

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

30TH OCTOBER 2017, AT 6.00 P.M.

PRESENT: Councillors L. C. R. Mallett (Chairman), S. A. Webb (Vice-Chairman),
C. J. Bloore, S. R. Colella, M. Glass, C.A. Hotham, R. J. Laight,
C. J. Spencer and M. Thompson

Observers: Councillors K. May, S. Shannon and L. Turner

Officers: Ms. J. Pickering, Ms. A. Scarce and Ms C. Welsh

48/17 **APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors C. Allen-Jones and P. L. Thomas.

49/17 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND WHIPPING ARRANGEMENTS**

Councillor C. A. Hotham declared an other disclosable interest in respect of Minute No. 52/17 as his wife was a GP. He left the room for this item and took no part in the debate.

50/17 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board held on 18th September 2017 were submitted.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board held on 18th September 2017 be approved as a correct record.

51/17 **CENTRES STRATEGY - PRE-SCRUTINY**

The Portfolio Holder for Economic Development, the Town Centre and Strategic Partnerships reminded Members that they had received a summary of the Centres Strategy at the previous meeting and they now had before them the full document. It was highlighted that whilst the strategy covered seven specific centres, it could be adapted to take account of the changing landscape of the District and would be reviewed in 3 years.

Members discussed a number of areas in more detail, including:

- Whether consideration had been given to re-developing some areas of Bromsgrove centre for town living. The Portfolio Holder responded that this was something which was being considered, with particular reference to areas above the shops, although some resistance to this had been met, it was an ongoing piece of work.
- Concerns were raised that there was no mention of Aston Fields within the Strategy. The Portfolio Holder responded that this would be considered as part of the review. The Centres Manager role had made specific reference to the seven centres highlighted in the Strategy; however this did not mean that she did not provide support to the remaining centres, where possible.
- Whether a strategy covering 3 years was sufficient time in light of the significant body of work which needed to be done. The Portfolio Holder responded that it was a realistic rolling programme and that it was in line with the 3 year contract of the Town Centres Manager.
- Development opportunity sites and the inclusion of the Recreation Ground – it was explained that this referred to improvements rather than development, following the completion of the retirement village. It was suggested that this needed to be made clearer as it may be misunderstood by anyone reading it.
- Evidence to back up the low number of void rates – it was confirmed that this currently stood at 12.
- Connecting the station to the Town Centre and available funds to support this.
- The production of the strategy as a document and the procurement process which had been followed. Members were disappointed that this had not been produced by a local photographer.

There were a number of typographical errors which it was noted would be corrected.

Following discussion on the Centres Strategy the Board further discussed the access between the station and the Town Centre. It was noted that there had been an article in the local press in respect of a new connecting bridge which would be built at Bant Mill Road. Concerns were raised in respect of how this decision had been reached and what involvement, if any the District Council had had. It was disputed as to whether this was the quickest route from Aston Fields to the Town Centre and a number of Members believed that the junction which accessed the Industrial and Business parks further along would be a much more suitable site for a new footbridge as this junction was also used for accessing local schools.

It was confirmed that this project was the result of funding from Central Government being made available. During the debate a number of areas were discussed:

- The distance, using the proposed footbridge to access the station and whether this was the shortest route to the Town Centre.
- Whether the Portfolio Holder had been consulted on the location of the bridge – it was confirmed that she had not.
- Whether the District would need to make any contribution to the cost of the new footbridge – it was confirmed that they had not been asked to.
- Whether this project would have an adverse effect on other projects within the district.
- Whether there had been or would be a consultation of residents to see whether this was what they wanted/needed.

Members went on to discuss a number of issues in respect of the A38, including a suggestion which had been made to make the section where the new footbridge was proposed dual carriage way. Members could not understand how this could be done without removing the sound barrier, which would not be acceptable to residents. Concerns were raised that there appeared not to be any joined up thinking between the County and District Councils. Officers advised that the Board were able to scrutinise areas which were outside of the District's control, particularly where there was an impact on its residents. If appropriate, a representative from Worcestershire County Council could be invited to a future meeting to discuss how this decision had been reached.

