

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW BOARD

TUESDAY, 3RD NOVEMBER 2009, AT 6.00 P.M.

PRESENT: Councillors S. R. Colella (Chairman), Mrs. R. L. Dent, Mrs. J. M. L. A. Griffiths, Mrs. C. J. Spencer and L. J. Turner

Officers: Mr. T. Beirne, Mr. P. Street, Mr. H. Bennett, Mr. M Bell, Mrs C. Felton, Ms A. Darroch, Mr. M. Carr, Mrs. A. Scarce.

30/09 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

No apologies for absence were received.

31/09 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND WHIPPING ARRANGEMENTS**

No declarations of interests or whipping arrangements were received.

32/09 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting of the Overview Board held on 1st September 2009 were submitted.

RESOLVED that the minutes be confirmed as a correct record.

33/09 **THE COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY REVIEW 2009**

The Overview Board considered a report of the Assistant Chief Executive (Mr. H. Bennett) on the 2009 Communications Strategy Review of the Council. The Board was asked to consider any immediate recommendations for its further development for submission to the Cabinet on 4th November 2009 and to identify the key linkages of the strategy to the proposed Scrutiny Board Task Group on Improving Residents' Satisfaction.

The Assistant Chief Executive introduced the report and summarised the development and review of the Communications Strategy. He explained that the Communications Strategy had been originally written in 2006 and was reviewed annually. He noted the link between the Communications Strategy and the Improving Residents' Satisfaction Task Group due to be considered by the Scrutiny Board. He was of the view that the Communications Strategy would help to further improve residents' satisfaction and noted that although residents' satisfaction needed to be further improved it was not very low when compared to other councils' performance in this area.

Questions and comments were received from Members of the Overview Board. It was recognised that the Communications Strategy of the Council could be even further enhanced if there were resources available but that this was not possible in the current financial context. The Assistant Chief Executive indicated that the implementation of the strategy was a "long game"

of delivering the key messages to residents through stealth and cost effective targeted delivery mechanisms.

It was highlighted that Bromsgrove (BDC) and partner agencies ran stalls in town centres focused around popular events and there was a Bromsgrove District Housing Trust (BDHT) information bus, which engaged directly with residents in community centres. It was pointed out that elected councillors also have a role in engaging in a two way dialogue with residents and building a positive relationship with the public. It was proposed that more focus be given on communications to local neighbourhoods, including communities outside the town centres, including schemes such as the stalls at popular community events and similar initiatives to the BDHT bus, to ensure that BDC communications reached all sections of the community across the District.

The Assistant Chief Executive pointed out that a lot of the complaints received by members of the public were built on misinformation, and were often satisfied through a proper dialogue and corrective information. The Executive Director of Services (Mr. T. Beirne) pointed out that a lot of communications work was defensive in nature, responding to bad press or incorrect information.

The idea of a “fridge magnet” or other handy, easy to read quick reference guide summarising the key contact numbers for Council services was considered, but it was thought that the costs would not offer value for money. It was nevertheless pointed out that the advertising of key dates of events and services (e.g. refuse collections dates) would be very useful for many residents.

It was proposed that there should be delivery mechanisms to relate key messages to local residents at key times of the year, e.g. when residents received their Council Tax bill. The Assistant Chief Executive pointed out that the Place Survey had highlighted some key areas for improving communications, including on *value for money*.

The Assistant Chief Executive was asked about the Mosaic system. *Mosaic UK* was a marketing tool that classified all consumers in the United Kingdom into 61 types, aggregated into 11 groups, using over 400 data variables and updated annually and it profiled UK consumers in terms of demographics, socio-economics, lifestyles, culture and behaviour. It was proposed that the Mosaic system be employed to inform targeted messages to different groups of residents across the District.

The Head of Street Scene and Community (Mr. M Bell) was asked if he thought services’ communications acted independently or through the corporate centre. He reported that key communications messages were delivered through the Communications Team. The Assistant Chief Executive advised that the Communications Team identified key projects and key messages throughout the council to incorporate them into the key corporate messages and the delivery of the Communications Strategy.

It was pointed out that some parts of the District (specifically in Wythall and Hagley) did not receive the popular newspapers that the Council used to deliver the key communications with residents. The Communications & Customer First Manager (Ms A. Darroch) advised that it was intended to set up focus groups in Wythall and Hagley to find out the best ways to communicate with them and also to make sure that residents in these areas received the Together Bromsgrove Council magazine. There were also plans to continue to “piggy back” on popular events around the District as a means to take communications out to residents in different areas.

It was asked if the communications budgets were allocated jointly with Redditch under shared services or were still separate for each Council. The Assistant Chief Executive advised that at that moment these were two separate budgets but that it was one of the issues that would be reviewed under the roll out of shared services and that there would have to be mechanisms introduced for recharging between the two Council budgets and between services. It was proposed that defined strategic communications processes be established to enhance and facilitate appropriate communications for shared services, including appropriate shared costs and service to service arrangements.

