

**COUNCIL**  
Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> May 2009

**Community Services Scrutiny Committee**  
**Annual Report 2008/2009**



**1. Forward by the Chairman**

This has been a very busy first year for the Community Services Scrutiny Committee. As members will be aware the terms of reference for this committee do as the title suggests cover all issues that may have an impact on the community and this year the subjects that we have scrutinised have been diverse but well within those terms of reference.

I am pleased to say that some of the issues we have looked at have been well attended by members of the public who have contributed to the Scrutiny process and we have been well supported by Parish Councillors who have attended at our invitation.

Our work programme has included items forwarded to us by Council and also by fellow Councillors, and for a new committee that began with a blank page it soon became apparent that our work programme was becoming very full and varied as you will be able to see from the following report. In fact although the new municipal year hasn't officially begun yet there are already two budget related items on the work programme ready to go through the scrutiny process.

At the last meeting of the committee it was felt by members that there was a need to monitor the success or impact of the scrutiny process we had carried out during the year and it was suggested that it would be a good idea to carry out a tracking process on all past recommendations from the committee in the new municipal year.

I would like to thank my Vice Chairman, Councillor Julian Philips, for all his help and support during the year. I would also to thank all the members of the committee and review panels for their hard work, attendance and contributions during the past busy year.

Last but not least I would like to thank Sarah Sprung for keeping me on the straight and narrow throughout the year and to Jane Alexander, Mary Morgan, Caroline Newlands and Charlotte Beswick who all have offered legal advice during the year.

Councillor Mrs Helen Dyke  
Chairman, Community Services Scrutiny Committee

**2. Fixed Penalty Notices for Litter Dropping Review Panel**

One of the first pieces of work undertaken by the Committee was to scrutinise fixed penalty notices for litter dropping in the district. The recommendation for the establishment of this review came from the budget review panel, who raised concerns regarding additional funds allocated to fund litter pickers.

This proved to be an extensive review with consultation being undertaken with parish, district and county councillors to assess 'hotspots' in the district.

Recommendations were put forward to the Scrutiny Committee and subsequently to Cabinet recommending that:

- i) A litter programme be run during August and early September 2008, as this period sees the highest number of visitors to the District, to raise the profile of the Council's Enforcement powers.
- ii) A second litter programme be run during term time in September 2008, in order that schools and the areas surrounding them can be targeted.
- iii) The Operational Services Manager to ensure that refuse vehicles are emptied at regular intervals to ensure that litter does not overflow.
- iv) A letter be distributed to all District, Town and Parish Councillors advising them of the procedure for reporting incidences of litter dropping.
- v) There should be a regular slot in Newswyre to promote the Council's enforcement policy and the number of fixed penalty notices issued, subject to the approval of the Newswyre Editorial Panel.

These recommendations were agreed by Cabinet on 26<sup>th</sup> June 2008.

**3. Driving Standards Agency Review Panel**

The Vice Chairman of the Committee, Councillor Phillips, put this item forward for review in response to local outrage that the Driving Standards Agency was proposing to close the Kidderminster Driving Test Centre (DSA).

A thorough review was conducted into the DSA's reasons for proposing the closure and into its policies relating to the distance candidates

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should travel to a test centre. A number of inconsistencies were identified in relation to implementation of policy by the DSA.

Recommendations were put forward and agreed by Cabinet on 21<sup>st</sup> August 2008, these were:

- i) The Chief Executive be authorised to write to the Driving Standards Agency in the strongest terms requesting them to reconsider the proposal to close the Kidderminster Test Centre and relocate to Lower Gornal, Dudley.
- ii) Subject to the Driving Standards Agency's willingness to reinstate a facility in the District, the Council assist the Driving Standards Agency in identifying potential sites for consideration.

In addition, the local MP, Dr Richard Taylor, was also requested to put forward Parliamentary questions or use other acceptable means to urge the Secretary of Transport to ascertain why there were inconsistencies in the DSA implementation of its policies.

