

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

20TH NOVEMBER 2023, AT 6.00 P.M.

PRESENT: Councillors P. M. McDonald (Chairman), S. T. Nock (Vice-Chairman), A. Bailes, R. Bailes, A. M. Dale, E. M. S. Gray, R. J. Hunter, B. Kumar, S. A. Robinson and J. D. Stanley

Observers:

Councillor C. A. Hotham – Portfolio Holder for Finance and Enabling

Councillor P. J. Whittaker – Portfolio Holder for Environmental Services and Community Safety (including Car Parking) (on Microsoft Teams)

Officers: Mr. G. Revans, Mr P. Carpenter (on Microsoft Teams), Mrs. J. Bayley-Hill, and Mr. M. Sliwinski.

47/23

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor H. D. N. Rone-Clarke.

48/23

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND WHIPPING ARRANGEMENTS

Councillor R. Hunter declared an other interest in agenda item no. 8, minute number 55/23, Proposal for a Bromsgrove District Council Cross Party Working Group to be set up to improve Rail and Bus Connectivity at Bromsgrove Station, in that he was a member of the Bromsgrove and Redditch Rail Users Partnership.

49/23

TO CONFIRM THE ACCURACY OF THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD HELD ON 16TH OCTOBER 2023

The minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting held on 16th October 2023 were considered.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting held on 16th October 2023 be agreed as a true and correct record.

50/23

WORCESTERSHIRE HEALTH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - UPDATE

[At the discretion of the Chairman, item 10 on the agenda – Worcestershire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee – Update – was considered earlier in the meeting as item 4]

Councillor B. Kumar provided an update on the last meeting of Worcestershire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC) he attended on 13th November 2023. Councillor B. Kumar stated that the main item on that agenda was a Public Health – 12-month review with the following points covered at that meeting highlighted for Members' attention:

- Worcestershire County Councils (WCC) work with schools and youth had shown that a large proportion of young people were meeting physical activity recommendations.
- Over 12,000 illegal vapes had been seized by the County's trading standards team. It is established that vaping starts around 11-12 years of age. Preventative work is being carried out in the schools.
- A rating of "Strong" was accorded by the home office in preventing radicalisation and terrorism.
- Community development led to Worcestershire having one of the lowest rates of loneliness in the country as featured in The Municipal Journal and on BBC TV.
- There was a significant rise in uptake on bowel screening.
- WCC won the regional public health award for its work on 'Best Social Media campaign' in promoting better mental health and preventing suicide.
- Health and Wellbeing – challenges faced by WCC were the ageing population and the ambition to support people to remain healthy and independent for as long as possible.
- Evidence-based physical activity would be operated out of a range of community venues.
- New roving vans would offer communities easier access to registering with a GP practice, health checks, vaccinations, wellbeing, and mental health advice.
- The WCC Public Health department was keeping a central register of nearly 870 Automatic External Defibrillators and was trying to encourage vital CPR training.
- Public Health established a Workplace Wellbeing Network, which would offer health survey and needs assessment, a resource hub, and training.
- The Public Health team organised high-profile events such as "City Run" and was also involved in environmental activities – working with Worcester Environmental Group to promote the 'Wild About Worcester Way'.
- Public Health was making grants available to school for environmental projects such as school tree planting and enhancing local environment.
- Public Health was also funding 'Junior Park Run' in Diglis.

RESOLVED that the Worcestershire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee Update be noted.

51/23

GOVERNANCE SYSTEMS REVIEW - IMPLEMENTATION PROGRESS UPDATE

The Principal Democratic Officer introduced the report and in doing so noted that it included details of the work undertaken to date to implement the recommendations made by the Governance Systems Task Group, which were approved at an extraordinary meeting of Council held on 20th September 2023.

Two appendices were included for Members' consideration and approval – Appendix 1 contained the proposed draft Terms of Reference for the Cabinet Advisory Groups. It was highlighted that the role of these Groups would need to be clearly distinct from that of Overview and Scrutiny Board and the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee. It was also noted that if approved the dates for these meetings would be built up into the 2024-25 meetings calendar.

