested amending the wording of the scheme in order to clarify that Co-Optees may be appointed for a specific topic, or for all issues.

Agreed:

- i) To adopt the revised arrangements for the Co-Option of Members onto Scrutiny Committees.**
- ii) To adopt the revised Review Panel Protocol and Proposal form.**

- iii) To clarify in the Co-Opted Members Protocol that Co-Optees may be appointed for a specific topic, or for all issues.**

CR.42 Recommendation Tracking

The Committee considered the outcomes from recommendations which fell within its terms of reference, which were put forward to Cabinet during the municipal year 2009 – 2010.

Agreed: To note the contents of the report.

CR.43 Feedback from Cabinet

Agreed: To note the content of the Cabinet action list, following consideration of the recommendations from its meeting of the 20th July 2010.

CR.44 Work Programme

Agreed: To note the contents of the Work Programme.

CR.45 Press Involvement

There were no items identified for press involvement.

The meeting ended at 7:30 pm.