

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL
MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

23RD NOVEMBER 2015 AT 6.00 P.M.

PRESENT: Councillors L. C. R. Mallett (Chairman), C. Allen-Jones, S. J. Baxter, C. J. Bloore, S. R. Colella, B. T. Cooper, M. Glass, R. D. Smith, P.L. Thomas and R. J. Deeming (Substitute)

Observers: Councillors G. Denaro, C. B. Taylor and P. Whittaker.

Officers: Ms. J. Pickering, Mr. G. Revans, Mr. D. Allen, Mr. K. Hirons, Mrs. H. L. Plant, Ms. A. Scarce and Ms. J. Bayley

66/15 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND NAMES SUBSTITUTES**

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors J. M. L. A. Griffiths and K. J. May. Councillor R. Deeming confirmed that he was attending as a substitute for Councillor May.

67/15 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND WHIPPING ARRANGEMENTS**

There were no declarations of interest nor of any whipping arrangements.

68/15 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board held on 26th October 2015 were submitted.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting held on 26th October 2015 be approved as a correct record.

69/15 **EVENING CAR PARKING TASK GROUP - VERBAL UPDATE**

In the absence of the Chairman of the Evening Car Parking Task Group Councillor M. Glass, a member of the group, provided a verbal update on the progress of the review.

Since the previous meeting of the Board Members had interviewed a number of expert witnesses. A survey had also been issued, to which the group had received 5 responses from local traders who operated during the day and 10 responses from the public. Though it was difficult to reach any conclusion based on such a small sample, a significant number had called for free parking mid-week or on Sundays.

Councillor Glass explained that, based on the evidence that Members had gathered to date, it had become clear that it was difficult to measure the impact of the introduction of free evening car parking. Any recommendations that might be brought forward by the group on this subject would be based on assumptions and anecdotal evidence. However, the group was mindful of the impact that parking could have on economic development and regeneration in the town centre. In this context Members had reached the conclusion that it would be helpful to extend the terms of reference for the review in order to assess whether car parking provision in the town centre was adequate to meet the needs of visitors and traders. This would also require an extension of the group's deadline to March 2016.

Following the provision of this update Members discussed a number of issues in further detail:

- The value of a more detailed review into car parking provision in the town following regeneration of the town centre, recent development proposals for the former market hall site and forthcoming works on the new leisure centre.
- The risk that the terms of reference could become too wide to address by the proposed new deadline of March 2016.
- The need for the group to have focus in order to make a constructive contribution to the Council's approach to managing car parks in the town.
- The potential for the review to make a constructive contribution in terms of economic development in the town and the need to involve the Economic Development Unit in the group's work.
- The option for the group to consider external research.
- Previous scrutiny reviews of car parking and the need for the group to avoid duplicating work that had already been undertaken.
- The need for an interim report, outlining the group's findings in relation to evening car parking, to be produced in advance of the Council's budget setting process.

In summary the Chairman noted that the Board was willing to let the group extend the timeframes for their review if they focused on economic regeneration. In particular, if the group discovered that free evening car parking was not the best option to enable economic regeneration within the town centre Members would be expected to identify alternative options that would have a more positive impact.

RESOLVED that

- 1) The title of the investigation be changed to Evening and Weekend Car Parking Task Group in order for the Task Group to complete its key objectives – in particular bullet point 3 “what alternative options are available and how do these compare to free evening parking for both customers and the traders in Bromsgrove?”;
- 2) The timescale for completion of the final report be extended to March 2016 in order for the Task Group to complete its in depth investigation;
- 3) An interim report be presented to the Board at its meeting on 18th January 2016; and

- 4) The report be noted.

70/15

CHURCHFIELDS MULTI STOREY CAR PARK IMPROVEMENT REPORT

The Environmental Services Manager presented a report detailing the proposed improvement works for Churchfields Multi-Storey Car Park. During the delivery of this presentation he highlighted a number of points for Members' consideration:

- Officers were requesting improvement works to address problems with vandalism and anti-social behaviour in the car park. It was proposed that these works should be funded from balances.
- Criminal damage and anti-social behaviour had been reported at the site since December 2014.
- In June 2015 West Mercia Police, in consultation with the Community Safety team, had produced a report assessing design features at the car park, with a focus on aspects that placed the venue at risk of vandalism and anti-social behaviour. This report had identified various security weaknesses which were being exploited by people accessing the car park after hours.
- The report proposed that additional fencing be installed to help prevent access outside normal opening hours.
- Officers were proposing that the doors which provided access to the stairwells should be replaced to enhance security. This work needed to be undertaken before any attempts were made to redecorate the stairwells as otherwise there was a risk that new paintwork would be vandalised before it could be secured.
- There was an opportunity to upgrade the lighting at the same time which would improve feelings of customer safety in the car park.
- A recent fire risk assessment had found that the fire alarm system in the carpark needed to be upgraded and this could be completed as part of the improvement works.
- Since the report was originally published new locations had been identified where people were accessing the car park out of hours.
- There was a risk that if the Council postponed the improvement works that were being proposed in the report the financial costs required to complete the works would increase.