RESOLVED that

- 1) the Centres Strategy be noted; and
- 2) a briefing paper be prepared by officers covering the areas discussed in the pre-amble above in respect of the proposed footbridge on the A38 be presented to a future meeting on the Board.

52/17

HOSPITAL CAR PARKING CHARGES - ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Officers reminded Members that this information had been requested following a notice of motion from Council which had been referred to the Board for further consideration. The briefing paper set out a brief outline of the car parking system and charges applicable at hospital run by the Worcestershire Acute Hospitals Trust (WAHT). It also provide details of the concessionary scheme in place and comparative data in respect of car parking charges made by a number of other Hospital Trusts.

Whilst considering the information Members discussed a number of areas in detail:

- That the concessionary charges appeared not to be well publicised – it was confirmed that these were now included on the car park signage and that more details were available from the relevant Wards.
- The lack of information in respect of the breakdown of income received from the car parks and detail in respect of the PFI contract.

- The option for the Board to write to the Secretary of State airing its concerns around car parking charges being used to top up hospital budgets which were under significant pressure.
- This was a problem which was not unique to Worcestershire.
- The need for a breakdown of the ongoing maintenance costs associated with the car parks.

Officers advised the Board that there were a number of ways in which it could approach any investigation including a Board investigation, a short sharp review or a task group. It was in Members' gift to decide how best to approach this. Members discussed how to approach the investigation in light of the initial notice of motion. It was agreed that further information would help shape that decision and it was therefore suggested that a small group of Board Members work with officers to formulate report setting out the additional information detailed above and further options available to the Board following receipt of that information.

RESOLVED that a Board investigation, led by Councillors Bloore, Colella, Thompson and Webb be undertaken, supported by Officers, with a view to an initial report being brought to the December meeting of the Board for further consideration.

(During consideration of this item Councillor C. A. Hotham declared an other disclosable interest as his wife was a GP. He left the room for this item and took no part in the debate).

53/17

PLANNING BACKLOG DATA UP TO 30TH SEPTEMBER 2017

The Chairman reminded Members that this information had originally been provided due to concerns raised following the Planning Department being in designation. It had been agreed that the Portfolio Holder and Officers no longer needed to attend to present this information, but if needed would be invited in to the following meeting. The Board had also reduced the number of reports received to bi-annually and had not asked for any further information.

Members discussed whether it was necessary for this item to remain on the Board's Work Programme and agreed that as the information was prepared for other purposes that the data would be sent out to Members prior to a Board meeting and if Members had any particular concerns then it could be placed on the agenda on an ad hoc basis.

RESOLVED that the Planning Backlog Data up to 30th September be noted.

54/17

RECOMMENDATION TRACKER

The Recommendation Tracker provided Members with an update on recommendations which it had made and progress on their implementation. The majority of these related to the work of the Finance

and Budget Working Group and as such the Executive Director, Finance and Resources provided an update and responded to questions from Members. Particular reference was made to the recommendations in respect of Virements and it was confirmed that these had been agreed by Cabinet and further considered by the Finance and Budget Working Group, when further changes had been made. Those changes would be picked up by the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Enabling when the report was presented to Council in November.

Members also asked for an update in respect of the recommendation from the Finance and Budget Working Group which referred to the services of an external commercial organisation being used in order to review the management structure of the Council. The Executive Director, Finance and Resources confirmed that she would speak to the Chief Executive requesting a response in respect of this item.

In respect of the recommendations from the Evening and Weekend Car Parking Task Group, the Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Economic Development, Town Centre and Strategic Partnerships advised Members that 2020 Consultants were currently undertaking a review of car parking, which included a survey and public meeting, which was due to be held on 4th November in the Library. She hoped to feedback the findings of this consultation within 4-6 weeks of its completion.

The Chairman of the Staff Survey Joint Task Group advised Members that in respect of the recommendations from that Group, both the Chairman and Vice Chairman had been invited to attend a presentation from the company formulating the next Staff Survey, in line with one of the recommendations.

