

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

23RD NOVEMBER 2020, AT 6.00 P.M.

PRESENT: Councillors M. Thompson (Chairman), J. Till (Vice-Chairman), A. J. B. Beaumont, S. R. Colella, R. J. Deeming, M. Glass, C.A. Hotham, R. J. Hunter, A. D. Kriss (minute 46-52), P. M. McDonald (minute 46-51) and C. J. Spencer

Observers: Councillor K. May, Councillor G. Denaro, Councillor S. Webb

Officers: Mr. K. Dicks, Mrs. S. Hanley, Mrs. C. Felton, Mrs R. Bamford, Mr. O. Paparega, Ms. J. Willis, Mrs J. Heyes, Mr. J. Smith, Ms I. Karimi Fini, Ms. A. Scarce and Mrs. J Gresham

46/20 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES**

No apologies for absence were received.

47/20 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND WHIPPING ARRANGEMENTS**

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

48/20 **TO CONFIRM THE ACCURACY OF THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD HELD ON 12TH OCTOBER 2020**

The minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting held on 12th October 2020 were submitted for Members' consideration. Councillor C. Spencer advised that her name did not appear in the list of Members Present at the meeting and asked that the minutes be updated to reflect her attendance. The Democratic Services Officer undertook to make the amendment.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board held on 12th October 2020 be approved as an accurate record.

49/20

BROMSGROVE MARKET UPDATE

The Head of Legal, Democratic and Property Services presented the item in respect of the Bromsgrove Market. Also in attendance for this item was the Business Improvement Manager for this area and the Bromsgrove Market Manager.

Members were invited to ask questions on the performance of the market during the pandemic. There was particular interest from Members regarding the number of traders that had received financial support from Bromsgrove District Council and the current number of traders. Officers confirmed that due to the Government guidelines regarding permission to trade and the sale of essential items there were currently 7 traders on the market. The Head of Legal, Democratic and Property Services would confirm with relevant officers in respect of the amount of financial support received by traders during the pandemic and circulate the information to Members outside of the meeting.

Officers confirmed that the market could be mobilised quickly once an announcement was made as to which Tier Bromsgrove would be included in after the second lockdown. In addition to this, there was scope to include extra trading days of the market in the run up to Christmas. This news was welcomed by the Board.

Members were pleased to hear that there had been no adverse reaction to Council staff during a difficult period for the market and that residents and traders had been supportive of the staff during the pandemic.

There was detailed discussion in respect of the potential use of the Bird Box for the market. The Head of Planning, Regeneration and Leisure advised Members that it might not be appropriate to move stalls from the High Street and that it was a priority to promote the Bird Box as an event space.

The Chairman invited Councillor K. May, who was in attendance in her role as Leader and Portfolio Holder for Economic Development, the Town Centre and Strategic Partnerships to comment on the report from officers. She thanked the team for all of their hard work during an unprecedented time. It was acknowledged by some Members that the decision taken by Council to return the market to a Council run operation had now proved to be fortuitous and an appropriate one in light of the pandemic and particularly given the status of Bromsgrove as a market town.

It was queried what the financial loss in respect of the markets had been during the pandemic. Officers confirmed that inevitably there had been losses experienced and between the first lockdown to early November £21,441 in income had been received. The Head of Legal and Democratic Services confirmed that the actual figures were not currently known but that the Council were claiming for all available financial support from Central Government and that Members would be informed once further information was available.

RESOLVED that the update in respect of the Bromsgrove Market be noted.

50/20

HEAD OF PLANNING, REGENERATION AND LEISURE SERVICES TO RESPOND TO QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS IN RESPECT OF THE PROCESS AND POLICY FOR THIRD PARTY EVENTS

The Head of Planning, Regeneration and Leisure Services was welcomed to the meeting in order to answer Members' questions in respect of the process and policy for third party events.