Appendix 2 contained the proposed cross-party Memorandum of Understanding that followed to embed and build positive cross-party relationships.

Following the officer presentation, it was suggested by a Member that an extra point be added to the proposed draft terms of reference for the Cabinet Advisory Groups to read as follows: 'Memorandum of Understanding also applies'. It was further suggested that the word 'respect' be added to point 5 of the proposed Memorandum of Understanding concerning cross party working. On being put to the vote it was agreed to recommend these documents to Cabinet with the proposed amendments included.

With regard to the cross-party Memorandum of Understanding, it was noted that all Group Leaders would sign the charter on behalf of their political groups and that this Memorandum of Understanding would be subject to agreement at a full Council meeting. It was further noted that the Memorandum of Understanding was not designed to replace or override the Council's constitutional Code of Conduct, which governed the principles of Councillors' conduct.

RECOMMENDED that:

- 1) The terms of reference for the Cabinet Advisory Group be approved, subject to addition of Paragraph 12 which would read as follows: "Memorandum of Understanding also applies"; and
- 2) The proposed Memorandum of Understanding concerning cross party working be approved, subject to an amendment to point 5 of the Principles section to read as follows: "Recognise and respect that each individual member can contribute to decisions that are

taken and should be involved and able to provide their opinion before a decision is taken”.

52/23

AGILE WORKING POLICY - PROGRESS BRIEF ON ADDRESSING QUERIES RAISED AT THE LAST MEETING

The written response to questions raised by Members with regards to the Council's Agile Working was provided. The five queries raised at the October Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting were discussed, and the following points were raised during the discussion of each response:

- Review of the title of the initiative – ‘Agile Working’ (Question 1, page 3 of supplementary agenda pack)

It was noted that Officers were working to ensure a clear definition was in place for this, including in terms of how this policy could be articulated in an unambiguous way to councillors, staff, and during recruitment.

- Look at introducing a follow up measure to gauge customer satisfaction when interacting with Council services, for example, through a form of ‘trustpilot’ style feedback (Question 2, page 3 of supplementary agenda pack)

It was noted that there was an ongoing piece of work by the Business Improvement Team to look at the best ways the Council could collect feedback and measure satisfaction across all customer facing services. It was requested that a date be provided by the Team for when this work was due to be completed. Officers undertook to provide this information to Members.

It was noted that one of the problems common to two-tier local government areas like Bromsgrove was that some services were provided by the District Council and some by the County Council. Members commented that there was a need to improve the link up of communication and services between Bromsgrove District Council (BDC) and Worcestershire County Council (WCC) to enable resident enquiries get to the right organisation and officers quickly.

It was noted that because BDC and WCC were two separate organisations, providing mostly different, through often overlapping suite of services, referring enquiries currently depended on contact and relationships between officers from the two organisations, rather than a specific system in place, for instance an IT solution common to both organisations. It was agreed as an action that Officers would investigate how BDC could work to link up services with WCC to enable a more seamless experience for residents.

- Data on the impact of flexible working arrangements on reduction in staff car mileage (and consequently reductions in carbon / greenhouse gas emissions) (Question 3, page 3 of supplementary agenda pack)

It was asked whether the staff mileage claims cost saving figure of £32,989 between 2021-20 and 2022-23 was for Bromsgrove District Council or across Bromsgrove and Redditch Councils. Members commented that it was important that savings per each council under shared staff arrangements was given. It was agreed as an action that the confirmation of the figures be provided to Members.

It was asked whether all planning officers were now based at Redditch and whether this had resulted in increased mileage payments associated with work planning officers were undertaking in Bromsgrove. It was agreed that Members would be provided with a response from Officers.

During the discussion it was highlighted that Redditch Town Hall redevelopment was ongoing and there was a process of leasing out some office space in that building to other organisations, including the NHS, DWP, and WCC. It was noted that through this a cost saving to Bromsgrove Council's budget of £70,000 per year would be delivered.

