B R O M S G R O V E D I S T R I C T C O U N C I L

MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

15TH DECEMBER 2014 AT 6.30 P.M.

PRESENT: Councillors L. C. R. Mallett (Chairman), C. J. Bloore, J. S. Brogan, R. A. Clarke, S. R. Colella, B. T. Cooper, R. J. Laight, P. Lammas, R. J. Shannon, S. P. Shannon and C. J. Spencer

Invitees: Councillors M. Bullivant and M. Webb

Officers: Ms. J. Pickering, Mr. G. Revans, Mr. I. Roberts, Ms. J. Bayley and Ms. A. Scarce

86/14 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors H. J. Jones and C. J. Tidmarsh.

87/14 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND WHIPPING ARRANGEMENTS**

There were no declarations of interest or whipping arrangements.

88/14 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Board held on 17th November 2014 were submitted.

The Chairman explained that the minutes from the extra meeting of the Board that took place on 3rd December 2014 would be considered in the New Year.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 17th November 2014 be approved as a correct record.

89/14 **ACTION LIST**

The Chairman reminded Members that the Action List had been placed early on the agenda at the agreement of the Board at their previous meeting. A number of the action points were subsequently discussed in detail.

Quarterly Write Off of Debts Reports

Officers explained that the additional information that had been requested on 17th November would be incorporated into the following edition of the report.

Green Waste Collection

Members were advised that the green waste collection service had generated a surplus of approximately £200,000 since the inception of the scheme.

Concerns were raised about the potential for a fee of £35 per customer to cover the transportation costs for the green waste collection service. However, Officers confirmed that the costs of collecting garden waste were covered by the fee charged by the Council whilst the costs of disposal were funded by Worcestershire County Council.

Members also noted that in the recent past they had received complaints about residents continuing to receive the green waste collection service even when they were no longer paying the Council for that service. The Board was advised that these problems had been acknowledged by Officers and action had been taken to ensure that every brown bin used by residents who were no longer paying for the service had been recovered.

Advertisements were due to appear on the Council's garden waste collection vehicles to encourage residents only to use the garden waste collection service if they were not in a position to compost. The potential for communal composting to be encouraged amongst allotment holders and residents with smaller gardens was briefly discussed and Officers suggested that this could be discussed further with Worcestershire County Council.

Bulky Collections

As part of service transformation the Place teams had trialled a new process for bulky collections. Residents could book the collection of a single bulky item over the phone. In cases where numerous bulky items would be collected the Council quoted residents £30 per hour per operative. The new approach had helped to reduce costs for the Council involved in delivering the service. Officers confirmed that it was standard practice for most local authorities to charge customers for bulky waste collections.

Trade Waste Service

Members were advised that Officers were exploring options to make the service financially self-sustaining. This included considering working in partnership with a private sector company as well as retaining the service in house. The Council was not permitted to operate in a commercially competitive way and this would need to be taken into account when determining the best option for the delivery of the service.

There had been an assumption that the Trade Waste Collection service would be sold and this had informed the budget setting process in the previous year. However, during the year Officers had identified the potential for greater revenue to be generated by the service. In part this potential had been highlighted by an external company that compared the market for services such as waste collection and recycling and which had worked with other local authorities. Officers had concluded that based on this development at the national level the Council should investigate all options further before a final decision was made about the service.

Business Rates

Members were advised that further information about the business rates would be provided as part of the budget scrutiny process in the new year.

RESOLVED that the Action List be noted.

90/14 **QUARTER 2 FINANCE MONITORING REPORT**

The Director of Finance and Corporate Resources presented the Finance Monitoring Report for the period April to September 2014. Members were advised that the additional information that had been requested by the Board in respect of income and expenditure would be included in reports from the new financial year, following the introduction of the new finance system.