After the presentation of this report Members discussed the following points:

- The positive impact that the improvement works would have, in terms of a reduction in anti-social behaviour and criminal damage in the car park.
- The relatively recent emergence of the car park as a focus for vandalism and anti-social behaviour and the need to address this problem as soon as possible.
- The work of the police to address problems with anti-social behaviour and crime in the car park, including the use of Section 34 dispersal powers.
- The income from Churchfields car park and the potential impact that these improvement works might have on future income. Members were

advised that the Council received an income of £88,000 per year and that it was difficult to predict the impact of the works on future demand as this could also be influenced by other factors such as the availability of other parking spaces in the town.

- The potential for the improvement works to be paid for using existing Council budgets. Officers advised that it would be more appropriate to pay for these works using funding from balances as there was no designated budget for the works.
- The potential for at least part of the expenditure on these works to be covered by insurance. Members were advised that the costs involved fell below the insurance threshold.

RESOLVED that the following proposals from Officers concerning improvement works to Churchfields Multi-Storey Car Park be endorsed:

- 1) Cabinet agree the improvement works; and
- 2) Cabinet recommend to Council the approval of, including the works within the 2015/16 Capital Programme, of £80,500 and to approve the funding to be released from balances.

71/15

PLANNING APPLICATION BACKLOG DATA

The Planning Services Manager provided an update on the progress that had been made in addressing the backlog with planning applications. During consideration of this item the following matters were highlighted for Members' consideration:

- Officers had attempted to emphasise key trends in the report.
- The backlog had declined in August 2015, which had coincided with a time when the team had been fully staffed. A number of employees had since moved to new jobs and there had subsequently been a rise in the backlog.
- Information about planning applications and the numbers that staff were working on at any given time was being published on the dashboard.
- Members would be able to monitor the backlog on the dashboard once access had been provided.
- The backlog changed every day depending on the number of applications that were received by the Council and the caseload of officers.

Following this presentation the Board discussed a number of matters in detail.

- The amount of time spent by officers producing the planning application backlog data monitoring update reports and whether this time could be better used working on planning applications.
- The frequency of the monitoring update reports, and whether this could be reduced once Members had access to the dashboard.
- The Council's position with regard to the designation status of major applications handled by the planning team.

- The Council's performance in terms of considering major planning applications compared to other local authorities. Members were advised that the Council was now processing major applications at a comparative speed to the average local authority.
- The ongoing value of the quarterly monitoring reports whilst the Council's planning services retained a designation status. Members concurred that these reports would no longer be required once the designation status was withdrawn.
- The different ways in which Officers were handling major applications compared to other planning applications.
- The inclusion of planning application figures for both Bromsgrove District Council and Redditch Borough Council in the information published on the dashboard. The Board was advised that generally applications for Bromsgrove constituted 65 per cent of the total at any one time.
- The limited information that had been provided to Members about the dashboard and a forthcoming presentation on this subject in December which might help to provide clarification.

RESOLVED that the Board reconsider the appropriate frequency of the Planning Application Backlog Data Monitoring Update reports in December following consideration of a presentation on the dashboard.

72/15

BURCOT LODGE EMERGENCY HOMELESS UNIT - UPDATE

The Strategic Housing Manager presented a written report detailing the progress that had been made with regard to discussions about the future of Burcot Lodge Emergency Homeless Unit. During this presentation he highlighted the following:

- Officers were anticipating that it would take 12 months to complete the sale of the Council House site, following the Council's move to Parkside. This advice had been provided by developers, organisations that might market the site and other local authorities.
- During this time Burcot Lodge could continue to be used as a homeless unit.
- The Council and Bromsgrove District Housing Trust (BDHT) were keen to only start using a replacement for Burcot Lodge once this became necessary.
- There was broad agreement between the Council and BDHT that Burcot Lodge would be replaced with slightly different facilities. This was because whilst there were 8 units in the lodge these were not always fully in demand.
- There were plan to replace the lodge with a smaller, three bedroom property which could be converted into a homeless unit. BDHT were estimating that it would take 8 – 12 weeks to convert this property.

The Board thanked Officers for the report and noted that in particular it had helped to clarify the timeframes available to resolve this issue.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

73/15

FEES AND CHARGES

The Executive Director for Finance and Corporate Resources presented a report outlining the proposed fees and charges for 2016/17. Whilst delivering this presentation she emphasised the following points for Members' consideration.

