

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 12 March 2013 at the Town Hall, Royal Leamington Spa at 6.00pm.

PRESENT: Councillor Gifford (Chairman); Councillors Boad, Brookes, Copping, Davies, Ms Dean, Dhillon, Edwards, Mrs Falp, Mrs Gallagher, Gill, Mrs Higgins, Illingworth and Weber

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Mobbs (Portfolio Holder for Finance).

Councillor Illingworth substituted for Councillor Guest.

107. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest made.

108. **WELFARE REFORMS**

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered a briefing paper from Finance which explained the changes to the housing benefit schemes and what was being done to protect those groups of people particularly affected by the changes. Particular emphasis was given to the "under-occupancy charge" (commonly referred to in the national Press as "the bedroom tax"). Members sought reassurance that the Council would be doing what it could to help/advice those particular tenants that the changes in legislation affected where there was a very real and immediate impact on quality of life, and they cited instances where they thought there might be issues.

The Committee thanked the officer for producing the briefing paper at short notice. The Committee's recommendations formed part of the debate under Executive agenda item 5 – Discretionary Housing Payment Policy.

109. **EXECUTIVE AGENDA (NON CONFIDENTIAL ITEMS AND REPORTS) – WEDNESDAY 12 MARCH 2013**

Item 5 – Discretionary Housing Payment Policy

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered a report from Finance on the revisions to The Discretionary Housing Payments policy. This had been revised to reflect changes to the housing and council tax benefit schemes which would be implemented in April 2013. This report was due to be discussed by the Executive and approval was sought for the revised policy.

The Labour Group had requested that this item was discussed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee because of its importance to large numbers of tenants and families in the District. The Liberal Democrat Group had also requested a discussion on this item because it was vital that the criteria for policy on how the money should be used, including the extra £95,000 to some of those facing increased costs due to the "Bedroom Tax", should be fully discussed.

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The Overview and Scrutiny Committee formally recommended to the Executive that:

1. It lobbied the Government to change the regulations so that when:
 - a. Two partners with individual medical needs shared accommodation, they were both entitled to a separate bedroom; and
 - b. Where a family was split but both parents shared custody of the children, each parent was entitled to have spare bedrooms for the children.
2. It requested that Housing and Property Services ensured that rooms classified as bedrooms met adequate size and space criteria to function as such.
3. Council policy stated that when a council tenant had applied to move into a smaller property that met the needs of the new legislation, they would continue to receive money from the discretionary fund up until they received a first offer from the Council.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee also suggested that the money spent from the fund was monitored closely and a report was sent to the Executive three months after the new legislation came into force.

110. UPDATE ON TOURISM AND VISITOR ECONOMY

The Committee received a presentation from the Economic Development and Regeneration Manager and two guests, Mr Harrison-Jones from Warwick Castle and Mr Tjolle from Shakespeare's England, on progress made on the tourism and visitor economy. Members were informed that a report would be going forward to the Executive in April 2013, with a further report underlining proposals concerning a joint destination management organisation (DMO) initiative between Stratford upon Avon and Warwick going forward to the Executive in September 2013.

The presentation outlined the work completed so far to attract home and foreign visitors and businesses into the area and the Committee saw examples of some of the marketing material and branding under the heading of Shakespeare's England. It was emphasised that marketing would form 75% of the work being handled, with strategy forming the balance. Examples were given of events that had been attended and the reliance on partners to spread the news at overseas events. Considerable work was being done in liaison with Birmingham International Airport. Private sector businesses would lead branding and it was envisaged that this would focus on Shakespeare with a modern twist.

Members were informed that the work they were seeing had been done ahead of any agreement to set up a DMO, but the benefits could already be seen. The Committee congratulated the Economic Development and Regeneration Manager, Mr Tjolle and Mr Harrison-Jones and expressed the hope to be part of a successful DMO.

The Economic Development and Regeneration Manager was asked to circulate a copy of the presentation to Members.

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111. UPDATE FROM THE PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR FINANCE

The Portfolio Holder for Finance, Councillor Mobbs, gave a short presentation on the work handled by Finance and his role as its Portfolio Holder. He explained the responsibilities, purpose, service priorities from 2012/13, on-going priorities, what had been achieved during 2012/13 and service priorities for 2013/14. He then explained his role and tasks he undertook.

A "Question and Answer" session followed. Councillor Mobbs explained that the Finance Section was aware that the changes to Discretionary Housing Payment Policy would have implications on staff. There was a risk due to the change on the way Universal Credit would now be paid directly to the tenant instead of the Council and this would be considered as part of the Risk Register work. In respect of monitoring the budget, Councillor Mobbs informed Members that whilst the position on overall savings was an indicator, he regularly checked the position and in respect of Fit for the Future, regular reports were presented to the Finance and Audit Scrutiny Committee.

The Committee thanked Councillor Mobbs for the presentation and for answering questions. Councillor Mobbs left the meeting.

112. EVENTS EXPERIMENT UPDATE

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered a report and presentation from Cultural Services and Development Services giving an update on the Events Experiment.

After numerous staff and structural changes over the past decade the management of Events at Warwick District Council had become fragmented and inconsistent. A new approach was proposed as an experiment in June 2012 which had been jointly overseen by Cultural Services and Development Services. This new trial approach had allowed learning and improvements to take place from which a revised permanent approach could be developed.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee had requested an update on the Events Experiment. In particular, the Committee requested that it be updated on whether the experiment was on track, the impact on income and the impact of events on town centres. The report presented to the Committee sought to address the above within the context of an ongoing piece of work and the changes which had occurred since it commenced.

