

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

TUESDAY 23RD JULY 2024, AT 6.00 P.M.

PRESENT: Councillors P. M. McDonald (Chairman), S. T. Nock (Vice-Chairman), A. M. Dale, E. M. S. Gray, B. Kumar, S. A. Robinson and H. D. N. Rone-Clarke

Observers:

Councillor K. J. May - Leader and Cabinet Member for Strategic Partnerships and Enabling

Councillor S. R. Colella - Cabinet Member for Finance

Councillor S. A. Webb - Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing and Strategic Housing

Councillor M. Marshall

Officers: Mr. G. Revans, Mr. M. Bough, Ms. M. Worsfold, Mrs J. Gresham, Mr. M. Sliwinski and Mrs S. Woodfield

19/24

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillor A. Bailes, Councillor R. Bailes and Councillor R.J. Hunter. Councillor C.A. Hotham was in attendance as named substitute for Councillor A. Bailes and Councillor S.M. Evans as named substitute for Councillor R.J. Hunter.

20/24

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND WHIPPING ARRANGEMENTS

There were no declarations of interest nor of whipping arrangements.

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TO CONFIRM THE ACCURACY OF THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD HELD ON 25TH JUNE 2024

The minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting held on 25th June 2024 were considered.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting held on 25th June 2024 be agreed as a true and correct record.

22/24

UPDATE ON LOCAL HERITAGE LIST FOR BROMSGROVE DISTRICT

The Principal Conservation Officer presented the update for the Local Heritage List for Bromsgrove District. Since the last update presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Board on 22nd April 2024, progress had been made on the Bromsgrove Local Heritage list. Draft lists for the parishes of Alvechurch, Belbroughton and Fairfield, Beoley and Dodford with Grafton were published and a six-week consultation process carried out.

Overall, Officers were pleased with the residents' response to the consultation events in those areas and with the feedback received. It was felt that with the additional descriptions of properties, residents had a better understanding of the process.

Following the presentation, Members thanked the Principal Conservation Officer for the detailed report and added that they were pleased to see progress being made.

Having reviewed the report, the following comments were made by Members:

- Why Parish Councils had not been involved in the consultation process? It was confirmed that the parish clerks had been consulted and had assisted in organising talks with residents. Officers had also been in recent communications with the parish clerks regarding nominations. It was agreed that a meeting be arranged to talk through the process with Councillor B. Kumar.
- Conservation Officer resource. It was confirmed that a recruitment process for a new Conservation Officer role was underway and interviews were imminent.

RESOLVED that the Update on Local Heritage List for Bromsgrove District be noted.

23/24

AFFORDABLE HOUSING BRIEFING

The Strategic Housing Services Manager addressed the Board. The briefing note had been prepared for the Overview & Scrutiny Board on the delivery of affordable housing in the District and covered the definition of affordable housing, number and size of the affordable housing delivered, housing register information and affordable housing need and future delivery.

Following the detailed report members thanked the Strategic Housing Services Manager. Having reviewed the report members made the following comments:

- Had provisions for independent living been considered for younger children and the disabled? Members were advised that Worcestershire County Council and Bromsgrove District Council both funded supported housing for young people through the Foyer scheme run by St Basils. It was also explained that the Council were working with registered providers to have homes adapted to enable people to remain in their homes.

A further point was raised concerning young people leaving care provision. Members had previously raised the potential of having care provision included at the new Burcot Lane site. The Strategic Housing Services Manager undertook to review the matter further.

During discussions the Portfolio Holder for Health and Wellbeing and Strategic Housing offered to organise a visit to St Basils if Members were interested.

The Chairman requested a further explanation of the Foyer scheme. Members were advised that the scheme was a twenty-four hour support service for young people, run through St Basils, and provided interim accommodation and support services for young people. Staff provided the skills necessary for young people to live independently, such as learning how to manage their own home and to provide aid with employment opportunities.

Members sought further details on the utilisation of Spadesbourne Homes to deliver private rented and affordable homes, helping to balance the housing market on Council owned land. It was advised Spadesbourne Homes was a Council owned housing company leasing privately rented properties.