- Officer response times to Member enquiries (Question 4, page 4 of supplementary agenda pack)

It was requested that Members be provided with a list of the agreed and statutory response times that Council Officers were bound by when responding to members of the public. In addition, it was asked that information be provided, if applicable, on how the response times differed across various types of requests/service areas, and what happened if the response times were not met. Officers undertook to provide this data to Members.

Members also asked whether regular data on response times could be shared as part of the Council's suite of performance measures. It was noted that a response would be provided on this.

With regards to providing responses to enquiries, it was suggested that staff across the Council could be set up with an automatic email response function to inform the person sending an email that his/her email was logged on the system. It was commented that this would provide reassurance that the email reached the intended recipient. It was noted that there was already such an automatic response in the case of sending emails to the compliments/complaints team. However, as other service areas differed considerably in their specific area of business, a consistent approach would need to be agreed across all customer facing areas of business.

- IT solutions to assist Members with the knowledge of the Council's organisational (and team) structures (Question 5, page 4 of supplementary agenda pack)

Members requested that induction / key contact documents be made available to Members on Microsoft Teams in addition to the current

formats. It was asked that Officers investigate how to make better use of Microsoft Teams for Member-Staff communication in general. It was noted that this would be picked up by the relevant officers.

RESOLVED that the progress brief be noted.

53/23

FOOD BANK AND COMMUNITY SUPERMARKET PROVISION TASK GROUP - MEMBERSHIP REPORT

The membership of this task group was chosen, and it was agreed that the chairman would be elected at the task group's first meeting. The terms of reference would also be agreed by the task group at its first meeting.

RESOLVED that Councillors A. Bailes, E. M. S. Gray, B. Kumar, P. M. McDonald, D. J. Nicholl, and D. G. Stewart be appointed to the Food Bank and Community Supermarket Provision Task Group.

54/23

NOTICE OF MOTION - REQUEST TO INVESTIGATE - FUTURE OF LIBRARIES WITHIN THE DISTRICT

A request to investigate the Future of Libraries within the District was considered. Members were informed that there was a recent task group investigation into libraries undertaken by this Council in 2021.

It was commented that the Review of Libraries Task Group that took place in 2021 did not consider the financial implications and the PFI partnership model for operation of some libraries in the District. Therefore, it was felt there was a need for Overview and Scrutiny to look at this topic again. It was noted that this topic was of significant concern to Members as exemplified by the full Council motion passed in July 2023.

During the discussion, it was proposed that a report be submitted to the next meeting outlining the relevant data on the matter. It was also proposed that as library provision was a responsibility of the County Council, the relevant Cabinet Portfolio Holder from Worcestershire County Council be invited to attend the next meeting of Overview and Scrutiny Board. On being put to the vote it was:

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the request is included on the Overview and Scrutiny Board work programme and the Board considers the matter as an item of business at its next meeting;
- 2) That the Worcestershire County Council Cabinet Portfolio Holder with responsibility for library provision be invited to the next meeting of Overview and Scrutiny Board.

55/23

PROPOSAL FOR A BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL CROSS PARTY WORKING GROUP TO BE SET UP TO IMPROVE RAIL AND

BUS CONNECTIVITY AT BROMSGROVE STATION

It was announced that this proposal was now scheduled as an item at the upcoming full Council meeting and would be discussed then.

56/23

FINANCE AND BUDGET WORKING GROUP - UPDATE

The Chairman noted that the first meeting of the Finance and Budget Working Group was due to take place on 21st November 2023, with Tranche 1 of the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) to be among the items of discussion.

RESOLVED that the Finance and Budget Working Group Update be noted.

57/23

CABINET WORK PROGRAMME

The Cabinet Work Programme was presented for Members' consideration.

It was requested by Members that descriptions of each item on the Cabinet Work Programme be provided so that Members had more understanding of the specifics of the issues that Cabinet was considering.

RESOLVED that the Cabinet Work Programme be noted.

58/23

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Overview and Scrutiny Board Work Programme was presented for Members' consideration.

RESOLVED that the Overview and Scrutiny Board Work Programme be noted.

The meeting closed at 7.13 p.m.

Chairman