During this item the following information was provided to Members:

- There were three categories of events that the Council might be involved in. They were as follows:
 - Council Run Events this included fireworks displays or Christmas Lights switch on lights were the sole responsibility of the council.
 - Civic or Community Lead Events where the Council provided some sort of support e.g. Remembrance Sunday Services
 - Other Events – events that the Council were not involved in from a Leisure perspective

Further information was requested by Members regarding events where fireworks were featured and what procedures were in place so that residents could take precautions if necessary, prior to the event taking place. The Head of Planning, Regeneration and Leisure explained that Council run events were well-publicised in advance. It was further clarified to Members that for private events, such as a fireworks display in a resident's back garden, no prior intervention could be made. The Board were advised if they wished to consider the types of events held on behalf of the Council, they should engage with the Portfolio Holder for Leisure Services.

There was concern from some Members that there seemed to be very little communication between Ward Members and Parish Councils prior to some particular events taking place. This included access to risk assessments that had been undertaken and potential road closures.

During the presentation, the following was highlighted for Members' attention:

- Some regular events occurred at the same time every year and that residents, Members and Parish Councillors would be aware of those dates due to their regularity.
- Road closures were posted by the Council even in the case of third-party events.
- Risk assessments were carried out by the company or organisation who hosted the event. At the current time in addition to the usual risk assessments, Covid-19 risk assessments were also carried out for all events. The Council did have sight of the risk assessments for the Alvechurch Mop and in conjunction with partners including Police and Fire Authority ensured that any mitigations within the risk assessment were appropriate and implemented effectively. The timelines for receipt of any risk assessment were reported to Members.
- Some third-party event organisers were members of the Showmans' Guild. Guild rules regulated access to land which had to be provided on a repeated and predictable basis. These rules were in place in order to protect the livelihoods of the Showmans' Guild members.
- It was reported that firework events could be cancelled at very short notice as a result of an inclement weather forecast, and regular assessments were made in the run up to these types of events.

The Chairman invited Councillor P. Thomas, who was in attendance in his role as Portfolio Holder for Leisure, Cultural Services and Community Safety for comment. He thanked the officers for their detailed responses to Members' questions.

RESOLVED that the presentation in respect of the process and policy for third party events be noted.

The Head of North Worcestershire Economic Development and Regeneration (NWEDR) presented the item in respect of the District Level Economic Recovery Framework and in doing so highlighted the following to Members:

- The District Level Economic Recovery Framework set out the priorities for recovery in the District and was a 'live' document and could be amended to reflect any changes in circumstances. The document outlined what plans were in place with key partners.
- There were three key priorities contained within the plan; Supporting People, Supporting Businesses and Improving Places.
- Data that was used within the plan captured the number of people claiming out of work benefits, the number of job vacancies and the number on furlough and comparisons between pre-lockdown figures had been analysed. It was clarified to Members that the number of claimants of benefits was increasing and there had been a significant drop in job vacancies. This had led to a more competitive labour market in the District. Members were informed that there had been an error within the District Level Economic Recovery Framework report in respect of the numbers of people eligible for employment within Bromsgrove. The figures were clarified as being 45,000 residents who were eligible for employment and not 42,800. The take up rate was confirmed as 11.5%.
- It was difficult to identify the number of businesses that had stopped trading during Covid-19 and the associated lockdown as there was an inevitable time lapse in the collection of data and its publication in this area.
- North Worcestershire Economic Development and Regeneration, Worcestershire County Council, Worcestershire Local Enterprise Partnership and Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership were working with residents who were at risk of redundancies or who had lost their jobs during the pandemic. The work included matching skills to vacancies and ensuring that the existing workforce were equipped with the appropriate skills to satisfy the labour market.
- Guidance and ensuring information in respect of grants and available support were key components within the plan and it was highlighted to Members that there had been a significant increase in people requesting information on starting up their own business during the pandemic. Support for larger businesses in Bromsgrove was also available and it was hoped that this would prevent the potential for large numbers of redundancies in the

future. The pandemic had highlighted the need for better resilience for businesses.

- It was hoped that the plan would improve access and layout in the Town Centre would encourage people to spend more time and money there.
- A Business Support Officer and Engagement Support Officer had been appointed by NWEDR in order to help facilitate the work contained within the plan.