Discussions continued with a query raised regarding residential development of 200 dwellings being liable for a minimum 40% Affordable Housing contribution. Members queried why that in the Local Plan it stated "up to". Members suggested it should read "minimum". It was explained that issues with site viability sometimes hindered this suggestion.

A point was also raised concerning Bromsgrove Council owning 30% equity in 109 Low-Cost Housing units. The owner could either purchase the 30% off the Council or sell on the open market at 100% of open market value and repay the Council the 30% share. Members queried why the Council did not maintain the 30% and sell the 70% at market value to be used for affordable housing provisions. Members also asked what the Council used the 30% equity for? It was explained a report went to Cabinet which set out the scheme and included in the report that a 30% equity be ring fenced for affordable housing. Members were also advised that within the Service Plan, provision would be sought to provide grants to registered providers.

Discussions continued concerning the number of social stock owned by different providers in the area. Members expressed their view that if a provider only owned a small amount of stock, that the level of support and service may be considerably less compared to Bromsgrove District Housing Trust (BDHT), who owned a considerably larger proportion of stock. The Chairman felt there was no substantial evidence of this suggestion. The Strategic Housing Services Manager added that the Housing Department had not received any complaints concerning this. Members were also reassured that all housing stock companies were monitored and regulated through the Regulator of Social Housing and the Housing Ombudsman. It was suggested that the Council contact providers in order to potentially discuss stock rationalisation.

Some Members felt that since reviewing the report fully, it did seem to suggest that the Council were not narrowing the gap for the provision of affordable housing, adding concerns that the average cost of a home in Bromsgrove was unaffordable. Members agreed affordable housing did need to be reviewed and was a substantial issue.

RESOLVED that the briefing on Affordable Housing be noted.

24/24

TOPIC PROPOSAL FOR TASK GROUP - HOUSING (REPORT TO FOLLOW)

Councillor Rone-Clarke presented the topic proposal for the Board's consideration. It was noted that the potential to establish Housing Task Group was discussed by Members at a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board held on 11th July 2024.

Key objectives of the proposed task group review would be to scrutinise the following areas:

- Fleeceholding - Members “to address and influence” to assist residents.
- Section 106 monies to support infrastructure rules - Members located in town centres/urban areas could add significant value.
- To investigate “asset rich” but “revenue poor” residents and the support available locally to residents - This could involve the task group exploring potential gaps that could be addressed by the Council and partner organisations.

Councillor Rone-Clarke felt the task group would be a good opportunity for Members to gain knowledge from Officers and to view their perspectives on the key objectives. He pointed out that the task group proposal was not its final draft and welcomed Members’ thoughts.

Following the presentation of the topic proposal, Members agreed to establish the task group. The Chairman advised that Members were to consider their interest and to contact Democratic Services in the first instance.

RESOLVED that the Housing Task Group be established and that the terms of reference for the Task Group, as submitted, be approved.

25/24

IMPACT OF HEATWAVES TASK GROUP - FINAL REPORT

Councillor M. Marshall provided a detailed presentation of the Impact of Heatwaves Task Group and final report details.

The Short Sharp Review was commissioned by the Board on 12th February 2024 following a Motion submitted by Councillor Marshall to Council on 24th January 2024. The Motion was in respect of a review of immediate action be taken to educate and equip residents for impending heatwaves made more likely by climate change. The terms of reference were agreed on 22nd April 2024 with the final the report to be discussed with the Board in July 2024.

The context for the review was the aftermath of the more frequent and intense heatwaves being experienced internationally and in the UK. Several key lessons were learned nationally from that experience and

the review sought to establish how those lessons were being applied locally in the fulfillment of the Council's statutory duties as well as moral obligation to protect citizens.

As a first-tier responder, the District Council had statutory duties before, during and after civil emergencies. These duties included putting in place emergency plans, warning and informing the public about civil protection, sharing information and cooperating with other responders. They also included implementing business continuity plans and championing business continuity.

Two key lessons learnt nationally from the 2022 heatwaves were the need to firstly improve public information and awareness of the impact of heatwaves and secondly to improve cooperation and coordination between different agencies.