The Head of Cultural Services and the Development Manager gave examples of events that had been run and the lessons learnt. The intention was to build a plan that could be used across the whole organisation and would ensure in-built resilience should one of the main people organising any event go absent unexpectedly.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee thanked the two officers for the presentation.

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113. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 12 February 2013 were agreed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

114. COMMENTS FROM THE EXECUTIVE

The Committee considered a report from Civic and Committee Services which detailed the response the Executive had given to their comments regarding the reports submitted to the Executive in February 2013.

The report was produced to create a dialogue between the Executive and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and it ensured that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee were formally made aware of the Executive's responses.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

115. FORWARD PLAN

The Committee considered the Forward Plan which had been published for March 2013 to June 2013.

The Deputy Chief Executive (AJ) was asked to check Forward Plan references 362 (Evening Economy) and 413 (Climate Change Programme) with the lead officers listed on the Forward Plan to see if these items still needed to be on the Plan. Members had noted that these items had been delayed for a considerable time. The Deputy Chief Executive was also asked to find out what was holding up other reports listed as "To be Confirmed" and had remained like this for a long time.

In respect of the Forward Plan for March 2013 to June 2013 it was:

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

116. REVIEW OF THE WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered a report from Civic and Committee Services on the Committee's work programme from March 2013 to May 2013.

The Chairman informed Members that he had written to the Leader of the Executive, Councillor Doody, to request that he attend a future meeting to talk about "One Council", and Councillor Doody had agreed to attend the meeting in April 2013.

The Chairman informed Members that the Council had received a complaint from a member of the public on the Governance arrangements for the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP). The Committee agreed with his recommendation that this should be scheduled on the Work Programme for May 2013 and that the complainant should be invited to speak to the Members.

In respect of the Work Programme for March 2013 to May 2013 it was:

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RESOLVED that the report be noted and an additional item be added to May 2013 regarding Governance arrangements and the LEP.

117. STAFF VOLUNTEERING TASK AND FINISH GROUP

The Committee considered a Scoping document for Staff Volunteering. The Committee felt that the document did not explain what would be examined and that this should be written into the document, then circulated to the Overview and Scrutiny members prior to consideration at the meeting to ensure that all Members were happy with the document. The Scoping document would be re-considered at the April meeting along with membership of the Task and Finish Group.

118. DOG CONTROL ORDERS TASK AND FINISH GROUP – UPDATE REPORT

In November 2011, the Council had introduced four Dog Control Orders and it had been agreed that once these had been in operation for a year, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee would set up a Task and Finish Group to review the effectiveness of these four orders.

Councillor Mrs Blacklock, the Chairman of the Dog Control Orders Task and Finish Group informed the Committee that a draft report had been written but needed to be checked by all members of the Task and Finish Group and their input fed into the document. She anticipated that the draft report would be brought to Committee by May 2013 at the latest.

Councillor Mrs Blacklock explained that the Task and Finish Group had spoken to a great number of people whilst undertaking its research and particular focus was not on the desirability of the Orders, but on their impact.

119. SEXUAL ENTERTAINMENT VENUES (SEVS) TASK & FINISH GROUP – UPDATE REPORT

Councillor Brookes gave an update of progress made by the Task and Finish Group set up to review SEVs within the District and whether the Council's policy was fit for purpose.

Councillor Brookes, a member of the Task and Finish Group informed Members that the Group was working on a survey and this would be reviewed by the Council's solicitor. Members of the Group were due to visit Councillor Townshend at Coventry City Council to see what lessons that Authority had learnt when it introduced a new policy. It was proposed that the results of the survey would be analysed by another body. Councillor Brookes informed Members that it was hoped that the survey would be sent out by the end of April, leading to consultation in May and the recommendations being submitted by June 2013.

120. HEALTH SCRUTINY

The Committee considered how it would implement Health Scrutiny at the Council. A report submitted to the Executive in December 2012 had

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recommended that Health Scrutiny be dealt with as a sub-committee of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee discussed the recommendations of the report to Executive in December 2012 but had concerns on how this could be implemented. The Members were keen that any sub-committee set up to handle Health Scrutiny should have cross-party membership. Questions were asked on how this could be accommodated and whether there was a need for a change in the Constitution on the way sub-committee membership was made up.

It was also noted that a sub-committee would have decision-making powers and some Members felt this was unnecessary because the sub-committee should report back to Overview and Scrutiny. Concerns were also voiced that a membership of four might be too small. It was also felt that there may need to be a link between the Council's representative for Health Scrutiny at Warwickshire County Council and any sub-committee set up at Warwick District Council. Further clarity was needed on how this could work.

The Deputy Chief Executive (AJ) agreed that this required further consideration in a lot more detail and recommendations on the ways to approach it would be brought to the Committee in April 2013.

121. PUBLIC & PRESS

RESOLVED that under Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972, the public and press be excluded from the meeting for the following items, by reason of the likely disclosure of exempt information within paragraphs 1 and 3 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, following the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006, as set out below.

Minute No.	Para Nos.	Reason
123	3	Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information)

The full minutes of Minutes 122 to 123 would be contained within a confidential minute which would be considered for publication following the implementation of the relevant decisions. However, a summary of the decisions was as follows:

122. EXECUTIVE AGENDA (CONFIDENTIAL ITEMS AND REPORTS) – WEDNESDAY 13 MARCH 2013

No items on this part of the Executive agenda were discussed.

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123. URGENT ITEM – POTENTIAL STRATEGIC LAND ACQUISITION IN LEAMINGTON SPA

The recommendations as set out in the report were supported with additional comments which would be detailed in the confidential minute.

(The meeting finished at 9.15 pm)