

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL
MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD
MONDAY, 27TH FEBRUARY 2012 AT 6.00 P.M.

PRESENT: Councillors S. R. Colella (Chairman), C. J. Bloore, J. S. Brogan, Mrs. R. L. Dent, K. A. Grant-Pearce, R. J. Laight, P. Lammas (Vice-Chairman), P. M. McDonald, S. P. Shannon, Mrs. C. J. Spencer and L. J. Turner

Observers: Councillor M. A. Bullivant, Councillor C. B. Taylor and Ms. J. Bayley

Officers: Ms. J. Pickering, Mrs. C. Felton, Mrs. A. Heighway, Ms. B. Houghton, Mr. C. Santoriello-Smith, Ms. A. Glennie and Ms. A. Scarce

89/11 **ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN**

RESOLVED that Councillor S. R. Colella be elected as Chairman of the Board for the remainder of the municipal year.

90/11 **APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Dr. B. T. Cooper and Mrs. J. M. L. A. Griffiths.

91/11 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND WHIPPING ARRANGEMENTS**

There were no declarations of interest or whipping arrangements.

92/11 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting held on 23rd January 2012 were submitted.

RESOLVED that the minutes be approved as a correct record.

93/11 **HOMELESSNESS GRANT 2012/13**

The Chairman welcomed the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Core Strategy, Regulatory Services and Strategic Housing and the Strategic Housing Officer who reminded Members that the Board had asked to receive this report following its inclusion on the Forward Plan and subsequent submission to Cabinet on 1st February 2012.

The Strategic Housing Officer provided Members with details of the funding received by the Council for 2011/12 and 2012/13, together with progress on schemes in place for 2011/12 and the methodology used in allocating the funds for 2012/13 and which had been recommended by the Homelessness Strategy Steering Group.

Members discussed the following in detail:

- The Economic Recovery Fund and how residents were made aware of the availability of the funds. This was only available in exceptional circumstances following advice and referral from Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) specialist mortgage rescue adviser.
- The role of the Homelessness Strategy Steering Group – it had been in existence for 7/8 years, its members included CAB, Bromsgrove District Housing Trust (BDHT), Bromsgrove Youth Forum Newstarts Furniture Project, Fry Housing, Our Ways, St Basils and Registered Providers and met on a quarterly basis.
- The development of services year on year – Members raised concerns that scheme would become dependant on the funds provided by the Council.
- The Newstart Furniture Project and the services that were provided by this project.
- The New Homes Bonus (calculated on the number of new homes created over a period of time) – which had already been included in the main budget. It was confirmed that this Bonus had not been ring fenced.
- The National Home Swap Scheme – accessed by BDHT through Homeswapper.
- The Discretionary Housing Benefit scheme and work carried out in conjunction with the Housing Benefit Department.
- Lashbrook House – Members were provided with background information on this facility.
- The Night Assessment Centre – who this was available to and how this was accessed.
- The use of sheltered accommodation for those under the usual required age criteria and the flexibility of that age criteria.

Members raised concerns that a proportion of the Grant had been surrendered to the Council's balances. Officers informed the Board that this had been agreed by Members and the Grant for 2011/12 to which this referred was not ring fenced. For 2012/13 the full Grant would be made available, although not ring fenced.

The Board discussed the new Government Welfare Reforms and in particular raised concerns in respect of the "bedroom" tax. Officers informed Members that an impact assessment had been carried out to ascertain the affect of the changes, this included a "modelling" exercise on the supply of accommodation, the number of people affected by the private sector changes and other issues and it was likely that it would take 4/5 years for the changes to take full effect. It was confirmed that there were approximately 290 people

who would be affected by the changes at BDHT. It was confirmed that the legislation would come into force with effect from April 2013. Officers informed Members that BDHT were taking a pro-active approach to the changes and had already contacted those residents which would be affected. Members further discussed the “bedroom” tax and the age range of those residents it was most likely to affect and the changes to retirement age.