The Chairman proposed that the Communication Strategy be considered where appropriate during consideration of forthcoming Overview and Scrutiny topics and particularly in relation to the proposed Task Group topics being considered and asked that any proposals that arise from this process could be fed into the development and review of the Communications Strategy and actions plans.

RECOMMENDED:

- i. that the Mosaic system be employed to inform targeted messages to different groups of residents across the District;
- ii. that a simple easy to read breakdown of BDC’s responsibilities and service provision be provided periodically at key times of the year to residents to communicate how BDC allocates spending according to residents’ priorities and BDC budget allocations, emphasising value for money;
- iii. that more focus be given on communications to local neighbourhoods and communities outside the town centre, including schemes such as the events stalls in town centres and similar to the Bromsgrove District Housing Trust bus, to ensure that BDC communications reach all sections of the community across the District;
- iv. that linkages are enhanced between the Communications Strategy and council services communications needs and other strategic service plans to ensure that council services communications are fully supported through the Communications Strategy and vice versa;
- v. that defined strategic communications processes are established to enhance and facilitate appropriate communications for shared services, including appropriate shared costs and service to service arrangements.

RESOLVED that the Communication Strategy be considered where appropriate during consideration of forthcoming Overview and Scrutiny topics.

34/09 **IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CIVIL PARKING ENFORCEMENT PROPOSALS**

The Head of Street Scene and Community updated the Overview Board on the implementation of the Civil Parking Enforcement proposals and the agency agreement with Worcestershire County Council. He advised that a proposed agency agreement had been sent to the County Council and that the Council was awaiting a response. The agency agreement governed the way in which funding and income generation from parking enforcement worked. When an agreement had been reached with the County Council over the agency agreement, BDC would be able to put together a business case for parking enforcement in the District. It was anticipated that that this would take about 12 months, taking into account the negotiations over the agency agreement with the County Council, putting together a business case and rolling out the service provisions.

Questions and comments were received from Members of the Overview Board to the Head of Street Scene and Community. He was asked how many other district authorities in Worcestershire had followed a similar path, to which he responded that he knew of four that had and two that had not. He felt that the problem with the current arrangements was that they were ambiguous in some important respects as to the responsibilities of the County Council and this could be very costly to the District. Members were informed that it was necessary to reach an agreement and clarification on the allocation of responsibilities and the resultant costs so that a proper robust business case could be put together.

The Head of Street Scene and Community was also asked if he had communicated with the other authorities that had reviewed their agency agreement with the County Council. He replied that he had and that the BDC needs from such an agreement had been identified. Advice had been taken from other district authorities on the prospects for income generation, but there was a need to have an agency agreement that suited the particular needs of BDC. The business case would run over a 5 year period and it was anticipated that after 3 years BDC should anticipate a return on its investments.

In response to a query as to whether the parking enforcement strategy was District wide, the Head of Street Scene and Community responded that it was, but that the town centres were inevitably the focus of much of the parking enforcement measures as these areas were where the problems were.

With regards to the workings of parking enforcement, Members were informed that most of the parking restrictions were already in place, including signage and road marking. It was noted that the County Council were ultimately responsible for highways and therefore restriction measures on the highway.

During the discussion it was suggested that there was a need in some wards for residential parking and that consideration should be given for the introduction of residential parking schemes in some parts of the District. In response, Members were informed that when the agency agreement had been agreed it would be possible to consider the introduction of residential parking schemes in the future.

The Chairman thanked the Head of Street Scene and Community for his contribution.

35/09 **VERBAL UPDATE ON PROGRESS OF THE OLDER PEOPLE TASK GROUP**

This item was deferred to the next meeting of the Overview Board.

36/09 **FORWARD PLAN OF KEY DECISIONS 1ST NOVEMBER 2009 TO 28TH FEBRUARY 2010**

Members of the Board gave consideration to the Forward Plan which referred to the key and non-key decisions which were due to be made by the Cabinet during the period 1st November 2009 to 28th February 2010. The Chairman asked Members of the Board if they wished to consider any items from the Forward Plan.

Some items from the Forward Plan were considered but it was clarified that those items were already scheduled on the Scrutiny Board Work Programme.

37/09 **ANTICIPATED REPORTS DUE TO BE CONSIDERED BY THE CABINET FROM MARCH 2010**

Members of the Board gave consideration to the anticipated reports due to be considered by the Cabinet from March 2010.

38/09 **REPORT FROM THE QUARTERLY MEETING BETWEEN THE LEADER AND CHAIRMAN OF THE OVERVIEW BOARD**

The Chairman gave a verbal report back to the Board on a recent meeting between the Chairmen of the Overview Board and the Scrutiny Board and the Leader of the Council. The Chairman reported that the Leader was very positive and generally very encouraged by the approach taken so far by the Overview and Scrutiny boards and that the Leader had been highlighted the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) as a potential area for scrutiny. It had been agreed with the Leader that the LSP was an important body for Overview and Scrutiny as it brought together local partnerships and local organisations, including the council and that Overview and Scrutiny could play an important role in improving the effectiveness of partnership working. The Chairman reported that the Chairman of the Scrutiny Board had also briefed the Leader on the progress and anticipated timescales for the scrutiny investigation into Hot Food Takeaways, which was due to report to the Scrutiny Board on 24th November 2009.

