

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MEETING OF THE PARISH COUNCILS' FORUM

THURSDAY, 28TH JANUARY 2010

AT 6.30 P.M.

PRESENT: Councillor R. Hollingworth (Chairman)

Representative(s)	Parish
Mr. J. Cypher (Chairman)	Alvechurch
Mrs. J. Jagger (Chairman)	Barnt Green
Mr. R. Westbury (Executive Officer)	
Mr. C. R. Scurrall	Belbroughton
Miss P. Harrison (Executive Officer)	Beoley
Mrs. E. Guise (Clerk)	Cofton Hackett
Mr. K. Duncan	
Mr. R. Harper (Chairman)	Dodford with Grafton
Mr. G. V. Cole	Hagley
Mr. K. Woolford	Lickey and Blackwell
Mr. C. W. Bateman	Lickey End
Mr. I. A. Hodgetts (Chairman)	Romsley
Mrs. H. Davies (Clerk)	Tutnall and Cobley
Mrs. S. J. Baxter (Chairman)	Wythall
Miss P. Harrison (Executive Officer)	

Officers: Mr. K. Dicks, Mrs. C. Felton and Mr. A. C. Stephens

15/09 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from:

Parish	Representative
Beoley	Mr. B. J. Somner (Chairman)
Belbroughton	Mr. J. M. Bradley (Chairman) Mrs. C. Limm (Clerk)
Bournheath	Mrs. K. May (Chairman) Mrs. S. Davies
Catshill and North Marlbrook	Mr. G. F. Witcomb (Chairman) Mrs. G. Lungley (Clerk)
Clent	Mr. E. Sheppard (Chairman) Mr. S. Malek Mrs. R. Mullett (Clerk)
Cofton Hackett	Mr. B. Bridgewater

Parish	Representative
Dodford-with-Grafton	Mrs. C. Limm (Clerk)
Hunnington	Mrs. R. Mullett (Clerk)
Lickey and Blackwell	Mrs. J. King
Romsley	Mrs. R. Mullett (Clerk)

(NOTE: Miss P. Harrison gave the apologies for absence from Mr. B. J. Somner and explained that he had recently been unwell. Consequently, the Joint Chief Executive suggested that the Forum may like to forward its best wishes to Mr. Somner. This was agreed by the Forum.)

16/09 **MINUTES, AND MATTERS ARISING**

The minutes of the meeting of the Parish Councils' Forum held on 22nd September 2009 were submitted.

Miss Harrison referred to the minutes and expressed concern over the consultation procedures relating to the issue of Certificates of Lawfulness in that her Parish Council wished to comment on applications for proposed developments, as well as existing developments. The Chairman confirmed that the matter would be investigated and arrange for the Parish Council's concern to be communicated to the relevant department(s) within the Council.

Mr. J. Cypher stated that he had recently encountered problems using the 'Public Access' planning / licensing website facility and questioned whether the parishes could be afforded additional time to respond to consultations. Mr. Dicks stated that he was aware of issues with the software and that he would speak to colleagues in Planning and Environment Services about the problems. However, he added that the Council would still have to work within statutory deadlines or run the risk of applications for planning permission being appealed for non-determination.

RESOLVED that the minutes be approved as a correct record.

17/09 **ELECTORAL SERVICES / PARISH COUNCIL CASUAL VACANCIES**

The Forum gave consideration to a report which outlined the Parish Councils' Casual Vacancies, together with details of the annual canvass for the Register of Electors which had been published on 1st December 2009.

RESOLVED that the information contained within the report be noted.

18/09 **FORWARD PLAN (1ST JANUARY TO 30TH APRIL 2010)**

Consideration was given to a report which indicated to the Forum where the Cabinet's Forward Plan of key decisions to be taken over the next four months could be located on the Council's website.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

19/09 **PARISH COUNCILS' CHARTER - UPDATE**

The Chairman informed the Forum that, to date, the Parish Council Charter had been adopted by fifteen Parish Councils, with two parishes yet to respond. He added that three Parish Councils had declined the invitation to adopt the Charter.

