

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL
MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

15TH SEPTEMBER 2014 AT 6.00 P.M.

PRESENT: Councillors L. C. R. Mallett (Chairman), H. J. Jones (Vice-Chairman), C. J. Bloore, S. R. Colella, B. T. Cooper, R. J. Laight (during Minute No. 34/14 to Minute No. 39/14), P. Lammas, C. R. Scurrall (Substituting for Councillor R. A. Clarke), R. J. Shannon, S. P. Shannon, C. J. Spencer and C. J. Tidmarsh

In attendance: Councillor C. B. Taylor

Officers: Ms. J. Pickering, Mr. S. Jorden, Mrs. R. Bamford, Mrs. P. Ross and Ms. A. Scarce

34/14 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J. S. Brogan and R. A. Clarke.

The Chairman asked Members to note that as detailed in the Constitution, trained substitutes were permitted subject to the restriction that each Member of the Board could only nominate a substitute on up to two occasions during the municipal year.

35/14 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND WHIPPING ARRANGEMENTS**

There were no declarations of interest or whipping arrangements.

36/14 **DEVELOPMENT CONTROL - HEAD OF PLANNING AND REGENERATION**

Members were reminded that during consideration of the Making Experiences Count Report when it was noted that there was a number of complaints relating to Development Control and following on from the meeting held on 14th July 2014 when the Board had considered the quarterly recommendation tracker and had noted the outstanding recommendations in respect of the Planning Policy Task Group, the Head of Planning and Regeneration and Portfolio Holder had been invited to attend and provide an update.

The Head of Planning and Regeneration provided Members with details of the principles developed during the Vanguard transformation process. The service now worked as a customer focussed service by understanding what the customer wanted, what mattered to the customer. What did customers want/expect from the service? The service needed to understand the wider

public interest of both residents and professional stakeholders to enable change and to look at waste within the system and design out waste. If waste was created by other departments officers would liaise with those departments. The system initially in place was a one fit, fits all system. Officers now met and engaged with residents and parish council's other than just through planning surgeries to provide information and advice. Shared learning encouraged staff to work in an environment as a team, to look at any issues, concerns or practices and in order that any waste identified within the system could be addressed.

The Head of Planning and Regeneration informed Members of the current backlog of work and how this was being addressed. Changes had been made to the way planning applications were now dealt with. Case officers now selected applications dependant on their work capacity and were able to call on help when needed. Senior officers collected data on the number of applications dealt with and the caseload/workload of officers was noted and discussed with officers as necessary. Reflection meetings were held every Monday morning. Officers were encouraged to take ownership of any enquiries or queries, even if the enquiry/query was for another service area. This ensured that the enquiry/query was dealt with and that the customer was not directed to different service areas. Officers were also beginning to fully utilise the IT system that was in place. Thinking about applications and what impact applications would have enabled officers to reconsider who to inform. The information detailed on site notices had improved and now included the case officers contact details and an iPhone application which enabled the site notice to be scanned.

It was noted that the workload had been affected by an increase in the turnover of staff within the service area. They had now recruited in higher grade positions and the backlog was being reduced. Leaving interviews had identified that staff were leaving to take up similar positions with higher salaries. The Head of Planning and Regeneration did not feel there was an issue with staff morale.

The Head of Planning and Regeneration responded to Members' questions with regard to applications not being dealt with in the eight week time period and were informed that there were no consequences or legal challenge if applications were not dealt with within that period. It was believed that achieving targets did not always help the customer. Officers now looked at 'end to end' time. Customers were made aware of the backlog and informed of the timescale to deal with their application. It was felt that if the customer was not concerned about targets but happy in the knowledge that they were receiving advice and information in respect of their application; officers felt that a good service was being provided.

The Head of Planning and Regeneration responded to Councillor S. R. Colella with regard to shared services and planning enforcement. Planning officers wore identity badges with both Bromsgrove District Council and Redditch Borough Council logos. Officers informed residents they were the case officer dealing with the application and to her knowledge this had not caused any issues with Bromsgrove District Council applications or site visits. With regard

to planning enforcement; residents, Parish Councils and Ward Members should contact officers with any concerns or evidence of non-compliance in order for officers to use this as part of their evidence gathering.

In response to Members the Head of Planning and Regeneration agreed to provide Board Members with the following information:-

- Contact details for Case Officers
- Additional information with regard to monitoring
- Detailed information on the overspend figures
- Planning Backlog - Quarterly reports

The Chairman and Board Members thanked the Head of Planning and Regeneration for her in depth verbal update.

RESOLVED that

- a) as detailed in the preamble above the Democratic Services Officer be tasked to liaise with the Head of Planning and Regeneration in respect of the additional information to be provided to the Board;
- b) Planning backlog information - Quarterly reports to the Board be included on the Board's work programme; and
- c) the Democratic Services Officer be tasked to provide information to the Board in respect of staff changes, namely when changes to overtime payment and car allowances payment came into effect.

37/14

WRS STRATEGIC PARTNER - PRESENTATION FROM HEAD OF REGULATORY SERVICES

The Chairman reminded the Board that consideration of the Joint Worcestershire Regulatory Services Scrutiny Task Group report had initiated this presentation.

The Head of Worcestershire Regulatory Services (WRS) delivered a presentation on WRS Strategic Partnership. He gave thanks to Councillors R. L. Dent and M. A. Bullivant for attending and who represented Bromsgrove District Council on the Worcestershire Shared Services Joint Committee.

The presentation provided Members with details on the following:

- Project Objectives
- Benefits of strategic partnership
- Alternative options considered to meet financial pressures
- What WRS could offer
- The Process

Following the delivery of the presentation a number of questions were put to the Head of WRS:

- Partners reducing their contributions to WRS and the effect this would have on the services provided by WRS.
- The implications (to those remaining and those opting out) of Partner authorities opting out of WRS.
- Governance arrangements and the changes to governance in respect of Strategic Partnering.
- The effect on the service if partner contributions were significantly reduced and whether there was the possibility of the service failing because of this.

