

WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

COUNCIL CHAMBER, WYRE FOREST HOUSE, FINEPOINT WAY, KIDDERMINSTER

THURSDAY, 7TH FEBRUARY 2013 (6.00PM)

Present:

Councillors: H E Dyke (Chairman), T Ingham (Vice-Chairman), R Bishop, C Brewer, E Davies, N Gale, J Greener, J A Hart, V Higgs, H J Martin, D C H McCann, B McFarland, J Phillips, M Rayner, C Rogers, M A Salter, A M Sewell, D R Sheppard, S J Williams and G C Yarranton.

Observers

Councillors: G W Ballinger, J-P Campion, N J Desmond, M J Hart and J A Shaw.

OS.73 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor P V Hayward.

OS.74 Appointment of Substitutes

Councillor M A Salter was appointed as a substitute for Councillor P V Hayward.

OS.75 Declarations of Interests by Members

No declarations of interest were made.

OS.76 Minutes

Decision: The minutes of the meeting held on 6th December 2012 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman, subject to the word in minute number no.OS.66 (a) be amended from “tailbacks” to “bunching”.

The Chairman agreed to move agenda item no. 6 – Crime and Disorder Updates forward on the agenda.

OS.77 Crime and Disorder Update

Following the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 6th December 2012, Members were invited to debate the presentation on crime and disorder issues and the progress being made against the Wyre Forest Community Safety Partnership’s priorities for 2012/13. Inspector Paul Crowley was also in attendance to answer questions.

The following points were highlighted:

- a. There had been an improvement of 9.5% in reduction of dwelling burglaries compared to the same period in 2011/12. A lot of activity had been done in this area, for example installing home security systems.
- b. Anti-Social Behaviour had seen significant improvements over the previous 12 months. Reporting categories had changed since April 2011 from over 10 to just 3 and these were: personal, environmental and nuisance.
- c. There was concern over drugs use in the area. The police tried to identify high level dealers and took action but it was not possible to be catch everyone. It was important to bear in mind that the users needed care and support if they wished to do so. Members were reassured that if people were caught dealing drugs, then action was taken.
- d. Members noted that the community police offices on housing estates could shut with reductions being made by the police. Inspector Crowley replied that as yet there were no plans to shut these offices in the area but welcomed the support from Members should the need arise.
- e. Members thought that the reduction in long term performance of total crime was encouraging and asked how this compared with other Councils in the area. It was reported that the Council were very consistent with particularly Redditch Borough Council and Bromsgrove District Council which formed the North Worcestershire Community Safety Partnership. However, these figures were also consistent with Worcester City Council.
- f. Other police forces in the area had seen a lot of police officers and civilian staff lose their jobs, however, in the West Mercia region this had not happened and there could in fact be opportunities to increase numbers. It was felt important to keep a presence in the community.
- g. It was reported that there were not enough incidents being reported in relation to hate campaigns and Members were encouraged to report any cases. The Community Safety Partnership were focusing on hate crime at present and reporting would be refreshed after Easter 2013.
- h. Further marketing was still required for the new 101 number to contact the police. Cards were available at PACT meetings and it was suggested that Members circulate these to their residents. Everyone had to take responsibility for contacting the police if they saw something untoward.

Councillor J Shaw arrived at the meeting at this point (6.25pm).

Members were advised that the time it took for a drug dealer to be convicted depended upon circumstances.

Agreed: The information be noted.

OS.78 Review of No Surprises Protocol

The Committee considered a review of the No Surprises Protocol.

Members were informed that the last review had taken place in February 2012 and as technology was constantly changing it was important to ensure the protocol was still effective.

Following the comments made in the recent staff survey, a Member thought there should be more education on the No Surprises Protocol through the Corporate Management Team.

A Member had concerns that emails were not always getting through the system and information was being missed. The Director of Resources responded that she would look into the matter.

Agreed: The Committee/Scrutiny Officer to contact Group Leaders asking for nominations for the No Surprises Review Panel.

OS.79 Wyre Forest District Revised Statement of Community Involvement – Adoption

The Committee considered a report from the Senior Forward Planning Officer which sought approval to adopt the Revised Statement of Community Involvement.

Members were taken through the report and a Member stated that it was disappointing to note that the level of responses were miniscule. Another member had a concern that there had not been sufficient responses to enable a recommendation to Cabinet. The Senior Forward Planning Officer replied that because of the type of consultation it was, the response was not unusual.

The Planning Policy Manager took on board the Members comments but assured them that the document had previously been subject to an independent examination and she believed that the document had encompassed wide community engagement. It was suggested that perhaps people had not responded because they did not have a problem with the document.

In response to a Member question, it was confirmed that a hard copy of the consultation was available to borrow for those people who did not have access to the internet and there was also a planning policy database where people could register to receive copies. A Member also had concerns that the documents were not easier to understand. Members were informed that extensive consultation on Planning Policy documents did take place with Officer's attending community exhibitions which also covered the rural areas.

Recommended to Cabinet: The Revised Statement of Community Involvement as set out at Appendix 2 of the report to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee be adopted and the responses to the representations made, as set out at Appendix 1 of the report to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee be endorsed.

