

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MEETING OF THE PARISH COUNCILS' FORUM

TUESDAY, 25TH JANUARY 2011

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. J. Bradley (Chairman)	Belbroughton
Mrs. C. Limm (Clerk)	
Mr. C. R. Scurrall	Bournheath
Mr. G. Witcomb (Chairman)	Catshill and North Marlbrook
Mrs. G. Lungley (Clerk)	
Mr. E. Sheppard (Chairman)	Clent
Mrs. R. Mullett (Clerk)	
Mr. S. Malek	
Mr. R. J. Deeming (Chairman)	Cofton Hackett
Mr. K. Duncan	
Mr. A. Rea	Dodford with Grafton
Mrs. A. Pulsford	Feckenham
Mrs. R. Mullett (Clerk)	Hunnington
Mr. J. Williams (Chairman)	Lickey and Blackwell
Mr. K. Woolford	
Mrs. R. Mullett (Clerk)	Romsley
Mrs. H. S. Davies (Clerk)	Tutnall and Cobley
Mrs. S. J. Baxter (Chairman)	Wythall
Mrs. H. Cleaver	

Also invited: Mrs. J. Maturi (County Association of Local Councils) and
Mr. B. Warwick (Census Area Manager, Office of National Statistics)
Officers: Mrs. S. Mould, Ms. F. Scott, Mr. M. Dunphy, Ms. R. Dunne and
Mr. A. C. Stephens

30/10 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Miss P. Harrison (Beoley Parish Council and Wythall Parish Council) and Mr. J. Ellis, Mr. K. Strawbridge and Mr. P. Callaway (Stoke Parish Council).

31/10 **MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING OF THE PARISH COUNCILS' FORUM
HELD ON 15TH APRIL 2010**

The minutes of the meeting of the Parish Councils' Forum held on 15th April 2010 were submitted.

Mr. J. Cypher referred the previous minutes with particular reference to the Parish Council Charter, and the consultation process following the recent abolition of Lickey End Parish Council.

The Chairman responded by stating that the Parish Council Charter was intended to formalise working arrangements between the District Council and the parish councils within the district and would continue as a 'living document' to take account of any changes which may be necessary.

In respect of the former Lickey End parish, the Chairman commented that any funds held by the parish council had been handed back to the District Council. In the event that there should be any future requests for the creation of parish or neighbourhood councils, he added that this has always been possible under current legislation; not necessarily under any proposals under the Government's "Localism" agenda.

RESOLVED that the minutes be approved as a correct record.

32/10 **DRAFT CORE STRATEGY / DRAFT TOWN CENTRE AREA ACTION
PLAN / LOCAL DEMOCRACY WEEK**

At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. M. Dunphy - Strategic Planning Manager - addressed the Forum and informed Members of the draft Core Strategy and the draft Town Centre Area Action Plan.

Mr. Dunphy referred to the former proposals in respect of the Regional Spatial Strategy [RSS] and housing allocation figures for the district stating that the RSS seemed likely to soon be abolished, and that the housing allocation determination would be determined at a local level, together with the strengthening of a number of housing related policies (for example, affordable housing and housing for an increasingly elderly population).

He added that relevant policies in the draft Core Strategy were mirrored in the policies contained within the draft Town Centre Area Action Plan which, in turn, builds on the Core Strategy and provides a lot more policy guidance and regeneration / development opportunities.

Mr. Dunphy also outlined the consultation process and provided details of events being promoted by the District Council as part of the consultation. Furthermore, he stated that he would be willing to make more detailed presentations to the parish councils upon request.

The Chairman added that the consultation period had been extended from the usual six week duration to twelve weeks and that responses would be encouraged from as many agencies and individuals as possible.

Mr. Dunphy and the Chairman then responded to a number of questions and comments raised by Members of the Forum; specifically in relation to Neighbourhood Plans, whether to continue work on Parish Plans currently being developed and issues relating to the RSS, housing need and the local housing allocation.

Local Democracy Week

At the invitation of the Chairman, Ms. R. Dunne - Senior Policy Officer - addressed the Forum and informed Members of arrangements for Local Democracy Week, running from 28th February until 5th March 2011. She added that Democracy Week was one of the projects being promoted as part of the "Big Society" proposals put forward by the Coalition Government, initially having arisen from an overview and scrutiny task group exercise conducted by the District Council into 'Community Involvement in the Democratic Process'.