The Head of WRS informed the Board that partner authorities had no perception of the financial pressures they would be faced with when the Worcestershire Shared Services Partnership legal agreement was agreed in 2009. A number of partners had identified the need for additional reductions in their contributions from 2014/2015 onwards, with the most significant of these being Worcestershire County Council. Members were further informed that the current Worcestershire Shared Services Partnership agreement protected the other member authorities against any negative impact and that any substantive or one off costs would have to be met by that partner authority. A significant reduction in partner contributions year on year could have an impact for some partner authorities if statutory requirements were not being met.

The Head of WRS also referred to the Joint WRS Scrutiny Task Group findings in respect of governance and informed Members that initially the governance arrangements had been set up as a need for trust and that at the time there had been no benchmarking to refer to. As the service developed there had become a need, which had been recognised, for the governance arrangements to change and WRS Joint Committee Members would determine good governance arrangements.

Partner authorities now wanted very different levels of services; there was therefore a need to identify what those partner needs were and how these could be provided. Strategic Partnership working would enable the service to look at an alternative delivery model which would meet the needs of all those involved.

The Head of WRS further informed Members that WRS had achieved a national reputation and had national experts. As a result of this achievement WRS had been approached by other authorities who were considering a shared regulatory service and looked at very closely by the private sector. Members agreed that it was refreshing to hear of a public sector success.

The Chairman of the Board and the Chairman of the Joint WRS Scrutiny Task Group thanked the Head of WRS for his presentation.

RESOLVED that the presentation be noted.

38/14

MINUTES

The minutes of the meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Board held on 14th July and 18th August 2014 were submitted.

RESOLVED that the minutes be approved as a correct record.

39/14

BUDGET SCRUTINY ARRANGEMENTS - PRESENTATION

The Executive Director, Finance and Resources delivered a presentation on the proposed Budget Scrutiny 2015/2016 – 2017/2018.

The presentation outlined the purpose of Budget Scrutiny:

- Provided challenge to decision makers
- Enabled the voice and concerns of the public to be heard/raised.
- Drives improvement in budget setting and transparency

Following the delivery of the presentation a number of points were raised by Members and responded to by the Executive Director, Finance and Resources:

- How had the Executive Director, Finance and Resources service area gone through transformation.
- How the Cabinet Work Programme and Leaders Group linked together.
- How the Council kept residents informed of the budget process.

The Executive Director, Finance and Resources informed the Board that her service was not a front facing (customer service area). The service had recently streamlined its processes and combined Bromsgrove District Council and Redditch Borough Council's financial processes. Transformation had taken place around processes and internal customers managing their budgets. Heads of Service were therefore responsible for their service areas budget. With regard to Cabinet and Leaders Group, the Executive Director, Finance and Resources had worked with the Democratic Services Manager to ensure that Overview and Scrutiny meetings for future municipal years were scheduled prior to Cabinet meetings in order for budget scrutiny to be more effective.

The Executive Director, Finance and Resources explained that budget jury meetings had ceased as only 13 to 15 members of the public used to attend. Members were concerned as to how the Council informed its wider audience and following discussion the Executive Director, Finance and Resources agreed to give this further consideration.

Following the presentation, the Chairman suggested that as the budget scrutiny would involve a lot of work for the Board if, following the next presentation from the Executive Director, Finance and Resource, Members were particularly interested in a specific area of the budget this could be included on the Work Programme and a number of short sharp inquiries set up, with Members providing feedback to the Board.

RESOLVED that the presentation be noted and a copy of the presentation be sent to all Board Members.

40/14 **LEISURE PROVISION TASK GROUP - UPDATE**

The Chairman of the Task Group, Councillor C. J. Spencer had provided a written update for Members of the Board and following discussion, Councillor R. J. Shannon expressed concerns that the new Dolphin Centre would not have the capacity to accommodate all of the facilities it currently provided.

Councillor Spencer responded to questions from Members and informed the Board that the principle was that Council provided leisure facilities should be value for money for residents and affordable to access, with all costs to the Council covered. Task Group Members had agreed that they would not want the Council to be seen to be making a profit. This was reflected in the final report and recommendations which would be presented to the Board at its meeting in November 2014.

The Chairman thanked Councillor Spencer for her update.

41/14 **CABINET WORK PROGRAMME**

Members considered the Cabinet Work Programme for the period 1st October 2014 to 31st January 2015.

The Chairman highlighted that the Town Centre Public Realm Phase 2 was no longer on the Cabinet Work Programme. He reassured Members that following on from the meeting held on 14th July 2014 and as detailed on the Overview & Scrutiny Work Programme a presentation on the Town Centre would be provided at the next Board meeting.

Members requested an update on the availability of the Playing Pitch Strategy, which had previously been on the Board's Work Programme, be provided at the next meeting.

The Executive Director, Finance and Resources responded to Councillor C. J. Bloore and informed Members that a report on the Ward Members' Fund was due to be presented to Cabinet on 24th September 2014. Members expressed their concern that they had not had the opportunity to scrutinise the report. The Executive Director, Finance and Resources further informed the Board that additional options had been included in the report and that following their concerns she would ensure a copy of the report was sent to all Board Members.

RESOLVED that the Cabinet Work Programme be noted.

42/14 **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD WORK PROGRAMME**

Members considered the latest version of the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme.

RESOLVED that the Work Programme be updated to include the items discussed and agreed by the Board during the course of the meeting.

Overview and Scrutiny Board
15th September 2014

The meeting closed at 8.24 p.m.

Chairman