

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

MONDAY, 16TH DECEMBER 2013 AT 6.00 P.M.

PRESENT: Councillors P. Lammas (Chairman), R. J. Laight (Vice-Chairman), C. J. Bloore, B. T. Cooper, R. L. Dent, K. A. Grant-Pearce, H. J. Jones, P. M. McDonald (Substitute), C. R. Scurrall (Substitute), S. P. Shannon, C. J. Spencer, C. J. Tidmarsh and L. J. Turner

Observers: Councillors R. Hollingworth and C. B. Taylor

Invitees: Councillors M. A. Bullivant and M. J. A. Webb

Officers: Ms. J. Pickering, Ms. A. De Warr, K. Hirons, Ms. A. Scarce and Ms. J. Bayley

58/13 **APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors J. M. L. A. Griffiths and L. C. R. Mallett. Councillors P. M. McDonald and C. R. Scurrall confirmed that they were attending as substitutes.

59/13 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND WHIPPING ARRANGEMENTS**

Councillor C. J. Spencer declared a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest as a member of the Bromsgrove Arts Centre Trust in respect of Item No. 10. As such Councillor Spencer withdrew from the meeting and took no part in its consideration and voting thereon.

60/13 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting held on 18th November 2013 were submitted.

RESOLVED that the minutes be approved as a correct record.

61/13 **CAR PARKING REVIEW REPORT**

The Board received a presentation from the Environmental Services Manager on the subject of a Car Parking Review that had recently been completed (Appendix 1).

Following delivery of the presentation the following details were discussed:

- The total cost to the Council in managing car parks in the district was £738k. However, car parking charges provided the Council with revenue of £1.125 million per annum.
- The revenue derived from car parking charges had been used to help fund the town centre redevelopment and services such as Shopmobility and BURT.
- The income accrued from car parking charges was important to the Council's budget in a difficult economic climate.
- Car parking charges had not been increased in Bromsgrove district since 2010. However, the charge for parking for up to half an hour had remained at 40p since 2007.
- The costs to the Council in managing the enforcement of parking on the Alvechurch Sports and Social Club car park were briefly discussed (Officers agreed to provide further information about these costs at a later date).
- The impact of budgetary cuts at Worcestershire County Council on the continuing provision of 24 hour CCTV coverage in the car parks was also briefly considered. (Officers were asked to provide further information about the impact of these cuts for consideration at a later date).
- The selection of case studies in the report, which reflected practices in locations such as Wychavon and Altrincham were also debated. Members suggested that it would have been useful to also consider car parking arrangements in Birmingham as, due to the close proximity of the city and its suburbs to Bromsgrove district, these arrangements could potentially impact on retail custom in Bromsgrove.
- Customers' preference not to park in multi-storey car parks was debated as well as the implications for revenue at Churchfields car park.
- The potential significance of car parking charges after 6.00pm to the night time economy was raised (Officers were asked to provide further information about how the revenue accrued from charges after 6.00pm compared to other local authorities).
- Members commented that there was a need for appropriate visual signs to be used on parking metres that were no longer in use and / or situated in car parks where charging did not apply on specific dates and times. It was also agreed that more work needed to be undertaken to advise customers that these machines did not need to be used at those times.
- Consideration of car parking availability and charging regimes had also been taken into account as part of a strategic overview of the redevelopment of the town and as a factor in attracting new retail business to the town centre.
- The charging model adopted by Trafford Metropolitan Borough Council had been considered as part of the review. If this model was adopted by Bromsgrove District Council Officers estimated that the Council would lose revenue of £619k.
- The review had been designed to provide a factual overview of car parking provision in the District. For this reason potential future options had been listed in the report and the public had not been consulted as part of the exercise.

Members commented that they had originally been asked to review car parking charges by Mr Bateman, on behalf of the Bromsgrove Older People's forum. Mr Bateman had suggested that the Board should establish a Task Group to investigate this matter in further detail, though he had also submitted a petition on behalf of the Forum requesting that further action be taken by the Council.

Members concluded that, due to the on-going redevelopment of Bromsgrove town centre, it was too early to what changes, if any, should be made to car parking charges for the District. After further consideration of this matter it was

RESOLVED:

- (a) that no further action be taken at this time; and
- (b) that the report be noted.

62/13 **QUARTERS 1 & 2 SICKNESS ABSENCE PERFORMANCE & HEALTH REPORT**

The Executive Director for Finance and Corporate Resources presented the Sickness Absence Performance and Health Report for the Board's consideration. Members were advised that the report contained comparative data for quarters 1 and 2 of 2013/14.

A number of points were raised during presentation of this item:

- It was anticipated that the length of staff absence due to sickness would be 7.10 days per person by the end of the year. Whilst Officers recognised that no staff absence due to sickness was ideal this level of absence was better than the Council's measure of 8 days absence.
- One member of staff who had experienced long-term sickness absence had retired due to ill health during the period.
- In general the Council's policy was to support staff experiencing long-term ill health back to work. Most staff returning from a lengthy period of sickness absence would be permitted to return on a phased basis.
- The rates of absence due to sickness for staff employed in WRS were relatively high. Various reasons were cited for this, including occupational hazards and the higher number of staff employed in the service, though it was noted that further information was required from the service to demonstrate how sickness levels compared to sickness levels within other departments which would be made available for Members' consideration as soon as possible.