- The Cabinet was proposing a zero increase on fees and charges in 2016/17.
- However, there were a small number of services where increases in fees and charges were being proposed.
- For timing reasons Members were being asked to increase the charge for the garden waste collection service for 2017 at this stage.
- Officers were proposing an increase in the charge for the Lifeline Service to reflect the cost of delivering that service. These costs had increased because the service was trying to more accurately assess an individual's health and well-being needs.
- Building Control was increasingly operating in competition with external service providers. Publishing the services' fees represented a risk from a competition perspective and increasingly customers were advised to phone the team for a quote.
- As a result of the zero increase in charges the Council would have an additional budgetary pressure of £150,000 which would be recorded in the Medium Term Financial Plan.

Once the presentation had been delivered Members discussed a number of points in further detail:

- The potential for information about the hourly rate for prohibition and enforcement work delivered by the Strategic Housing team to be recorded in the report.
- The possibility of providing clarification in the report that the smoke alarm hire charges applied in cases where they were monitored by Officers.
- The extent to which the £150,000 additional budgetary pressure took into account the small number of fees and charges where it was proposed there should be an increase.
- The number of lifeline installations carried out every year.
- Recent increases that had been made earlier in the year to the fees for the garden waste collection and whether a further increase could be justified at a time when it was proposed that there should be a zero increase for other services.
- The potential impact that an increase in garden waste collection charges might have on rates of fly tipping locally.
- Payment methods available for garden waste collection and the increasing emphasis on payment by direct debit. Officers advised that payment using direct debit was not obligatory.
- The extent to which charges for cemetery services compared to other Councils.

- The proportion of the local market held by the Building Control team and the potential to increase that market share.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

74/15

MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN 2016/17 TO 2018/19

The Executive Director of Finance and Corporate Resources presented the Medium Term Financial Plan 2016/17 to 2018/19. During the delivery of this presentation she highlighted the following points:

- Officers had taken into account the Board's suggestions regarding the content of the report and separate columns had been included detailing both Council income and expenditure.
- Heads of Service had been asked to reflect on savings for future years as well as expenditure in 2014/15. In cases where there had been underspends in 2014/15 senior Officers had been asked to consider whether they needed to increase their budgets in 2016/17.
- The Comprehensive Spending Review on 25th November 2015 would potentially contain proposals with implications for local government finances.
- The Government grant settlement for the Council was unlikely to be confirmed until late in December.
- Officers had concerns that there might be changes to the funding of the New Homes Bonus which could have a significant impact on the Council's finances.
- Officers were aiming to provide an update to the Board on the subject of capital bids and unavoidable pressures at the following meeting.

The Board discussed a number of points in detail once the presentation had been delivered:

- The potential for further information to be provided in future reports where there was a variance of 10 per cent in the figures provided.
- The value of attendance by specific Heads of Service at future meetings of the Board in cases where a significant number of their services had budget variances of 10 per cent or more.
- The potential for the Chairman and Vice Chairman to meet in advance of the next meeting of the Board to discuss any variances over 10 per cent and to determine which were unusual enough to warrant the attendance of a Head of Service.
- The Council's expenditure on utility bills and potential savings that would arise in this respect following the closure of the Council House site.
- The anticipated decline in the Council Tax Support Grant and the potential impact that this might have on the Council's budget.
- Potential increases to pension contributions by the Council. Officers explained that all of the Councils in the county had challenged the actuaries for the local government pension scheme in Worcestershire about how these increases should be phased in.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

75/15

WORCESTERSHIRE HEALTH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - VERBAL UPDATE

Councillor B. T. Cooper, the Council's representative on the Worcestershire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC), provided an update on the latest meeting of the Committee which took place on 4th November 2015. The following issues were addressed during this update:

a) Draft Joint Health and Well-Being Strategy 2016-19

The Committee had considered the draft Joint Health and Well-Being Strategy 2016-19. A number of priorities had been identified for inclusion in the strategy including:

- Mental health.
- Physical well-being and activity.
- Reducing alcohol consumption.

Councillor Cooper explained that he had asked about the potential for air quality to be included as a priority as he was aware, from recent scrutiny work, how significant this issue was in relation to the health of residents living in Bromsgrove district. However, he had been advised that this was not being raised as a concern and therefore there was a lack of evidence to support the inclusion of this as a priority in the strategy. Members agreed that, due to the importance of this matter to the health of residents living in Bromsgrove District, Councillor Cooper's proposal to bring this to the attention of the Leader for action should be supported by the Board.

b) Worcester Cancer Services

The new cancer service had been collectively commissioned by the three Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) in Worcestershire. The performance of the new Oncology Unit was improving and it was becoming a useful facility for local residents.

c) Alexandra Hospital – Maternity Services

The recent developments with provision of Maternity Services at the Alexandra Hospital in Redditch had not yet been discussed by the Committee. However, the Chairman of the Committee had met with representatives of the trust to discuss the matter further and the Committee was shortly due to discuss the matter.