Councillor Hollingworth then outlined what would happen with the Charter next; that is, the Council would itself adopt the Charter and work in accordance with it in conjunction with those parishes that had signed up to it. He stated that the those Parish Councils who had not, at this stage, adopted the Charter could still sign up to the document at any stage if they so wished.

In response to a question from Mr. Cypher, the Chairman confirmed that Councillor M. J. A. Webb would be the Cabinet Member to support the Charter and that Mrs. C. L. Felton, Head of Legal, Equalities and Democratic Services would be the Lead Officer to the Forum. Furthermore, Mr. Dicks added that he would also be happy to respond to questions from Members of the Forum.

The Chairman clarified the position in respect of the County Council's Parish Councils' Charter which had been proposed several years ago. However, he stated that the development of the District Council's Parish Charter had been developed with the Parish Councils themselves and that it would be a 'living' document, unlike the County Charter which had probably not been reviewed in any way since being initially proposed.

Members of the Forum discussed the reasons why some Parish Councils had declined the District Council's invitation to adopt the Charter. In conclusion, Mr. Cypher suggested that Feckenham Parish Council - the only Parish Council within the Redditch District - may wish to be invited to attend meetings of the Forum and, ultimately, sign up to and adopt the Parish Councils' Charter.

RESOLVED:

- (a) that the details of those Parish Councils which have adopted the Parish Councils' Charter be noted;
- (b) that an invitation be extended to Feckenham Parish Council to attend and participate in meetings of the Forum; and
- (c) that the membership of the Parish Councils' Charter Sub-Group be determined at the next meeting of the Forum, by which time the Charter itself would have been considered by the District Council, prior to formal adoption.

20/09 **QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE AREA COMMITTEE OF CALC**

- (a) Parish Council information in Council Tax billing packs

"Would it be possible, if the parishes wanted to do so, to include an explanatory paragraph / small leaflet about the parish precept in the mailing sending out the Council Tax bills?"

The Chairman stated that this issue had been considered in the past but had been reluctantly turned down due to the increased costs which would be incurred by including an individual leaflet relating to each of the parish areas.

The contents of a statement from Ms. J. Pickering, the Head of Financial Services, was read out to the Forum giving a further explanation of the issues involved. However, the statement included details of a possible solution for the 2011/2012 Council Tax year (the bills having already been prepared for 2010/2011) by way of a generic explanation on behalf of all of the parishes contained within the County/District Combined booklet which was sent to all households with the Council Tax bills. Members of the Forum were advised to contact Ms. A.-M. Darroch, the Council's Communications Manager, with a view to obtaining space in next year's combined booklet.

The Forum considered alternative methods of communicating an explanation of what parish councils do and why they raise a precept. It was noted that each parish operates in differing ways and do different things so a generic statement on behalf of all parish councils may not accurately reflect the work undertaken within the parishes. For example, some parish councils within the district employ the services of a Lengthsman, paid for out of the parish precept. However, the Forum considered that the Lengthsman scheme was something that should be investigated at a later date.

This was noted

(b) Older People Task Group

"Hugh Bennett had made a presentation about the Older Persons Task Group at the last meeting and the parishes had been asked to submit comments. Did he receive any feed back and has a report emerged yet?"

The Forum were advised that two responses had been received following the presentation on the Older People Task Group by Mr. Bennett at the previous meeting. Brief details of these responses were relayed to the Forum.

It was reported that, whilst the Task Group's report had been drafted, the Overview Board would be considering the report at its meeting to be held on 2nd February 2010 before being presented to Cabinet on 3rd March 2010 which would then consider the recommendations made by the Task Group.

This was noted.

(c) Core Strategy

"News on the Core Strategy?"

The Forum were advised of the current situation in respect of the development of the draft Core Strategy; that is, the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) report had been received and more focussed work on the draft Core Strategy could therefore be undertaken. The Forum were also informed of the approach the Council were intending to take in respect of the housing allocation within the District of 4,000 houses initially up to 2021, with scope for a further 2,000 - 3,000 in later years.