The Council's statutory duties were partly discharged through the West Mercia Local Resilience Forum which was part of a national network based on police force areas. They included representatives from Worcestershire County Council (WCC), District Councils, Police, Ambulance and Fire Services, NHS Bodies, The Health and Safety Executive, transport companies and utilities.

Wide-ranging areas of responsibility relating to heatwaves included working with vulnerable residents, especially older adults and children, caring for patients in NHS settings, protecting transport infrastructure, agricultural management, access to working air conditioning, environmental pollution, protecting homeless residents, maintaining water supplies and protecting the public against wildfires.

During the review the task group learnt in detail about the plans, protocols and command structures of the forum and the traffic light system used to trigger mobilization of any response. For heatwaves, these warnings trigger temperature thresholds which vary regionally but in the West Midlands a heatwave were defined as three consecutive days on which the daytime temperature exceeds 30 Degrees Celsius during the daytime and 15 Degrees Celsius at nighttime.

During the review, Worcestershire Prepared were established consisting of a range of partner organisations including WCC, District Councils, the NHS, Environment Agency, Police Fire and Rescue Services as well as voluntary partners. Worcestershire Prepared had a specific remit for engagement with local communities through a messaging service plus mobilising resources and perhaps most importantly providing a conduit

to sense check on whether these measures were adequate or working. During the review the task group members were repeatedly reminded that protecting the vulnerable from heatwaves was best achieved through utilities, social care and voluntary organisations.

Bridging the gap between national and regional measures and front-line action on the ground in the local communities were perhaps the area where local councillors could personally have the most impact. Encouraging local businesses to undertake their own risk assessments and develop their own business continuity plans was identified as a particular gap.

During the review the task group were supported extensively by the Council's partner organisation, Applied Resilience, which advised the Council on the discharge of its emergency planning responsibilities. Applied Resilience were currently undertaking an audit of potential rest centres across Bromsgrove, Redditch and Wyre Forest which might be required for a variety of civil emergencies but will now include the provision of cooling centres within its scope. The task group was also advised that WCC would be developing print and digital messaging each year to educate and advise residents about preparations for potential heat events.

Because of the fast-changing nature of the challenges and responses the task group's recommendation was that an annual update be provided to the Board each Spring to assess any further lessons learnt and gauge the Council's readiness for impending heat events. Rules could and should be set by Central Government but Members based locally were best-placed to enact them and to sound the alarm.

Following the presentation Members thanked Councillor Marshall for the suggestion of the task group and for the detailed report, adding that it was good to know procedures were in place.

Members discussed the essential requirement for specific cooling areas in the District. Councillor Marshall suggested Members could assist to identify possible cooling centres within their Wards. He also advised Members that Worcestershire Prepared were specifically designed as an initiative to bridge the gap, providing knowledge at a local level and to provide the specific rules and regulations set nationally and regionally.

On being put to the vote the Impact of Heatwaves Task Group report recommendation was agreed and would be submitted to Cabinet to note at their next meeting in September 2024.

RECOMMENDED that the contents and recommendation of the Impact of Heatwaves Task Group Final report be noted.

RESOLVED that an annual report be provided to the Overview and Scrutiny Board to update any areas of change in respect of the Impact of Heatwaves on the community and any changes in the response to these events be noted.

26/24

FINANCE AND BUDGET WORKING GROUP - UPDATE

The Chairman discussed the Finance and Budget Working Group meeting held on 19th July 2024, in particular with regards to Quarter 4 2023/24 Performance Monitoring Report presented at the meeting.

It was reported that four recommendations had been made during this meeting. The first being to reconsider the Council's Local Plan thresholds. Developers building up to 100 dwellings were to provide a maximum of up to 30% affordable houses in contrast to 200 dwellings developed, a maximum of up to 40% be built. The Chairman felt with this in mind, it was paramount to bridge the gap for affordable housing.

Members discussed the proposal, agreeing more affordable housing was needed locally. It was also discussed that the Council's priority should be to encourage residents to stay living within the District.

Discussions continued with some Members expressing concerns that the possible increase in affordable housing could encourage anti-social behaviour. Other members suggested issues with anti-social behaviour was more likely related to poor quality social housing, adding that mixed communities was a solution with residents possibly having a greater sense of a shared stake in their area and community.