Among the recommendations was a suggestion to establish a Local Democracy Year to, for example, encourage people to seek to become a local Ward Councillor and visiting schools to inform and educate children and young people of the democratic process and how to get involved. Ms. Dunne stated that Local Democracy Week itself had been promoted as a focussed week in advance of the District and Parish Council elections. She also referred to a national Democracy Week, aimed at schools, which took place in October of each year but it was felt that this would be too far in advance of the elections in May 2011.

Ms. Dunne added that, as part of her role in promoting local democracy in its widest sense, she worked with schools, community and youth groups, volunteer groups, Bromsgrove District Housing Trust and other agencies, and would welcome the participation of the parish councils within the District.

Ms. Dunne then responded to several questions and comments from Members of the Forum.

Localism / Big Society

With reference to the Coalition Government's 'Localism' agenda, the Chairman stated that there was nothing definite to report at this stage and that further information was awaited from the Department for Communities and Local Government.

In terms of the Big Society proposals, the Chairman stated that the District Council was already, to a certain extent, promoting its own version of this and he quoted the Alvechurch Communities Together scheme and The Trunk at Charford (which had extended itself to include Sidemoor and Catshill) as examples where members of the public are taking more control. However, he stated that he was cautious about the Big Society suggestion, especially in terms of where funding would come from in the future.

The Chairman then responded to several questions and comments from Members of the Forum.

33/10 **CENSUS 2011**

At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. B. Warwick - Census Area Manager from the Office of National Statistics - addressed the Forum and informed Members of the arrangements concerning the Census 2011 which takes place on Census Day - 27th March 2011 - and stated that, from 7th March 2011, Census forms would start to be delivered nationally.

Mr. Warwick outlined the uses of the information accumulated by the Census and stated that much of the statistical data which can then be used to analyse communities. He informed the Forum that, for the first time, the Census forms could be completed on-line but also assured Members that personal information gathered by the Census would remain confidential for 100 years.

After responding to questions from Members of the Forum, the Chairman thanked Mr. Warwick for his presentation.

34/10 **ELECTORAL SERVICES - INFORMATION UPDATE**

At the invitation of the Chairman, Mrs. S. Mould - Electoral Services Manager - addressed the Forum and started by confirming that the Order to abolish Lickey End Parish Council and to revert the area it covered back to a non-parished area was made towards the end of 2010 and took effect on 1st January 2011.

Mrs. Mould then informed Members of the Forum of the preparations being made for the District and Parish Council elections on 5th May 2011, the levels of training for candidates, agents, Parish Council Clerks / Executive Officers and electoral staff. She stated that it was likely that there would be the national referendum in respect of the Alternative Vote System also taking place at the same time as the two elections for the District and the parishes.

Mrs. Mould also outlined how the Clerks / Executive Officers to the Parish Councils could also help in the electoral process, giving the significant dates for the submission of formal documents and forms, and reminded Members of the Forum of the importance of submitting election expense information and legal issues in connection with this. She detailed the processes which would be undertaken on election day itself and arrangements to be made at the counting of votes and declaration of results.

After responding to questions and comments from Members, Mrs. Mould reminded the Forum that the Casual Vacancy Summary for the parish councils was also included with the agenda for the meeting for the information of Members.

35/10 **DISABLED ACCESS AWARDS SCHEME**

At the invitation of the Chairman, Ms. F. Scott - Equality Officer - addressed the Forum and outlined a few details in relation to the consultation held in respect of the Disabled Access Awards Scheme for the Bromsgrove District. She stated that there had been an excellent response to the consultation, all of which was very positive, produced valid evidential data of what people need and backed-up the commitment made by the District Council to its Disability Equality Scheme when first adopted in December 2006.

She explained that the Awards Scheme for 2011 would commence with the issue of nomination forms with the March edition of 'Together Bromsgrove' prior to the selection process leading up to the presentation of the awards as part of the annual Business Awards ceremony in June. However, Ms. Scott added that the awards would not be financial - the funding is just not available to do this; the key to the awards is the recognition which would be gained by the successful nominees by way of formal certification by the Council and additional publicity.