55/17

PARKING ENFORCEMENT IN THE VICINITY OF SCHOOLS - TOPIC PROPOSAL

The Chairman invited Councillor Bloore to present his topic proposal and reminded Members that he had at the previous meeting, been appointed as Chairman of this Task Group.

Members were asked to confirm their agreement to the terms of reference in order for the next stage of the investigation to commence. It was agreed that the work of the Task Group would commence in January/early February 2018 and Members, who were not Members of the Cabinet would be invited to join the Task Group, with a maximum of 7 including the Chairman and should there be interest in excess of this, membership be on a "first come first served" basis. It was noted that Councillors R. Dent, S. Colella, S. Shannon and C. Spencer had already shown an interest in joining this Task Group.

The Portfolio Holder, Economic Development, Town Centre and Strategic Partnership gave support to the proposal as she was keen to ensure that the Enforcement Officers were utilised on a needs basis.

RESOLVED:

- a) that the Overview and Scrutiny Board agree the terms of reference for the Car Parking Outside Schools Task Group; and
- b) Officers canvass membership of the Task Group with a view to the investigation commencing in January/February 2018.

56/17

SOCIAL MEDIA TASK GROUP - DRAFT FINAL REPORT

Councillor R. Laight as Chairman of the Social Media Task Group introduced the report and in so doing thanked the Members of the Task Group and in particular Councillor Thompson who had acted as Vice Chairman in his absence. The aim of the Task Group had been to investigate how social media was used by both the Council and Members. The Group had met with a number of witnesses and had received a wide range of information from them. The Council's Communications Manager had been very supportive and showed a great knowledge of the use of social media and its pitfalls. It was important that Members were trained in how to use it appropriately to ensure they were aware of the legal implications of any comments made through it. The importance of isolating the use of social media for their personal lives and for their role as Councillors was something which had been debated at some length. There were also a number of areas which the Task Group felt warranted further consideration and this had included the Council providing, perhaps through working with partners, training opportunities for residents and in particular those which were more vulnerable.

Following presentation of the report Members discussed a number of areas included within it, particularly the live streaming of meetings and how this would work. Officers explained that this could already be done and had been on occasion, by attendees at public meetings and therefore by the Council carrying this out it gave more control around what would be presented in the public domain. Although it was stressed, that it was not envisaged that a whole meeting would be live streamed, more around a specific agenda item which could be of particular public interest. This would give scope for a wider audience to access the work of the Council as it happened.

RECOMMENDED to Cabinet that

- 1) the Council should promote its meetings through social media in order to engage with residents;
- 2) the Council should consider a trial of the live streaming of particular items/meetings of interest to residents through Facebook;
- 3) a) the Council's Social Media policy be reviewed with the emphasis on providing guidance for officer use;
b) a separate section be included which is dedicated to guidance for Members' use of social media; and

- c) Members of the Task Group assist with the section in respect of guidance for Members' use.
- 4) an area be created on the Measures Dashboard dedicated to data in respect of access to the Council's social media accounts in order to measure its usage; and
- 5) as part of the Member Induction Programme a workshop type training session be provided for Members, covering the following areas:
 - a) An introduction to Social Media on an iPad; and
 - b) Any legal implications of Members' use of social media and how to keep safe.

57/17

FINANCE AND BUDGET WORKING GROUP - UPDATE

The Board was advised that as the Finance and Budget Working Group had not had a meeting in time to consider the report in respect of the Medium Term Financial Plan 2018/19 – 201/22 Budget Assumptions it had been included within the agenda as a supplementary item for the Board to consider.

The Executive Director, Finance and Resources presented the report and in so doing highlighted a number of areas, including the assumptions made in respect of:

- Council Tax
- Pay inflation
- Superannuation Rates
- Price Inflation
- Discretionary Fees and Charges (2.8% customer price inflation had been used for this). Any areas which deviated from this would be asked to give an explanation of the reasoning behind this.

It was explained that Service Managers had also been asked to analyse their current fees and charges taking into consideration cost recovery, current usage/demand with a view to optimising income to the Council. The fees and charges report would be considered by the Finance and Budget Working Group at one of its forthcoming meetings.