After the presentation there was detailed debate regarding the matching of skills to vacancies in the current climate and the process that was to be undertaken in order to carry this work out. It was explained to Members that the plan would provide the framework for this work and that discussions had already taken place in respect of working with businesses to match up vacancies and skills that were available. It was noted that historically Bromsgrove had a good record of incubating businesses and was at an advantage compared to other Districts due to its location and higher education facilities. It was reported to Members that there had been recent investment in the District by two large digital companies. It was hoped that these investments would demonstrate there were opportunities in the District for local people.

There was a suggestion that perhaps this might be an opportunity to bring forward the date for regeneration of the Town Centre and that local centres were not all in need of re-purposing. It was suggested that local Ward Members be involved in discussions regarding any potential changes to their local centres. Members were advised that work was already taking place in respect of the regeneration of the Town Centre.

After lengthy debate, the following recommendation was proposed by Councillor S. Colella:

‘That the Strategic Planning Team and Economic Regeneration Team engage with the town centre ward member to develop a master regeneration plan and a timeline for that plan.’

On being put to the vote this recommendation was lost.

Several sites were identified as potential areas of opportunity and innovative approaches for partnership working in the Town Centre particularly heritage buildings. Members were advised that as some of the buildings were privately owned this made plans more difficult to initiate.

Members were encouraged at the number of businesses in the District, however it seemed that they were not businesses that employed a large number of people. In previous years, it had been the case that business had been registered in the District but were not operating businesses. The Head of NWEDR agreed that the data might have been distorted by businesses that were registered but not actively trading. Members requested that the figures of the internal wage of the District compared to other Local Authorities in the County be provided. These figures Median Gross Weekly Pay (full time 2018) were as follows:

	People who live and work in Bromsgrove
Bromsgrove	£500 per week
Redditch	£480 per week
Wyre Forest	£450 per week

It was clarified to Members that there was a big discrepancy in respect of wages of those that lived in Bromsgrove and worked elsewhere where the Gross Median weekly wage was £650 per week.

RESOLVED that the report in respect of the District Level Economic Recovery Framework be noted.

52/20

HOUSING STRATEGY - PRE-SCRUTINY

The Head of Community and Housing Services presented the report in respect of the Housing Strategy for consideration by the Board.

Members were informed that this strategy complemented the countywide strategy and took a more localised approach. The strategy had been drafted prior to the pandemic however Covid-19 had been included in the final document presented before Members. The proposed strategy would be put out to public consultation for a 4-week period.

Councillor S. Webb was invited to speak in her capacity as Portfolio Holder for Strategic Housing and Health and Wellbeing who thanked the team for bringing the strategy together in difficult circumstances.

A suggested amendment was made in respect of the wording used within the report. However, Officers confirmed that the existing wording was part of the countywide Strategic Housing Plan which had already been approved therefore no changes could be made. Members were assured that Officers would feedback the suggestion back to Worcestershire County Council in order that changes might be made in future iterations of the countywide strategy. It was however agreed that

'affordable' be inserted into the strategy on page 40 of the main agenda pack to reflect that this was a key strand within the strategy.

The Chief Executive clarified to Members further context in respect of the countywide Housing Strategy. He explained that this was a longer-term housing strategy across Worcestershire and that affordability was a key area going forward.

Members' attention was drawn to another potential change on Page 36 of the main agenda pack detailing the number of complaints in the private rental sector in contrast to the number of complaints in the social housing sector. The Head of Community and Housing Services undertook to finding further information in respect of the number of complaints regarding social housing for possible inclusion in the report.

Some concerns were raised in respect of green initiatives and their place within the Housing Strategy going forward. Members were advised green initiatives were considered and were already being included in projects that had been undertaken.

RESOLVED that the Housing Strategy be noted.

53/20

DOMESTIC ABUSE POLICY - PRE-SCRUTINY

The Domestic Abuse Policy was presented for Members' consideration by the Head of Community and Housing Services. The policy set out the Council's commitment to addressing and preventing Domestic Abuse and that ensured that Council staff were equipped in identifying abuse in customers and service users. The strategy also served to satisfy the requirements set out in the Domestic Abuse Bill which would come into effect in April 2021. Members were advised that they would be provided with training to aid Members in this area.

The Chairman invited Councillor S. Webb to speak on this report and she thanked officers for their hard work in putting such an important policy together and although there had been a slight rise in the instances of domestic abuse during the pandemic, officers were working closely with partners in order to manage any increase.