Despite concerted efforts from Officers and Members, with the support of local residents and driving instructors, notification that the last day of testing at Kidderminster Test Centre will be on Friday 29<sup>th</sup> May 2009 has been received.

### **4. Post Office Closures**

During the Post Offices most recent round of closures, as part of its network change programme, the Committee invited Senior Post Office staff to attend the Committee to discuss proposals with Members, Parish Councillors also received invitations to attend this meeting.

The committee were pleased to see representation from eight Parish Councils at the meeting at which the Post Office explained its reasons for the proposed closures.

At the time of the meeting Post Office staff were not able to confirm the number of Post Offices earmarked for closure in the District. Subsequent to the meeting it was confirmed that four Post Offices in the District were proposed for closure.

Even with the best efforts of Members and Officers in putting forward cases to keep these Post Offices open the Post Office remained adamant that they would close.

### **5. Alcohol & Substance Misuse Review Panel**

This review panel was in August 2008 to investigate the need for Alcohol Restriction Zones (ARZ's) in the district, problems relating to

underage drinking and to consult with relevant partners on substance abuse issues.

The creation of the Review Panel resulted from a motion to Council on 16<sup>th</sup> July 2008 requesting that alcohol restriction zones be investigated in several parks within the District.

The review process has been quite lengthy in this case due to the amount of evidence considered by the review panel. The panel heard evidence from a broad range of partner agencies including;

- i) Police Divisional Intelligence Analyst
- ii) Trading Standards (Worcestershire County Council)
- iii) Kidderminster Licensees Association
- iv) Chairman of Bewdley Pubwatch Scheme
- v) Head of Property and Operational Services
- vi) Wyre Forest District Council Licensing Section
- vii) Worcestershire Substance Misuse Action Team
- viii) Worcestershire County Council Healthy Schools Programme
- ix) Wolverley High School

In addition to this the Panel also consulted with County, District and Parish Councillors and local PACT Chairmen.

Recommendations were put forward to Cabinet in February and April 2009, firstly on the alcohol element of the review process, then on the substance misuse element.

Recommendations were put forward to Cabinet on 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2009 and agreed.

## **6. Draft CCTV Policy**

Members considered a draft policy in relation to CCTV in the district. Members noted that there were 7 cameras in Kidderminster Town Centre 6 in Stourport-on-Severn and 4 in Bewdley, all of which were monitored by Bromsgrove District Council.

The Committee felt that there may be occasions, based on tangible evidence, where it might be beneficial to re-locate a camera. It was felt that there should be provision within the policy for this to be actioned, should there be evidence to support this.

## **7. External Funding Review Panel**

The External Funding Review Panel was established in November 2008 and investigated the process for selecting and applying for external funding by Council divisions, reviewed the process for collecting, monitoring and reporting funding data. The Panel also

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considered the role and responsibilities of the External Funding Strategy and the External Funding Working Group (EFWG).

The Panel circulated a questionnaire to Directors in order to gauge procedure within each division for the management and monitoring of bids for external funding. At this point data was also collected in relation to each divisions external funding activities.

The following recommendations were agreed by Cabinet on 26<sup>th</sup> March 2009;

- i) All Officers, who complete bids for external funding, send a full copy of the bid to the Regeneration & Economic Prosperity Section.
- ii) Financial data regarding the Council's external funding activities be included quarterly in the Members Information Bulletin, together with contact details for the External Funding Working Group.
- iii) External Funding be a topic for the next Member Briefing Session on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2009, in order that all Members can be apprised of the Council's external funding activities.
- iv) The External Funding Working Group hold an event to share the processes in place for external funding within the Council and to highlight best practice.

### **8. Citizens Advice Bureau Review Panel**

The Review Panel was established by the Committee in July 2008, following a request by the Leader of the Council.

The Panel considered the level and range of services the Wyre Forest Citizens Advice Bureau provided to support residents in the district and assessed if this met the demand and need for services of this nature.

In addition the Panel also compared the level of services offered by the Citizens Advice Bureau to the funding allocated by the Council, both in terms of grant allocation and other assistance provided in kind.

