

**WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**COUNCIL CHAMBER, WYRE FOREST HOUSE, FINEPOINT WAY, KIDDERMINSTER**

**THURSDAY, 6TH JUNE 2013 (6.00PM)**

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**Present:**

Councillors: H E Dyke (Chairman), T Ingham (Vice-Chairman), R Bishop, C Brewer, N Gale, J Greener, D C H McCann, T L Onslow, M Rayner, A M Sewell and J A Shaw.

**Observers**

Councillors: J-P Campion and M Price.

**OS.1 Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors: V Higgs, J Phillips and C Rogers.

**OS.2 Appointment of Substitutes**

Councillor R Bishop was appointed as a substitute for Councillor C Rogers. Councillor J A Shaw was appointed as a substitute for Councillor V Higgs.

**OS.3 Declarations of Interests by Members**

No declarations of interest were made.

The Chairman announced it had been decided that there would no longer be a representative from the Legal Services section attending the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Meetings. Members were advised a note would be circulated to that effect and if Members had an interest in any future agenda items, to seek legal advice in advance of the meeting.

**OS.4 Minutes**

**Decision: The minutes of the meeting held on 4<sup>th</sup> April 2013 and 29<sup>th</sup> April 2013 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman. Subject to the following additions for the minutes of 29<sup>th</sup> April 2013:**

**OS.119 Apologies for absence were received from Councillor J Greener.**

**OS.122 West Mercia Policing in North Worcestershire.**

**A variety of topics were discussed including:**

- **Reporting of drug related issues in Park Street / bottom part of Castle Road, Kidderminster and action taken by the Police.**

**OS.5 Recommendations from the Housing Review Panel**

The Committee considered the recommendations from the Housing Review Panel of 9<sup>th</sup> May 2013 regarding Housing and Homelessness Services.

The Strategic Housing Services Manager advised Members the Council currently provided a number of homeless prevention services, delivered directly or through partners, which Members of the Review Panel felt provided excellent value for money.

Estimates of cost associated with re-housing a homeless household were between £2,500 and £7,500 whereas most of the Council's homeless prevention services cost around £596 per case on average (not including those prevented through the Community Housing Group contract). It was reported 2013-14 would be the last year that the Council would receive grant funding in the current way from Communities and Local Government for Homeless Prevention services.

The Chairman of the Review Panel, Councillor M Price, hoped Members of the Committee would agree to take the recommendations forward to Cabinet.

A Member commented on the huge amount of good work carried out by the panel. A request was made to the Democratic Services Officer to compile the background papers and recommendations from the Review Panel into one document for future reference by Members.

**Agreed:**

- **The Democratic Services Officer to compile the background papers and recommendations from the Review Panel into one document and circulate it to Members for future reference.**
- **Recommend to Cabinet:**
  1. **To undertake an evaluation of the cost effectiveness of homeless prevention services (funded from the Department of Communities and Local Government) to then develop a business case for Cabinet to consider the continuation of funding the prevention services when the allocation goes from an area based grant into unringfenced Business Rates Retention Grant in 2014-15 (by July 2013).**
  2. **To undertake research into the different service delivery models for a debt awareness / money advice service to homeless /potentially homeless households to include, but not limited to, the Citizens Advice Bureau and an in-house service and to develop an options paper for further consideration.**
  3. **To give support to the continued focus and emphasis on homeless prevention services as it is recognised as being good practise, giving a better service to customers and value for money (with a £108k spend p.a. giving and estimated saving of £800k+) and to continue working with partners to ensure services are joined up and comprehensive.**

**OS.6 Recommendations from the No Surprises Protocol Review Panel**

The Chairman of the Review Panel, Councillor H E Dyke, presented the recommendations to the Committee. Members were advised focus groups had been held with Officers from across the authority. In light of the feedback received from the groups, the proposed amendments listed at bullet points a) to n) on pages 13 and 14 of the report to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee were put forward.

The Committee considered each point in turn. Members felt it was important to be advised when Officers were providing support to local community groups. There had been occasions when Members had attended meetings of community groups and were not aware in advance of the Officer led support proposed by the Council. This also included being notified of Officers supporting community groups in submitting bids for external funding as both District and County Councillors received an allowance for supporting community leadership initiatives and could be in a position to offer some funds.

The Wyre Forest Forward Programme Manager agreed to incorporate the comments made into the recommendations.

**Agreed:**

- **The Wyre Forest Forward Programme Manager to incorporate the comments regarding support for community groups into the recommendations.**
- **Recommend to Cabinet: The No Surprises Protocol be amended.**

**OS.7 How Are We Doing? Performance Update**

The Committee considered a report from the Business Improvement Officer which updated Members on the performance of the Council for Quarter 4 from 1<sup>st</sup> January to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2013.

The Business Improvement Officer led Members through the report and accompanying appendices. The following queries were raised by Members:

- LE046 Value for benefit enquiries received in person – no data available prior to August 2012.
- LE056 Percentage of ICT helpdesk calls resolved at first point of contact – performance declined over last quarter.

The Business Improvement Officer agreed to contact the relevant Managers for an explanation and circulate the responses to Members.

**Agreed:**

- **The Business Improvement Officer to contact the relevant Managers for an explanation on the queries and circulate the responses to Members of the Committee.**
- **The progress in performance for quarter 4 be noted.**

**OS.8 Recommendation Tracking**

The Committee considered the updates following the recommendations made during the 2012-2013 municipal year. The following points were raised:

- The recommendations from the Housing Review Panel of 5<sup>th</sup> March 2013 regarding empty properties would be presented to Cabinet on 18<sup>th</sup> June 2013. An update would follow in due course, however the Leader of the Council confirmed that a Housing and Enforcement Officer had been employed on a 12 month contract. Their role would include tackling some of the issues surrounding empty properties within the District.
- The Local Authority Mortgage Scheme was still deferred and rates continued to be monitored.
- Members requested an update from The Community Housing Group on progress made with the implementation of the recommendations from the Housing Review Panel of 31<sup>st</sup> July 2012 regarding the Tenant Services Committee.

**Agreed:**

- **The Democratic Services Officer to send a letter to The Community Housing Group on behalf of the Chairman inviting them to attend the next meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to provide an update on the progress made with implementing the recommendations put forward to them.**
- **The recommendation tracking updates be noted.**

**OS.9 Work Programme**

The Committee considered the work programme and were advised there would be an update on the Wyre Forest House project at the meeting in July 2013. A request was made for an update following the changes to the benefits system.

**Agreed: The Democratic Services Officer to update the work programme with the additional items.**

**OS.10 Press Involvement**

There were no future items for scrutiny that might require publicity.

There being no further business, the meeting ended at 6.52pm.