During the delivery of this report the following matters were highlighted for Members' consideration:

- There would be a number of recharges at the end of the year between Councils involved in sharing services as well as between departments at the Council which would influence the final budget figures for 2014/15.
- The income target of £204,000 for Environmental Services would not be met by the end of the financial year due to the decision made in respect of Trade Waste Service.
- Officers were now anticipating that there would be a revenue underspend at the end of the year of £210,000.
- There had been an assumption that a significant amount of capital expenditure would have been made on projects during the period. However, as many of these projects had experienced delays capital expenditure had been much lower than anticipated. As a consequence the Council would no longer be borrowing funding as originally anticipated.
- Parkside would not be ready for the Council to use until at least April/May 2015, the move may be postponed until after the local and national elections had taken place.
- The figure that had been provided in the report for the Town Centre Development - Project Management was incorrect as the level of expenditure had been counted twice.

Following presentation of the report a number of issues were discussed in further detail by the Board.

- Arrangements for capital expenditure and the potential for a breakdown of the Council's capital programme to be provided.
- The extent to which assumptions in the budget were based on a realistic analysis of future demand and lessons that could be learned when planning the budget in the future.
- The savings that the Bromsgrove Urban and Rural Transport (BURT) were predicted to achieve by the end of the year and the potential for these

savings to be used to fund other community transport projects in the district.

- The locations in which the BURT service operated and eligibility criteria. The Chairman suggested that further information on this subject had been provided to the Board in previous years and he requested that this be reported for Members' consideration at ta future meeting.
- The energy efficiency home insulation project and the Council's approach to promoting the service.
- The projected variance in expenditure on customer services and the reasons for this variance.
- The impact of the reduction in funding for Customers Services made by Worcestershire County Council and the impact that this had had on demand for customer services at the district level.
- The £371,000 overspend on refuse and recycling services included both the £250,000 that had not been secured following the decision to not sell the trade waste service as well as £121,000 for vehicle breakdowns and replacement vehicle hire.
- The reduction in income from car parking charges and whether the sale of the Stourbridge Road car park had been taken into account when calculating the budget for future years. Officers explained that the sale was unlikely to proceed until the following financial year.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

91/14 **BUDGET POSITION - PRESSURES AND SAVINGS PRESENTATION**

The Director of Finance and Corporate Resources delivered a presentation on the pressures and savings that could be achieved in the Council's budget. She advised the Board that she would also be available to meet with any Members who wanted to discuss specific aspects of the budget in further detail. Further information about the lessons that had been learned from the Council's new approach to budget scrutiny would be discussed at the following meeting.

During the delivery of this presentation the following issues were highlighted for Members' consideration:

- The government grant settlement had reduced significantly in recent years.
- Whilst the government grant settlement for 2015/16 had not yet been announced it was anticipated that the figure would be approximately £1.2 million.
- The Council would continue to receive a Parish Council Grant, although it was anticipated that this would be further reduced, which had been awarded by the government two years previously to reimburse Councils for changes to Council tax.
- The budgetary impact of providing free parking in Bromsgrove during the evenings had not been included in the figures contained within the presentation as Cabinet had not as yet made a formal decision on this.

- The reserves had been reviewed and had been amended to reflect changing priorities and circumstances.
- A number of services, had achieved minimal savings. This would be discussed further with senior Officers at a corporate level.
- Members were advised that a list of buildings affected by the business rates increase would be provided for their consideration.
- The costs of the IER process for the elections had cost the Council less than had been anticipated and this had helped to achieve savings.

Following delivery of the presentation a number of additional points were raised by Members:

- The impact of cuts to the government grant on the Council's finances.
- The stage at which, due to financial reductions, local government would no longer be viable.
- The need for elected Members to make difficult decisions about service provision in order to balance the budget in future years.
- The potential to use funding from balances and the Council's reserves to address key financial challenges.
- Once reserves had been used they would no longer be available to use to balance the budget in future years.

RESOLVED that the presentation be noted.

92/14 **CAPITAL BUDGET - PRESENTATION**

The Director of Finance and Corporate Resources delivered a brief presentation on the Council's Capital Budget and highlighted the following for Members' consideration:

- There was a limited capital budget programme which was unusual.
- The £3.5 million quoted for the development of Parkside represented the gross rather than the net figure for the capital receipt quoted in the presentation.
- The budget for the replacement of fleet vehicles was designed to cover a 3 year period, though the programme for planning the replacement of the vehicles extended over a 10 year period.