The Chairman continued, advising lateness of reports was also discussed during the Finance and Budget Working Group. A further recommendation discussed was for Officers to ensure that when deadlines were provided in Council reports, these dates were realistic and should be adhered to. It was explained that lateness of reports was not providing members with confidence.

It was clarified that following discussion with Officers that the final recommendation in respect of the Market Hall site Levelling Up project had been withdrawn.

Following member discussions, the Executive Director confirmed that the Strategic Planning and Conservation Manager had advised there was scope within the Board to review these recommendations through the Strategic Planning Steering Group as part of the Local Plan review. Officers confirmed that the Housing Monitoring Report had been published on the Council's Website and could be circulated to Members for their consideration.

On being put to the vote the recommendations from the Finance and Budget Working Group, were agreed as recommendations to Cabinet.

RECOMMENDED that

- 1) The Council seek maximum threshold of developer contribution (as set out below) in respect of the rate/proportion of affordable housing delivered for housing developments taking place in the District. The thresholds, as per the Council's Local Plan, are:
 - Up to 40% affordable housing (or a higher % if proposed [by a developer]) on greenfield sites or any site accommodating 200 or more dwellings.
 - Up to 30% affordable housing (or a higher % if proposed [by a developer]) on brownfield sites accommodating less than 200 dwellings.
- 2) that the 40 % thresholds referred to above be extended to any site accommodating below 100 dwellings, to narrow the ever-increasing gap between Market Houses and Affordable;
- 3) To ensure that when deadlines are provided in Council reports, these are realistic and are being adhered to be approved.

27/24

WORCESTERSHIRE HEALTH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - UPDATE

The Council's Representative on the Worcestershire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC), Councillor B. Kumar, updated the Board on the matters discussed at its recent meetings.

Two items considered on the agenda included Adult Mental Health Acute Inpatient and Rehabilitation redesign and strengthening the

patient and carer voice across Herefordshire and Worcestershire Health and Care NHS Trust Service Delivery and in decision making.

Members were informed that Mental Health care had been at crisis point and urgently needed reviewing. The Community Mental Health Transformation Programme had developed new ways of working for adults with acute mental health needs, in partnership across several providers including the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) Sector and Social Care. The new national guidance stated that two levels of Mental Health Rehabilitation should be available: Level 1 – Community Rehabilitation Units and Level 2 – Intensive Rehabilitation Support.

Some objectives for the programme were:

- Patients being treated in one area.
- To reduce agency staff.
- Develop induction training.
- Implement “Best Use of Resources” philosophy.
- Using best practice, improving quality.
- Looking at emotional needs.
- Strengthening patient and carer voice.

Following the update, Members thanked Councillor Kumar for the detailed report. Members expressed their deep concerns for mental health patients, having personally witnessed the issues patients encountered within the NHS. Members felt encouraged that steps were being put in place to improve the care provided.

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

28/24

CABINET WORK PROGRAMME

The Cabinet Work Programme was presented for Members’ consideration.

Following discussions members requested the following change to be made:

On page 51 “New National Forest Application” be amended to read “New National Trust Application”.

The Executive Director noted the matter would be discussed with relevant officers.

RESOLVED that the Cabinet Work Programme be updated as per the pre-amble above.

29/24

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD ACTION SHEET

The Overview and Scrutiny Board Action sheet was discussed by members.

RESOLVED that the Overview and Scrutiny Board Action sheet be noted.

30/24

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD WORK PROGRAMME (REPORT TO FOLLOW)

The Board reviewed The Overview and Scrutiny Board Work Programme.

During consideration the following were discussed by Members:

Play Audit Review - It was queried why the review was being split into two, with dates being provided for September and November. It was explained that the final report would not be available until end of October/beginning of November.

North Worcestershire Community Safety Partnership. It was queried if a date had been provided. It was confirmed that a date had not yet been established.

Disabled Facilities Grant - Recommissioning of the Home Improvement Agency Promoting Independent Living Service – Members queried when a report would be made available to scrutinise. It was advised that a report be made available for Members imminently.

RESOLVED that the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme be noted.

The meeting closed at 7.40 p.m.

Chairman