Ms. Scott concluded by reporting on several good news items and forthcoming events which raised, or were anticipated to raise, the profile of the work being undertaken in respect of disability equality throughout the District; for example:

- the fourth Disability Equality Community Consultation Conference - 2nd April 2011;
- LGBT History Month events - 18th and 22nd February 2011;
- construction of the 'Changing Places' Toilet facility in Bromsgrove Town Centre; and
- provision of a tactile map of Bromsgrove Town Centre, free to any blind or visually impaired Bromsgrove residents/visitors.

36/10 **ITEMS REQUESTED TO BE PLACED ON THE AGENDA AT THE REQUEST OF THE COUNTY ASSOCIATION OF LOCAL COUNCILS**

- (a) Future of meetings of the Parish Councils' Forum / Monitoring Officers Liaison Group / Parish Charter Working Group

The Chairman apologised for the fact that the two previous meetings of the Forum (originally arranged for June and September 2010) had been cancelled. He stated that, if the parish councils wished to maintain having the meetings on a three monthly cycle, he would be happy to continue.

He also made reference to the Monitoring Officers' Liaison Group which had recently been established by the District Council. The Forum was informed that this had been established so that certain officers of the District Council could meet twice a year with the Parish Clerks / Executive Officers and exchange information relating to legal procedures and issues relevant to the parish councils and their Parish Councillors.

Finally, the Chairman referred to the Parish Charter Working Group which had been established to review the Parish Council Charter document, and ensure that its content was still relevant to current working practices and procedures between the District Council and the parish councils. Members of the Forum commented that certain issues had been omitted from the Charter document when originally established and it was intended that the Working Group would look further into the following matters:-

- (i) Financial arrangements;
- (ii) Parish Plans; and
- (iii) Village Design Statements.

The Chairman responded by saying that he would explain item (i) when discussing (b) below. In respect of item (ii), he stated that it was currently difficult to understand how or where Parish Plans would fit into new planning legislation following the abolition of the Regional Spatial Strategy. He added that this may be an item for consideration in the future when a new planning system is announced.

Finally, in respect of (iii), the Chairman stated that many, but not all, Village Design Statements had yet to be formally adopted and, therefore, were not necessarily referred to when addressing planning applications. He offered to take this matter up with the relevant officers in the Planning and Regeneration Service because he felt that the community involvement which had produced the Village Design Statements in the first place could be resurrected as part of the Coalition Government's 'Big Society' initiatives. This was noted.

(b) Update on shared services arrangements with Redditch (and other authorities)

The Chairman informed the Forum that the shared services initiative is continuing, especially with Redditch Borough Council, but not necessarily in terms of 'front line' services, and an agreement had been reached with Wyre Forest District Council to join in with the Redditch / Bromsgrove shared services in respect of building control and economic development. He added that environmental health and licensing (regulatory services) was a shared service being developed throughout the County, with Bromsgrove being the administrative centre.

(c) Budget cuts - matters directly affecting the parish councils

The Chairman stated that the budget cuts incurred upon the reduced government grant given to the District Council should not directly affect the parish councils. However, the Forum were concerned that some committed expenditure to the now abolished Local Neighbourhood Partnerships might not now be available. The Chairman agreed to take this back and speak to the relevant officer(s) because he was of the opinion that the committed expenditure should be honoured.

(d) Improvements to public transport within the parishes

The Chairman stated that public transport was an issue for Worcestershire County Council, although he was aware that local bus services were also likely to be the subject of reductions due to the economic situation faced by local authorities. Mrs. S. J. Baxter stated that the County Council were undertaking a consultation and that Wythall Parish Council had organised a public meeting in order to assist residents respond to the consultation in a meaningful way.

Concern was expressed about the service provided by Bromsgrove Urban and Rural Transport Community Bus Service but the Chairman reassured the Forum that this was something the Council were continuing to work on and to try to improve the service.

37/10 **DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS OF THE FORUM**

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

RESOLVED that the Forum meetings during 2011 be held on the following dates:-

- Monday, 21st March 2011 (6.30 p.m., Council Chamber)
- Tuesday, 21st June 2011 (6.30 p.m., Committee Room)
- Wednesday, 21st September 2011 (6.30 p.m., Committee Room)
- Thursday, 12th January 2012 (6.30 p.m., Committee Room)

The meeting closed at 8.40 p.m.

Chairman