Members then discussed the implications of the RSS report, the draft Core Strategy document, matters arising from the formal Examination in Public and the proposals for consultation with the public and statutory consultees.

This was noted.

(d) Shared Services with Redditch Borough Council

"Shared services with Redditch - are there likely to be any disadvantages (Redditch has little experience with working with parishes)?"

The Chairman informed the Forum that the Council's relationship with the Parish Councils would be likely to be unaffected by the Shared Services initiatives.

Mr. Dicks reported that the Shared Management Team had been appointed and would formally be taking up their posts on 20th April 2010. He also outlined how he anticipated services to improve as a result of closer shared working and how he planned to implement the necessary changes in due course.

RESOLVED that the details of the new Shared Management Team, together with contact information, be forwarded to the Parish Councils for information.

(e) Cuts to the District Council's budget - impact on Parish Councils

"What impact will there be on the parishes arising from cuts in funding to the District Council?"

Mr. J. Cypher expressed concern that, as a result of cuts to the Council's budget, the operation of the Local Neighbourhood Partnerships was to cease on 31st March 2010.

The Chairman stated that it was unfortunate that the Council had to take this course of action but savings were required to be made for the next financial year. However, he added that additional funding was

being given to the Local Strategic Partnership which would be available to cover the District, rather than those specific areas where a Local Neighbourhood Partnership had been established.

From the ensuing discussion, Members of the Forum considered the issues relating to engaging the public and public bodies, including the possibility of encouraging those Partnerships already established to continue their work on an informal, unfunded basis.

This was noted.

(f) Parish Council Training - Planning issues / Code of Conduct

"Provision of training for the parishes by the District Council on:-

- *planning issues*
- *the Code of Conduct."*

Mrs. Felton explained that both the Head of Planning and Environment Services, and herself, had provided training for individual, or groups of, Parish Councils in the past, and that there was no reason why this could not continue as long as the training sessions were well attended and, therefore, meaningful.

She suggested that requests for training could be programmed in to a training schedule in order that there is a better opportunity for the provision of training.

Mr. Cypher commented on the Code of Conduct training which had been provided in the past, with a view to the provision of further training on the imminent changes to the Code of Conduct. Mrs. Felton responded by saying that the Chairman and Clerk of the Parish Councils would also be invited to future Code of Conduct training, but that it would be impractical to invite all parish councillors.

In respect of training on planning issues (especially in the light of recent planning applications in Stoke Prior, Alvechurch and Dodford), it was felt that the new Head of Planning Services, when appointed, could assist in developing a programme of relevant training.

This was noted.

21/09 **COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT IN LOCAL DEMOCRACY**

(The Chairman agreed to the addition of this item as a matter of urgency in order that information could be conveyed to the Forum before the next meeting.)

The Forum was advised that the Council were investigating ways to enhance community involvement in the democratic process, in the light of Democracy Year 2010 - 2011, and had established the Community Involvement in Local Democracy Task Group.

Members were informed of the terms of reference for the Task Group, what it intends to do and who it would consult with, together with co-ordinating the arrangements for Democracy Year. Members were invited to contact the Council should they wish to be involved or express the views of their respective parish council.

This was noted.

22/09 **DATES OF PARISH COUNCILS' FORUM MEETINGS (2010)**

Consideration was given to a report which outlined suggested dates for future meetings of the Forum.

RESOLVED that the Forum meetings during 2010 be held on the following dates:-

- Tuesday, 30th March 2010 (6.30 p.m., Council Chamber)
- Tuesday, 29th June 2010 (6.30 p.m., Council Chamber)
- Tuesday, 28th September 2010 (6.30 p.m., Council Chamber)
- Tuesday, 21st December 2010 (6.30 p.m., Committee Room)

The meeting closed at 8.10 p.m.

Chairman