Members understood the need for houses with multiple occupations (HMOs) within the district but concerns were raised about the controls that were needed to ensure that the area surrounding such houses did not suffer as a consequence. This was noted by officers and the Board was informed that inspections were carried out to ensure that this was not the case.

RESOLVED:

- (a) that the report on Homelessness Grants 2012/13 be noted;
- (b) that the Strategic Housing Manager and Portfolio Holder provide the Board with an update report on the affect of the Government Reforms and the Impact Assessment carried out, at the meeting to be held on 23rd April 2012; and
- (c) that the Strategic Housing Manager and Portfolio Holder provide the Board with an update report on the progress of expenditure for 2012/13 at the meeting to be held on 10th September 2012.

94/11 **UPDATE REPORT ON DEALING WITH FLY-POSTING**

The Chairman welcomed the Head of Community Services, the Community Safety Manager and the Senior Community Safety Project Officer to the meeting.

The Senior Community Safety Project Officer provided Members with background information on fly-posting and advised that the current policy had been in place since December 2004 and did not reflect the complexity of tackling fly-posting. Members were informed of the legislation which could be used to tackle fly-posting and advised that the Community Safety Team together with Environmental Services and Planning were currently working with colleagues from Worcestershire County Council to identify the most effective options that could be used at a local level to successfully implement that legislation, in order to produce an updated policy and procedure for fly-posting. Members were informed that it was anticipated that the updated policy and procedure would be brought before the Board for comment at its meeting to be held on 18th June 2012.

It was confirmed to Members that three wardens and the Senior Community Safety Project Officer had completed the relevant training in order to issue fixed penalty notices. Members discussed the follow in more detail:

- The type of advertisement that could be classed as fly-posting.
- The consent required for different types of advertisements.
- The resources available to deal with fly-posting.

RESOLVED

- (a) that the Update report on dealing with Fly-posting be noted; and
- (b) that the Board receive the new Fly-posting policy and procedures for comment at the meeting to be held on 18th June 2012.

95/11 **APRIL TO DECEMBER 2011 - QUARTER 3 FINANCE MONITORING REPORT**

The Quarter 3 Finance monitoring report 2011/12 which set out the Council's financial position for the period April to December 2011 was considered by the Board. The Executive Director for Finance and Resources informed Members that Officers were aware of the financial pressures that the Council was under and were ensuring quality services were maintained, whilst minimising spend to essential items only.

Members discussed the following areas in more detail:

- Unfilled vacancies and the use of agency staff and external consultancy and professional advice.
- The necessity for the increase in the budget for Building Control (Executive Director for Finance and Resources to provide Board with further detail.)
- The budget estimates and the savings made.
- Environmental Services underspend - it was confirmed that no increase in complaints had been received following the restructure of Street Cleansing team.
- Installation of Solar panels – these should be in place by the end of the financial year and the feed in tariff rates.
- Regulatory Services – underspend from Environmental Health and savings made following the move of Regulatory Services to White House.
- Revenue and Benefits – shortfall due to benefit calculation, error rate and active recovery of overpayments.
- Elections and Electoral Services – the expected cost of the election of a Police Commissioner. (Executive Director for Finance and Resource to provide Board with details.)
- Sundry Debtors – Garden Waste, invoicing process and payment options.
- Write offs – approved by the Portfolio Holder for Finance and the Section 151 Officer and reported quarterly through the Audit Board and the Cabinet.
- Treasury Management – credit ratings of the companies used and investment rates.

The Executive Director Finance and Resources provided Members, as requested at a previous meeting, with details of the use of agency staff at the Depot (Environmental Services). The Board was also provided with an update in respect of Section 106 monies, which it was confirmed were agreed with the Legal and Finance Teams and in liaison with Planning and the

Leisure Team to ensure these were being used appropriately and within the required timescale.

After further discussion it was

RESOLVED that the Quarter 3 Finance Monitoring Report 2011/12 be noted and in future, where appropriate, the relevant Head of Service be invited to attend future meetings.

