

WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

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

THURSDAY, 7TH JULY 2011 (6.00 PM)

Present:

Councillors: H E Dyke (Chairman), T Ingham (Vice-Chairman), J Baker, J Greener, I Hardiman, P B Harrison, J A Hart, V Higgs, J Holden, D J McCann, J W Parish, M A Salter, J A Shaw, D R Sheppard and S J Williams.

Observers

Councillors: M J Hart, M B Kelly and J Phillips.

OS.13 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors A J Buckley, N J Desmond, N Gale and A M Sewell.

OS.14 Appointment of Substitutes

Councillor P B Harrison was appointed as a substitute for Councillor N Gale. Councillor M A Salter was appointed as a substitute for Councillor A J Buckley. Councillor J A Shaw was appointed as a substitute for Councillor A Sewell.

OS.15 Declaration of Interests

Councillor J Greener declared a personal interest in agenda item no. 13 as she is a board member of The Community Housing Group.
Councillor I Hardiman declared a personal interest in agenda item no. 13 as he is a board member of The Community Housing Group.
Councillor H E Dyke declared a personal interest in agenda item no. 13 as her husband is employed by The Community Housing Group.

OS.16 Minutes

Decision: The minutes of the meeting held on 2nd June 2011 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

OS.17 Co-option of Members

The Committee considered whether co-opted Members should be appointed on to the Committee and/or future Review Panels.

The Chairman reminded Members of the decision that was agreed at the last Overview & Scrutiny Committee meeting in June 2011. Unfortunately the Recording Equipment, Blogging and Social Media Review Panel had not held their final meeting and therefore a report detailing their recommendations would not be

presented until the September 2011 Scrutiny meeting.

A discussion was held on co-option and it was felt that Members should only be co-opted for their expertise on specific items when required.

Agreed: The Chairman of the Recording, Blogging and Social Media Review Panel would continue for the duration of the review panel. However, the Overview & Scrutiny Committee would not be looking to co-opt anyone to the Overview & Scrutiny Committee for the whole of the duration of the municipal year but would consider requests on a review by review basis.

OS.18 Finance Update

The Director of Resources advised there was no update on Finance matters.

OS.19 Revenues and Benefits Shared Service – Options Appraisal

The Committee considered a report from the Director of Resources for consideration of the future delivery of the Revenues and Benefits Service.

Members were taken through the report which detailed the options available and in response to questions, the following was given:

1. As part of the Budget proposals in February 2011, it had been agreed that there would be a reduced cost for the service and that savings of £150,000 would need to be achieved.
2. Two options were detailed in the report for achieving these savings.
3. Following the creation of the South Worcestershire Revenues and Benefits Shared Service in 2006, there had been a lot of underperformance for the team and this had impacted on performance levels, however this issue had now been resolved and had been identified as a successful revenue and benefits service.
4. A report would be presented to Cabinet on 19th July 2011 and this would incorporate the views of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee.
5. The productivity of home workers was higher than in the office and the idea of system thinking was going back to basics and understanding what the service was about and how it could be re-evaluated. Bromsgrove District Council and Redditch Borough Council were already carrying out this process and the Council would be liaising with them to assist them through the process.
6. Looking towards the implementation of Universal Credit, the Government were looking for fraud staff and this could be a way of keeping knowledge in-house.
7. Compulsory redundancies could not be ruled out with either option that was taken.

Members felt that by choosing option 1 of the recommendations, staff would be reduced modestly and better practices be brought in. It was also sensible to share

practices with other local authorities.

Agreed:

Recommended to Cabinet:

- 1. To transform the in-house service to increase effectiveness and efficiency.**
- 2. A full review of the opportunity to join a Revenues Shared Service when the position is clear on Universal Credit.**
- 3. Any costs of implementation are met from the provision of £700k for severance costs approved as part of the Financial Strategy 2011-14.**

OS.20 Feedback from Cabinet.

Agreed: The content of the Cabinet action list, following consideration of the recommendations from 21st June 2011 be noted.

OS.21 Work Programme

Agreed: The Committee/Scrutiny Officer to add an item on Grants to Voluntary Bodies to the work programme for September 2011.

OS.22 Press Involvement

There were no items that required press publicity.

OS.23 Exclusion of Press and Public

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 1 of Schedule 12A to the Act.

OS.24 Annual Report of The Community Housing Group Homeless Contract Performance

The Committee considered a report from the Strategic Housing Manager regarding the performance of The Community Housing Group (TCHG) in relation to the housing register, housing advice and homelessness contract which commenced in 2009.

Members were updated on latest performance targets and the way the economic downturn has impacted on the level of homelessness. The Council would continue to work with The Community Housing Group to reduce costs within the existing contract.

The representatives from The Community Housing Group advised Members that a lot of good work was being done to prevent homelessness and they would continue to be improved. Projected figures indicated that targets should be achieved and this

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should represent cost saving.

Members were concerned that the comparisons between authorities were not like for like with regard to the size of social housing stock. The Strategic Housing Manager would obtain information regarding the comparisons and notify Members.

Agreed: The report be noted.

The meeting ended at 7.10 pm.