The review concluded that:

- i) The funding of Wyre Forest Citizens Advice Bureau be continued by a Service Level Agreement, or other appropriate documentation, be introduced as part of the grant funding so that there can be monitoring and evaluation of the funding agreement. The Head of Community and Partnership Services to be responsible for the negotiation of the document, in consultation with the Head of Legal & Democratic Services.

- ii) Other sources of funding be explored by Wyre Forest Citizens Advice Bureau including funding through Wyre Forest Matters.
- iii) The Local Strategic Partnership be asked to consider funding Wyre Forest Citizens Advice Bureau, possibly through reward monies.

These recommendations were approved by Cabinet on 20<sup>th</sup> November 2008.

## **9. Flooding**

Due to the severe floods of summer 2007 Worcestershire County Council, along with the six District Councils in the County established a joint review panel to investigate responses from key partners in relation to the flooding.

In addition to this the implications of the Pitt Review on flooding were also considered by the Committee.

As flooding is an issue which has affected so many residents in the district we were pleased to welcome 17 members of the public and representation from three Parish Councils to the meeting.

Residents had the opportunity to question Council Officers on ongoing and planned work to reduce the risk of flooding, including brook clearance work.

Many questions were put forward to the Committee which concerned emergency planning and the role of volunteers in an emergency situation. The Committee noted that no formal training was provided to volunteers, in matters such as clearing watercourses. Whilst it was acknowledged that the Council did not have the expertise to provide training in this area Members felt that the Environment Agency should be approached to ascertain if they were able to provide training to volunteers.

## **10. Council Sports and Leisure Centres – Activities Relating to Health & Well-being**

The Committee received details of the activities and initiatives relating to health which were provided by the Council and other partners.

Members were extremely pleased to note that, after several years of trying to progress the Activity Referral Scheme, it was due to be launched in February 2009.

Members commended the strong partnership between the Council and DC Leisure and other local partners and congratulated staff on their achievements in this area.

**11. Staffing Arrangements for the Countryside Service**

Following the presentation of a briefing paper highlighting the resource implications for the Countryside Service taking on additional land, the Committee recommended to Cabinet that Section 106 monies be used to fund a member of staff to the Countryside Service.

It was envisaged that this post would develop a management plan for the sites managed by the Countryside service and co-ordinate the required maintenance, under the terms of the S106 agreements.

This proposal was agreed by Cabinet on 26<sup>th</sup> March 2009.

**12. Review into the Provision of Local Authority Mortgages**

Although approaching the end of the municipal year, at its last meeting, in April 2009, the Committee agreed to the establishment of a review panel to scrutinise the potential provision of local authority mortgages.

At a meeting of the Budget Review Panel in February 2009, the concept of local authority mortgages was introduced in a joint Liberal/Liberal Democrat proposal. The proposal asked Council to consider reintroducing such mortgages for individuals to purchase Shared Ownership properties, with the added condition that the mortgages be underwritten by the relevant Registered Social Landlord (RSL).

The proposal was subsequently included within the Cabinet proposals which were approved by Council on 25<sup>th</sup> February 2009.

The first meeting of the review panel is due to take place in May 2009, with feedback to the relevant scrutiny committee expected in July 2009.

**13. Methods of Domestic Waste Collection & Recycling Review Panel**

Following a request from Cabinet the Committee agreed to the establishment of a review panel to:

- i) Consider the County Council Joint Municipal Waste Management Strategy.
- ii) Investigate and consider the potential methods of future collection method for waste and recycling following the opportunity of collection of co-mingled recycling with the provision of the EnviroSort facility, with the view of achieving cost



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reductions of £300k as required within the Financial Strategy 2009/12.

- iii) Recommend which of these options should be implemented at Wyre Forest District Council.

The first meeting of this review panel will take place in May 2009, with feedback required for the August meeting of the relevant scrutiny and Cabinet in order that recommendations can then be put forward to Council in September.