39/09 **OVERVIEW BOARD WORK PROGRAMME 2009-2010**

Members of the Board considered a report of the Head of Legal, Equalities and Democratic Services (Mrs C. Felton) on the Overview Board Work Programme 2009-2010. The report presented the new Overview Board Work Programme arising from the Overview and Scrutiny Work Planning Workshop held on 6th October 2009 and outlined the process and rationale for the Overview and Scrutiny Work planning process for 2009-2010. The Chairman introduced the report, outlined the process that had been followed to develop the work programme and explained that the topics selected and prioritised by all Overview and Scrutiny Members had been allocated between the Overview Board and the Scrutiny Board. The topics for the Overview Board were listed in priority order on the updated Overview Board Work Programme for final agreement.

The Chairman invited the Board to identify any key evidence, witnesses or site visits they would like to include as part of the Overview Board investigations, so that this could be planned out. The Bromsgrove Planning Policy topic was discussed and the Executive Director of Partnerships & Projects (Mr. P. Street) explained that the planning peer review group was due to report within about a fortnight. It was considered that it would be a good idea to receive the report of the peer review as evidence to consider this topic and to invite a member of the peer review group to attend the Overview Board. The Executive Director of Partnerships & Projects explained the peer review process and advised that four representatives from the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) had visited the Council from 13th – 15th October to review the planning service. Their brief included; the relationships with elected councillors, the relationships with customers and the interpretation of policy. This was not an inspection but a detailed independent review. The review body would report back and deliver recommendations that would inform an action plan. It was also suggested that members of the Planning Committee also be invited to the Overview Board when it considered this topic on 5th January 2010. It was explained that this topic had been linked to licensing because many of the same issues were perceived to be involved in relation to licensing.

The proposed Task Group topic on Community Involvement in the Democratic Process was discussed. The Head of Legal, Equalities and Democratic Services explained that this topic could include some important duties of the council including the duty to promote local democratic arrangements, the duty to involve residents, consultation on the new executive arrangements and options and Democracy Year running up to the 2011 elections. It was reported that the Head of Legal, Equalities and Democratic Services was due to meet with the proposed Chairman of the Task Group on 11th November 2009 to advise on the technical and operational aspects of the topic and the approach for the Task Group investigation. It was suggested that the voice of the general public / local residents should somehow be considered as part of the evidence for this topic. Councillors Mrs J. M. L. A. Griffiths and Mrs C. J. Spencer expressed an interest in joining the Task Group.

The Board considered the other topics on the draft Overview Board Work Programme and it was clarified that the Head of Financial Services would be presenting a report to the Overview Board on Council Procurement on 5th January 2010. The importance of requesting the attendance of Councillor Mrs M. A. Sherrey – Cabinet Member for Vulnerable and Older People for the topic on The Worcestershire Older Peoples Strategy was expressed.

In addition to the formal meetings of the Overview Board the Chairman announced two events as part of the Rough Guide to Overview and Scrutiny series: the Overview and Scrutiny seminar on 19th November 2009 at 6pm *The Keys to Success* and the Overview and Scrutiny conference *Into the Future* on 10th December 2009 at 6pm. The first event on 19th November would provide an opportunity to plan out Overview and Scrutiny topics in detail and consider the best ways to approach a successful scrutiny investigation, with the expert guidance of Dr Andrew Coulson from the Institute of Local Government (INLOGOV) at the University of Birmingham. The second event on 10th December would consider the future for Overview and Scrutiny, including the development of the role of the scrutiny in the light of recent legislation and the development of the scrutiny function locally. The Chairman stressed that it was important for all Overview and Scrutiny Members to attend and said that all Members of the Council were invited. Members were asked to confirm their attendance or non-attendance to the Scrutiny Officer as soon as possible.

RESOLVED:

- (a) that the Overview and Scrutiny work planning process for 2009-2010 be noted;
- (b) that the Overview Board Work Programme for 2009-2010 (as set out in Appendix 3 of the report) be agreed;
- (c) that the evidence identified in the consideration of each item on the draft Overview Board Work Programme be included in the plan of future agenda items;
- (d) that the Task Group proposal for Community Involvement in the Democratic Process (as set out in Appendix 4 of the report) be agreed,
- (e) that Councillor L. Turner be elected Chairman for the Task Group, and
- (f) that the Chairman of the Overview Board write to invite all non-executive Members of the Council to apply to join the Task Group and write to the group leaders to notify them of the establishment of the Task Group.

40/09 **OVERVIEW RECOMMENDATION TRACKER**

The Board considered the Overview Board Recommendation Tracker, a report to monitor implementation progress against recommendations approved by Cabinet. The Board noted those recommendations that had been reported as implemented.

The meeting closed at 8.08 p.m.

Chairman