The Executive Director, Finance and Resources took the opportunity to provide Members with an update in respect of the proposed Worcestershire Pilot Business Rates Pool, for which delegated authority had been granted to the Group Leaders at the previous Council meeting. Worcestershire had made a proposal to amend the percentage split of the funds from this, however all the Districts had successfully opposed this and the original split of 50% to districts, 49% to Worcestershire County Council and 1% to the Fire Authority had been included in the proposal which had been submitted by the due date of 27th October 2017.

Members discussed a number of other areas in more detail, including:

- The level of borrowings – these had been agreed at the last full Council meeting.
- Savings associated with Burcot Lane and the impact of any changes in respect of local authority investments. It was confirmed that currently there were no planned investments, but any coming forward would take account of any pending changes. It was believed that these referred to local authorities who were investing outside of their own areas.
- The level of surplus which had been more than anticipated on a number of occasions and the impression this gave to residents when fees and charges were being increased.
- The impact of the increase on Council Tax of £5 as opposed to 1.99% - the Executive Director, Finance and Resources agreed to provide the exact figures to Members outside of the meeting.

Following discussion of the report the Chairman gave a brief outline of the areas covered by the Finance and Budget Working Group since the last Board meeting. This included further work in respect of shared services, cost allocations, commercialisation and Financial Strategy, procurement regulations and a budget timeline for future meetings.

58/17

MEASURES DASHBOARD WORKING GROUP - UPDATE

Councillor Webb, as Chairman of the Measures Dashboard Working Group advised Members that the Group's work was progressing well and had arranged a further meeting in November. The Group also planned to meet with Redditch Members in January to look at the potential for joint working and in particular the recommendation from the Staff Survey Joint Scrutiny Task Group.

It was also noted that Members would shortly be receiving an email from IT in respect of accessing the Dashboard on iPads following a trial which had been undertaken by Members of the Group.

59/17

TASK GROUP UPDATES

CCTV Short Sharp Review

Councillor Colella, as Chairman of the Review advised that the Group had planned on inviting a number of key witnesses to future meetings, including the Police and Crime Commissioner. However, following receipt of information in respect of a review of CCTV undertaken by the Police and Crime Commissioner, this had been delayed until further detail in respect of that review had been received. It was understood that funds would be made available to the Council, but these would be limited and have a number of caveats attached to them.

At its most recent meeting the Group had discussed a number of alternative options, which would help formulate recommendations to be

included in its final report, which it was anticipated would be completed in January.

60/17

WORCESTERSHIRE HEALTH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - UPDATE

Officers advised Members that due to other commitments Councillor Webb had asked to step down from her role as representative on the Worcestershire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC).

Officers informed Members that this was a role which ordinarily was appointed by the Leader at Council but needed to be a Member of the Board. In the circumstances the Leader had advised Officers that he was happy for the Board to make this appointment and for it to be reported to Council at the November meeting. It was confirmed that the HOSC met on a monthly basis and the meetings were held during the day time.

The Chairman asked for nominations and following a brief discussion it was

RESOLVED that Councillor Charles Hotham be appointed at the Board's representative on the Worcestershire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee with immediate effect.

61/17

CABINET WORK PROGRAMME

The Board considered the content of the Cabinet Work Programme for the period 1st November 2017 to 28th February 2018; however Officers advised that there had been a more up to date version published that day, which included a number of additional items. It was confirmed that a number of those in relation to finance would be considered by the Finance and Budget Working Group.

Following discussion the Board requested the opportunity to consider the Local Development Scheme – District Review Timetable and the Allocation of Homelessness Grant Funding 2018/19 at its December meeting.

Although not on the Cabinet Work Programme, Members also showed an interest in receiving information on the Disabled Facilities Grant and it was confirmed that this was also an item on the work programme of the Finance and Budget Working Group.

62/17

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD WORK PROGRAMME

Officers confirmed that the Work Programme would be updated in line with the areas discussed during the meeting. It was also highlighted that the Industrial Units Investment Outline Business Case had been put back and would now be received at Cabinet in January and therefore, would be put back on the Board's Work Programme to December.

The meeting closed at 8.10 p.m.

Chairman