

# West Wiltshire District Council

## Minutes

**Minutes of the:** Scrutiny Committee

**Held on:** Wednesday 19 November 2008

**Held at:** Council Offices, Bradley Road, Trowbridge

**Present:**

**Councillors:** Cllrs Burden, Carr, Clark (Chairman), Hawker, Hedley, Humphries, Jenkins, King, Mudge, Osborn H, Osborn J, Parks, and Walker

**Also in attendance:** Cllrs Brown, Carbin and Mounde

**Officers:** Finance Service Manager (AB), Policy Officer (HC), Policy Officer (DJ), Policy Officer (ML), Policy and Communications Services Manager (PM), Member Support Officer (HP)

### 117. Apologies and Membership of the Committee

Apologies were received from Cllrs Ezra and Ridout.

### 118. Declarations of Interest

None were received.

### 119. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 15 October 2008 were approved and signed by the Chairman.

### 120. Announcements from the Chairman

The Chairman made the following announcements:

1. Welcome to Cllr Veronica Burden who replaces Cllr Denison-Pender.
2. On its meeting of 5 November, Cabinet approved the Scrutiny Committee's recommendations from its September and October meetings:

**Housing in Multiple Occupation (HMOs)** – Cabinet will direct resources towards enforcing statutory regulations regarding HMOs.

Work will be done to ensure that recommendations in the report concerning migrant workers and HMOs are taken forward by the new Wiltshire Council.

**Affordable Housing** – all possible ways of increasing the volume of affordable housing locally will be investigated and pursued.

**Neighbourhood Police Teams (NPTs)** – a letter will be sent from the Council to the Chief Constable and Chair of the Police Authority:

- expressing strong support for the general principle of neighbourhood policing, and the desire that it should live up to expectations
- expressing concern about the abstraction rates of officers from NPTs and requesting trend information on these abstraction rates

This letter was sent last week.

**Additional Officer Support** – will be made available to support the work of the JOSTB and associated task groups up to the end of March 2009, when Scrutiny work for this Council permits.

3. The Chairman thanked Policy Officer, Diana Jones, for her work assisting the Scrutiny Committee and wished her luck in her future employment.

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Cllr Mudge provided a verbal County health scrutiny update:

- Recent national figures on the number of people living with a learning disability suggest that the disability is drastically underfunded in Wiltshire;
- The number of people paying for private healthcare has decreased;
- The Royal United Hospital's (RUH) performance with regards to infection rates is still poor, particularly with the C. difficile virus.

Cllr Burden added that there is a need for GPs to record which of their patients are carers.

## 121. Update on Joint Overview and Scrutiny Transition Board

Cllr J Osborn introduced an update on the work of the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Board (JOSTB).

Members of the JOSTB task groups each gave a verbal update:

Cllr Parks (Development Control) reported that the Implementation Executive (IE) has approved the proposed scheme of delegation for planning applications. Current members of District Council planning committees will be co-opted to Wiltshire Council's Area Planning Committees, which will be politically balanced.

Cllr Ridout (Housing) was not present at the meeting, therefore no update was received.

Cllr Hedley (Waste and Recycling) referred members to the written update in the report.

Cllr Walker (Area Boards) referred members to the written update in the report and emphasised the need for consistency in the use of terminology.

Cllr J Osborn voiced concern at the drastically varying budgets allocated to different Area Boards, especially when analysed by population data.

Cllr Carr (Customer Access) reported that the Customer Access Task Group is scheduled to meet on Monday 24 December; therefore there was no update to report at this time.

Cllr Humphries reported that problems with the four district councils' existing IT-support contracts means IT staff will not know their future working arrangements until 2009. He also expressed concern that staff from the five authorities are not all receiving information on the transition at the same time.

**Resolved that:**

- **The Scrutiny Committee noted the report.**

**122. Affordable House-building update**

At its meeting on 17 September 2008 the Scrutiny Committee decided to invite major local housing developers to a future meeting to discuss the possibility of the economic downturn causing a shortfall in affordable housing. None of the four developers approached were able to attend, but a summary of their written responses was circulated at the meeting (appended to these minutes as Appendix 1).

Cllr Hawker noted that on their Leigh Park site, Persimmon Homes appear to have scaled down their operations, though not stopped them completely.

Cllr J Osborn reported that Cllr John Thompson (WCC) is lobbying to ensure that the funds allocated by Central Government for affordable housing in the economic downturn do not go solely to the conurbations.

**Resolved that:**

- **The Scrutiny Committee noted the update.**

### **123. Performance monitoring 2008-09 Quarter 2 July – September 2008**

Cllr Carr introduced a report summarising the Council's performance in the second quarter of 2008-09. He noted that the letter response target is now being met but there are still 'red lights' in development control, though he is encouraged by progress being made in that area. Reports of fly-tipping have increased, despite the extra resources diverted towards tackling the problem. The Corporate Team is reviewing this work to see if its effectiveness can be improved.

The Scrutiny Committee agreed that it would still like to see performance figures for Quarter 3 at its February meeting.

Cllr Clark requested clarification of the sentence (on p. 10 of the report), "The number of overturns is running at a high level and relate to the original delegated decisions being called in under the current constitution."

#### **Resolved that:**

- **The Scrutiny Committee noted the report.**

### **124. Financial Monitoring 2008-09**

The Finance Service Manager (AB) introduced a report informing members of the Council's financial position for the period ending 30 September 2008. Following a question raised on the council's investment portfolio, he reported that the Council held funds with an Irish bank at a rate of 6.30%, a long term investment with a Merchant Bank due to mature in 2009, and funds in an Abbey National Instant Account.

He reported that income from car parks has increased, as it has from planning applications (due to the inflationary increase being higher than the budgeted figure), but income from land charges has decreased significantly.

Cllr Clark requested clarification of whether the Council can charge for pre-application consultation work, and whether it does so.

Cllr Mounde provided an update on the Waterside Project:

- The core retail elements of the project will be retained;
- The Strategic Planning Group (SPG) are due to meet with Modus to agree which elements of the scheme will continue;
- Some of the projected deficit in the scheme's finances may be covered by a contribution from the Regional Development Agency (RDA);
- Cllr Jane Scott (WCC) has publicly given the scheme her full support.

**Resolved that:**

- **The Scrutiny Committee noted the report.**

**125. Further Post Office consultation – Longbridge Deverill**

The Policy Officer (DJ) introduced a report informing members of a further consultation from Post Office Ltd regarding the service in Longbridge Deverill.

Cllr Carr expressed concern that the proposed opening hours are inconvenient for those with day jobs.

Cllr Burden added that they are also inconvenient for those taking children to school.

**Resolved that:**

- **The Scrutiny Committee welcomed the proposal to keep the outreach service at its current location and requested that officers work with the local Member with regard to preferred opening times. A response would then be sent to Post Office Ltd by the closing date of 1 December.**

**126. Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Plan**

The Scrutiny Committee agreed to cancel its December meeting, making its next meeting 14 January 2009.

**Resolved that:**

- **The Scrutiny Committee agreed the Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Plan.**

**127. Cabinet Forward Work Plan**

**Resolved that:**

- **The Scrutiny Committee noted the Cabinet Forward Work Plan.**

**128. Date of Next Meeting**

The next ordinary meeting of the Scrutiny Committee will be held on Wednesday **14 January 2009** in the Council Chamber at the Council Offices, Bradley Road, Trowbridge at **7pm**.

(7.00pm – 8.20pm)

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