RECOMMENDED to the Leader that air quality be proposed as an additional priority for inclusion in the Joint Health and Well-Being Strategy 2016-19.

76/15

INCREASING PHYSICAL ACTIVITY JOINT SCRUTINY TASK GROUP - VERBAL UPDATE

In the absence of the Council's representative on the Increasing Physical Activity Joint Scrutiny Task Group, Councillor J. M. L. A. Griffiths, Members were advised that there were no updates on this subject for the Board.

The Board noted that at their previous meeting Members had been advised that the Task Group had consulted with representatives of local sports clubs. It was suggested that, if Members had not already done so, it might be useful to consult with the group that had launched a petition about the facility mix at the new leisure centre.

Members agreed that for all Task Group updates it would be useful for the Board to receive written updates if the Council's lead representative was unavailable to attend the meeting.

77/15 **ACTION LIST**

Officers advised that the briefing paper requested in respect of the Churchfields Car Park had been resolved so would be removed from the Actions List. The Planning Application Backlog item would be updated following the next meeting of the Board once Members had determined the appropriate frequency of the reports.

78/15 **QUARTERLY RECOMMENDATION TRACKER**

Officers provided updates on progress made implementing scrutiny recommendations:

a) **Leisure Provision Task Group**

The Board was advised that a number of the recommendations that had been made by the Leisure Provision Task Group remained to be implemented. Further, more detailed information about progress that had been achieved with implementing the group's recommendations would be provided during the 12 month review of this exercise in January 2016.

b) **Youth Provision Task Group**

A number of the recommendations proposed by the Youth Provision Task Group also remained to be implemented. Three of these recommendations required action from Worcestershire County Council and a response was awaited from the lead Officer at the County Council. A further recommendation involved the delivery of a presentation by the Chairman of the Task Group, Councillor J. M. L. A. Griffiths, for consideration at a CALC meeting.

Councillor S. J. Baxter, as the Chairman of CALC, was asked to raise the proposed presentation for the consideration of CALC at a future meeting in order to identify a suitable date for this action to take place. Members also agreed that in order to progress the other three outstanding

recommendations Councillor J. M. L. A. Griffiths, in her capacity both as a County Councillor and as the former Chairman on the Task Group, should be asked to raise this issue with the relevant Officer at Worcestershire County Council and to encourage him to take action in respect of these points.

c) Finance Monitoring

Officers explained that part of the recommendation from the Board, concerning the inclusion of income and expenditure details within the quarterly update reports, had been implemented. However, Members were advised that it would be more difficult to include all of the comparable data in the tables as requested. This made the tables very complicated and it would be difficult to present the information within the space available. For these reasons the board agreed that a summary could be provided for comparative purposes within the report.

79/15

CABINET WORK PROGRAMME

The Board considered the content of the latest version of the Cabinet Work Programme and noted the following key points:

a) High Street Refurbishment Phase 2

The Chairman explained that the High Street Refurbishment Phase 2: Consideration of Options report was no longer due to be considered by Cabinet in December 2015. However, the Chairman had been assured that the Board would have an opportunity to pre-scrutinise the contents of this report before any decisions were made on the subject by Cabinet.

b) New Leisure Centre Update

Members commented that it would be useful to have further information about the outcomes of the Council's negotiations with BAM regarding the position in relation to sporting facilities at the new leisure centre. This was a subject that the Board had previously made suggestions about and, given recent public interest in the matter, Members agreed that it would be suitable for further information on this subject to be provided for the Board's consideration.

RESOLVED that the Head of Leisure and Cultural Services deliver a presentation on the subject of the new Leisure Centre, to include information about the outcomes of negotiations with BAM.

80/15

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Board discussed the content of the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme:

a) Dashboard presentation

All Councillors would be invited to attend the meeting on 14th December to view the presentation on the subject of the dashboard.

b) Parkside

It was possible that this would be the first meeting to be held in Parkside, though the location remained to be decided. Members had an opportunity to look around Parkside in advance of this meeting on 9th December and also needed to provide Officers with their car registration details before the move to Parkside to ensure that they could park for Committee meetings.

c) March and April meetings

The Chairman noted that whilst numerous items were scheduled to be considered during the meetings of the Board in December and January very little had been programmed for consideration in March and April 2016. Members were therefore asked to reflect on the items listed on the work programme which had not been allocated a date and to prioritise issues for consideration during those months.

The meeting closed at 7.45 p.m.

Chairman