96/11 **SICKNESS ABSENCE PERFORMANCE AND HEALTH FOR PERIOD ENDED 31ST DECEMBER 2011**

The Chairman welcomed the Portfolio Holder for Policy, Performance, Communications, Customer Service, Legal, Equalities, Democratic Services and Human Resources and the Executive Director for Finance and Resources provided background information on the Sickness Absence Performance and Health Report.

The Board discussed the following in detail:

- The level of sickness and the comparative figures provided.
- The recording of sickness through the Shared Service regime – a review of the methodology had been requested by Human Resources to look at addressing this.
- Work being undertaken, particularly at the Depot, to manage sickness and support staff.
- The development of a revised report and supporting documentation
- The effectiveness of the Sickness Policy

RESOLVED that the Sickness Absence Performance and Health Report be noted.

97/11 **DISCOUNTED PARKING CHARGES - OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY TOPIC PROPOSAL REPORT**

The Board considered the Overview and Scrutiny Topic Proposal put forward by a resident, Mr. Charles Bateman, in relation to discounted parking charges. As the Board had recently completed a Task Group in respect of the Recreation Road South Car Park and in light of the agreement at the Cabinet meeting held on 22nd February 2012 for a cross party review to be carried out in respect of car parking, Members agreed it was not appropriate to investigate the issues raised in this Topic Proposal until such time as that review had been completed.

RESOLVED that the Board receive, upon completion, the report on the Review of Car Parking before giving further consideration to the Topic Proposal in respect of Discounted Parking Charges.

98/11 **PLANNING POLICY TASK GROUP - INTERIM REPORT**

Members were informed by Councillor S. R. Colella, Chairman of the Planning Policy Task Group that the final report was nearing completion and would be formally presented to the Board at its meeting to be held on 26th March 2012.

Members discussed issues at the Marlbrook Tip site and officers confirmed that these were outside of the terms of reference of the Task Group. However, officers agreed to ask the Head of Planning and Regeneration for clarification as to whether an expert report on the condition of the site had been commissioned and if so, when the contents of that would be made available. The Board also discussed arrangements in respect of meeting the cost of such a report and Worcestershire County Council's involvement.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

99/11 **FORWARD PLAN OF KEY DECISIONS**

The Forward Plan of Key Decisions was considered by the Board. Members discussed the item in respect of Longbridge Statement of Principles regarding Affordable Housing Provision in detail and raised concerns in respect of any implications this could have on the Council's current policy for the provision of affordable housing. The Board also discussed the inclusion of the Performance Monitoring Report within its Work Programme and officers confirmed that this should be a standing item and was included within the Board's terms of reference.

After further discussion it was

RESOLVED:

- (a) that a report in respect of Longbridge – Statement of Principles regarding Affordable Housing Provision be received at the Board meeting to be held on 26th March 2012; and
- (b) that the Quarter 3 Performance Monitoring Report be presented to the Board at its meeting to be held on 26th March 2012 and all future Quarterly Performance Reports be included within the Work Programme as a regular item.

100/11 **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD WORK PROGRAMME**

The Board considered the Work Programme and the Chairman asked Members to think about any areas suitable for scrutiny which could be put forward. It was noted that the Board would receive an update on Burglary and Vehicle Crime in Bromsgrove at the meeting to be held on 23rd April 2012. Officers undertook to confirm the date at which the Write Off of Debts Quarterly Report would be made available for consideration by the Board, as soon as possible.

RESOLVED that, subject to the above, the Work Programme be noted.

101/11 **WCC HEALTH OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

Officers informed Members that this item was for information and that the Council's representative on the Worcestershire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC) was Councillor Dr. B. T. Cooper who would, on his return from annual leave, provide Members with regular updates of the work of HOSC and Members would be given the opportunity to ask Councillor Cooper to raise any relevant issues, where appropriate.

Members requested that Councillor Cooper feedback to the Board any matters that were discussed in respect of the Alexandra Hospital in Redditch and other services that were provided within the district.

The meeting closed at 8.38 p.m.

Chairman