Members subsequently discussed the following matters in further detail:

- The standard amount of time in which vehicles within the Council's fleet could safely be kept in operation.
- The potential for the length of time vehicles were in use to be extended and the need to balance consideration of the costs of replacing the fleet with the costs of ongoing maintenance which could become more expensive over time.
- Arrangements for disposing of vehicles, which generally involved a sale though on occasion vehicles had to be scrapped.
- The standard approach to replenishing the fleet and whether the Council leased/purchased new or second hand vehicles.

- The costs of hiring temporary vehicles, which was undertaken when necessary.

Following these detailed discussions it was

RESOLVED that the presentation be noted.

93/14 **CABINET WORK PROGRAMME 1ST JANUARY TO 30TH APRIL 2015**

The Board considered the Cabinet Work Programme for the period 1st January 2015 to 30th April 2015. The Chairman noted that no item had been recorded on the Work Programme for free parking during the evenings. It was understood that Cabinet would consider this matter in due course following the presentation of a notice of motion at Council in November 2014.

Members discussed the Setting of Fees for a Street Café Policy, which was scheduled for the consideration by Cabinet on 1st April 2015. Further clarification was requested to help explain the purpose of this report.

94/14 **CAR PARKING SHORT SHARP REVIEW**

The Chairman of the Car Parking Short, Sharp Review, Councillor S. P. Shannon, explained that the group had not met since the previous meeting of the Board as the last scheduled meeting had been cancelled due to the extra Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting taking place on 3rd December 2014. The Group were now due to meet on 22nd December 2014.

95/14 **WCC HEALTH OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

The Council's representative on the Worcestershire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC), Councillor B. T. Cooper, provided an update on the two latest meetings of the Committee.

5th November 2014

Members were advised that the Committee had discussed three key items during a lengthy meeting:

- Mental health liaison.
- An update on the Joint Services Review (JSR). Members had been advised that whilst a preferred option had been put forward the decision would be reviewed by the West Midlands Clinical Senate at the request of NHS England.
- Hospital treatment for patients based in North Worcestershire. Patients referred to the Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Birmingham with routine conditions were being refused treatment and this had caused concerns within Worcestershire. The hospital had chosen to take this stance in order to protect their tertiary services.

Members noted that they had also learned that patients who lived in south Birmingham were using the Alexandra Hospital in Redditch. This had been

confirmed by the Chairman of the Birmingham HOSC who had attended the meeting.

The Chairman explained that he had been approached by another Member of the Council about the services provided to patients who were members of practices in parts of the north of the district. Some GP practices in these locations were part of a wider group that were led by a parent practice based in Birmingham and were part of the Birmingham Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG). It had been suggested to the Chairman that the Board might want to consider this matter as a topic for scrutiny. However, it appeared from the HOSC minutes of 17th November that HOSC was already scheduled to investigate this matter further. Members agreed that prior to the Board considering this matter Councillor Cooper should raise it at a future meeting of HOSC.

9th December 2014

The Board was informed that mental health services had been discussed in detail during the this meeting. Two issues in particular had been of concern to HOSC:

- Care for patients with acute mental health illnesses.
- Care for patients with mental health problems who were discharged into the community. The Committee had been reassured that the care available to patients in these circumstances was improving.

Members were advised that once the HOSC minutes for this meeting had been finalised they would be circulated for the consideration of the Board.

96/14 **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD WORK PROGRAMME**

The Board considered the latest edition of the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme. Members were reminded that the meeting of the Board in January had been postponed from 19th to 21st January 2015 to accommodate an extra Council meeting in the new year.

Officers explained that whilst the Work Programme for the Board was relatively busy there remained capacity for a Task Group review to be launched. Member were therefore asked to consider whether there were any issues they felt might be suitable for a Task Group exercise which could be discussed at the following meeting of the Board.

The meeting closed at 8.18 p.m.

Chairman