Members were advised that this was a new policy for the Council and that Domestic Abuse had previously been included in the Safeguarding Policy. This new, separate policy reflected the additional duty that Local Authorities would have placed on them when legislation came into effect from April 2020.

RESOLVED that the report in respect of the Domestic Abuse Policy be noted.

54/20

FINANCE AND BUDGET WORKING GROUP - UPDATE

The Chairman introduced the Finance and Budget Working Group update in his role as Chairman of the Group. He explained that the Working Group had met once since the last Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting held on 18th November 2020.

At the meeting of the 18th November the Group looked closely at Fees and Charges, Budget Bids and the impact of Covid-19 and Capital Expenditure on Strategic Assets. In attendance for the items were the Head of Environmental and Housing Property Services and the Head of Planning, Regeneration and Leisure Services.

Concerns were raised by the Group in respect of the Capital Programme and it was agreed that this area would be closely monitored in the coming months.

The Group requested further updates at the next meeting regarding the impact of Covid-19 on the Council's budget and information on grants that were available from Central Government. Members would also continue to monitor the Council's position in this area.

A motion that had been brought before Council by Councillor R. Hunter was discussed during the meeting and Members requested that he attend the next meeting of the Group, due to be held on 16th December 2020, to understand the motion in more detail.

The Chairman asked if there were any further comments for the Board and it was noted that if the Council made a decision to not provide a service during the pandemic there would be no remuneration from Central Government. However, it was confirmed that if closures were mandatory, then remuneration would be made.

RESOLVED that the update in respect of the Finance and Budget Working Group be noted.

55/20

TASK GROUP UPDATES

- a) Equalities Task Group – Chairman, Councillor P. McDonald

In the absence of Councillor P. McDonald the Senior Democratic Officer presented this update and highlighted to Members that there had been two meetings of the Task Group since the last meeting. Members were informed that attendees included the Policy Manager and a Union Representative. Members were advised that the report was in the process of being completed in readiness for the February Board meeting.

b) Impact of Review of Library Services Task Group – Chairman, Councillor S. Colella

Councillor S. Colella gave a verbal update in respect of this item and informed Members that the group had met once since the last meeting of the Board and were due to meet on 15th December 2020. Councillor L. Hodgson Cabinet Member with responsibility for Communities at Worcestershire County Council (WCC) had been invited to this meeting to provide further context of the new countywide Library Strategy.

c) Impact of Flooding in the District Task Group – Chairman, Councillor R. Hunter

Councillor R. Hunter updated the Board regarding the Task Group and informed Members that during previous meetings there had been an opportunity to interview officers from Bromsgrove District Council, North Worcestershire Water Management and WCC. Members were advised that officers from Severn Trent had been invited to the next meeting which was due to be held on 10th December 2020.

RESOLVED that the verbal updates in respect of the Task Groups be noted.

56/20

WORCESTERSHIRE HEALTH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - UPDATE

Councillor J. Till presented the update from the Worcestershire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC) and advised the Board that there had been a meeting held on 16th November 2020. Health Partner representatives were in attendance at the meeting and the Covid-19 vaccination programme was discussed in detail. Also discussed at this meeting was the Restoration Plan for the NHS post Covid.

Councillor J. Till undertook to circulate to the Board any information or minutes received.

RESOLVED that the verbal update in respect of the Worcestershire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee be noted.

57/20

CABINET WORK PROGRAMME

The Senior Democratic Services Officer presented the Cabinet Work Programme and drew Members' attention to the following items which were already included on the Board's Work Programme:

- Final Council Tax Support Scheme
- Homelessness, Flexible Homelessness Support and Homelessness Reduction Grants 2020/21
- Fees and Charges - this item was to be included in the Finance and Budget Working Group work programme and would be brought to the main Overview and Scrutiny Board if there was anything that needed to be further scrutinised.

RESOLVED that subject to the preamble above the Cabinet Work Programme be noted and that the Overview and Scrutiny Board's Work Programme for 2020-21, be updated to include the items discussed and agreed during the course of the meeting.

58/20

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD WORK PROGRAMME

This item was discussed as part of the previous item.

The meeting closed at 8.18 p.m.

Chairman