OS.80 South Worcestershire Development Plan – Publication

The Committee considered a report from the Senior Forward Planning Officer which provided Members with an update on the preparation of the South Worcestershire Development Plan.

Members were taken through the report and in particular the appendix to the report which listed the Council responses to the plan. The following points were highlighted:

- a. The Development Plan had been approved by Malvern Hills District Council, Wychavon District Council and Worcester City Council and there was full support to progress it.
- b. Members were informed that this would help in the publication stage of this plan and this was the last point before examination.
- c. There was the possibility that the South Worcestershire Authorities could see a number of speculative planning applications on greenfield sites post March 2013.
- d. In response to a query on the site at Roxel, it was confirmed that the site straddled the boundary between Wyre Forest District Council, which fell into employment and Wychavon District Council which fell within the green belt. At the “Proposed Significant Changes” stage of the SWDP, it had been suggested to remove the site from the green belt which meant that both authorities would be treated the same in terms of planning. However, the publication document leaves the site in the green belt but with major developed site status. The Council now proposed to revert back to the position of removing it from the green belt. The Council could only designate their part of the site and could not comment on the part that fell in Wychavon District Council.
- e. The National Planning Policy Framework had given Councils 12 month grace in March 2012 for Local Authorities to get their Development Plans up to date, but at the end of March 2013 this would change and if Plans were not in place there would be a Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development.

Members were advised that officers were working with the other Worcestershire authorities on a new Gypsy & Traveller Accommodation Assessment (GTAA). This would enable officers to keep up to date with what was going on in neighbouring authorities with regard to Gypsy and Traveller pitch provision.

Recommended to Cabinet: The representations set out at Appendix 1 of the report to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee be approved for submission in response to the Publication consultation.

OS.81 Recommendations from Treasury Management Review Panel: Consideration of Treasury Management Strategy Statement, Minimum Revenue Provision Policy Statement and Investment Policy and Strategy Statement for the Period 1st April 2013 to 31st March 2014

The Committee considered a report from the Director of Resources which asked for approval of the Treasury Management Strategy Statement, Minimum Revenue Provision Policy Statement and Investment Policy and Strategy Statement for the Period 1st April 2013 to 31st March 2014.

Many Members had attended the recent Treasury Management training held by Sector and had found it very worthwhile.

Members had concerns on the interest the Council were receiving on their current investments and felt that they could achieve higher rates. The Director of Resources explained that sums of money were invested over different timescales and some had instant access. Some of the interest rates were applicable for only a two month period.

It was also explained that the higher risk you took the higher interest rate you could achieve. However, in the current economic climate, it was better to place the Council's investments for no longer than a 3/6 month period.

Councillor J-P Campion arrived at the meeting at this point, (7.23pm).

The Finance Team looked at the interest rates on a daily basis to get the best available income for the Council.

Recommended to Cabinet:

- 1. The restated Prudential Indicators and Limits for the financial years 2013/14 to 2015/16 included in Appendix 3 of the report to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee be approved, and the change in the External Debt Indicator explained in paragraph 3.13.4 of the report to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee be noted.**
- 2. The updated Treasury Management and Investment Policy and Strategy Statements for the period 1st April 2013 to 31st March 2014 be approved (the associated Prudential Indicators are included in Appendix 3 of the report to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the detailed criteria is included in Section 3.7 and Appendix 5 of the report to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee).**
- 3. The Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) Statement that sets out the Council's policy on MRP included in Appendix 1 of the report to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee be approved.**
- 4. The Authorised Limit Prudential Indicator included in Appendix 3 of the report to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee be approved.**

OS.82 Recommendations from Budget Review Panel – Consideration of Financial Strategy 2013/2016 – Cabinet Proposals and Alternative Budget Proposals

The Committee considered a report from the Director of Resources on the findings of the Budget Review Panel's scrutiny of the Cabinet's Financial Strategy 2013/2016.

The Chairman of the Budget Review Panel informed the Committee that there had been three meetings of the Panel where the Cabinet proposals had been well scrutinised. At the final meeting the alternative budget proposals had been presented.

Members were informed that at the Stourport Town Council meeting on Tuesday 5th February 2013, a vote had been taken on the offer made by the Council that a new splashpad be built in the Lickhill Memorial Park. The vote had been 7 for and 7 against with the mayor having the casting vote, unfortunately the vote was lost. Members asked what would now happen with the £100K in the capital budget as this had been turned down by Stourport Town Council and asked if it would become available for other political groups to spend. The Director of Resources explained that at this point in time the money was in the capital programme and would remain so until a decision was taken on what to do with it.

The Director of Resources summed up by saying that although the alternative budgets stacked up, in her opinion the level of reserves was too low in all of them.

Recommended to Cabinet: Having considered the Cabinet proposals, and amendments from the Independent Community and Health Concern, Labour and Liberal and Independent Groups, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee is satisfied that the proposals are all clear, achievable and financially sound.

OS.83 Feedback from Cabinet

Agreed: The content of the Cabinet action list, following consideration of the recommendations from the meeting on 18th December 2012

OS.84 Work Programme

Agreed: The work programme be noted.

OS.85 Press Involvement

There were no future items that might require scrutiny.

The meeting ended at 7.41 pm.