A number of additional issues arising from the report were discussed by Members following the presentation:

- Concerns were expressed about the high rates of short-term sickness absence attributed to illnesses relating to the stomach, kidneys and the liver.
- The Council's Sickness Absence Policy had been redrafted in the previous 12 month period.

- The Council did not use a points system to monitor or manage sickness levels. Managers used the data on periods of sickness to support staff in returning to work and to provide external support when required.
- There was flexible working at the Council and staff were therefore expected, wherever possible, to book appointments with their GPs and dentists by using that facility. However, hospital appointments could be taken during working hours.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

63/13 **MAKING EXPERIENCES COUNT QUARTER 2 REPORT**

The Head of Customer Access and Financial Support presented the Making Experiences Count report for the second quarter in 2013/14.

The following points were highlighted for Members' consideration during the presentation of this report:

- There had been 41 complaints during the period which represented a decline in the number of complaints that had been made in the previous quarter.
- 92% of complainants had received a response from the Council within 15 days of the complaint being reported. In cases where further time was required to resolve the issue Officers attempted to inform the complainant about the reasons for the delay.
- The timeframes for responding to complaints had recently been changed as part of a trial. The outcomes of this trial would continue to be monitored.
- There had been a reduction in the number of complaints relating to the route optimisation programme. The last complaint received on this subject had been reported in September 2013.
- One complaint, concerning a housing strategy matter, had been escalated for the Head of Service's consideration. It had been found that whilst Officers had followed appropriate procedures communication with the complainant about the case could have been more effective.
- Two customers had complained about arrangements at a Planning Committee meeting. Due to the fact that this complaint had been about a very specific matter it had been dealt with by the Chief Executive and Head of Legal, Equalities and Democratic Services.
- There had been a slight increase during the period in the number of customers who made payments to the council using the automated system.
- The Council had received 19 compliments during the period, though it was likely that the number of compliments received by staff was significantly higher as many employees tended not to report the compliments they had received.

A number of further points were discussed in detail by Members once the report had been presented.

- The extent to which staff checking litter levels prior to mowing represented a change to service delivery was debated as Members suggested that this had traditionally been a requirement of landscaping and cleansing operatives in the district. However, Officers noted that whilst this was meant to be a standard working procedure litter picking had not always been occurring prior to mowing taking place.
- Complaints about bus passes and other County Council functions would be reported to the County Council as part of their complaints process. However, in cases where district Council staff had some involvement in delivering County Council services attempts were being made to ensure that staff provided appropriate information to the customer about the service.
- The involvement of qualified inspectors in assessing the condition of properties provided to vulnerable residents as part of the Step Up Scheme was briefly considered.
- Officers confirmed that cases classified as “other” could relate to a variety of enquiries including Council services that could not be easily categorised and services provided by other organisations.
- Concerns were expressed about the fact that emails had been sent by a member of staff revealing personal email addresses. Reassurance was provided that staff received data protection training on an annual basis and that staff were being encouraged to use blind copying facilities were personal email addresses were used for communications.
- No guarantee could be provided that complaints and compliments reported by Councillors would be logged onto the system. To ensure that both complaints and compliments were logged Members needed to ensure that they referred the matter to the relevant officers and specifically requested that the complaints and compliments be logged.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

64/13 **QUARTERS 1 & 2 WRITE OFF OF DEBTS REPORT**

The Head of Customer Access and Financial Support also presented the Write off of Debts Report covering the period of the first two quarters of 2013/14.

During delivery of this presentation she explained that in these two quarters £202,743 had been identified as bad debts. However, the level of debts tended to decline during the course of the year. Therefore it was suggested that the figures as of 30th September 2013 should not be considered a final indicator of the level of debts that the Council would have at the end of 2013/14.

The potential for the Council to recoup debts from businesses once they had gone into liquidation was briefly debated. Members also expressed an interest in learning to what extent repayments to a local authority would be prioritised over repayments to other organisations. It was therefore agreed that Officers should provide further information on this subject at a later date.

The possibility of providing a list of businesses and individuals in debt to the Council as part of the report was also discussed. Members noted that any

such information would need to be published in confidential papers which were not commonly presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Board. It was possible that it would be more appropriate to make this information available for the consideration of the Audit Board. Officers were asked to provide further information clarifying requirements in relation to this report and any data protection issues arising from the suggested reporting structure at the following meeting of the Board.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

65/13 **QUARTER 2 FINANCE MONITORING REPORT**

The Executive Director for Finance and Corporate Resources presented the Finance Monitoring Report for the second quarter of 2013/14.

Members were advised that there had been an over spend of £58k to date. However, in total it was anticipated that there would be an under spend of £17k across all Council departments at the end of the year.

The figures provided for Corporate Services in the report covered savings for both the services within the Chief Executive's directorate and projected savings for all other departments. Savings would be achieved throughout the year in a variety of ways, including through the Council's approach to vacancy management and through efficiency savings. The report would be adapted in due course to reflect how different departments had achieved the projected savings as the year progressed.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

66/13 **JOINT WRS SCRUTINY TASK GROUP**

The Chairman of the Joint WRS Scrutiny Task Group, Councillor R. J. Laight, provided an update on the progress of the review. He confirmed that the Head of Regulatory Services was due to be interviewed for the second time at the group's next meeting in December. Further interviews were scheduled to take place with representatives of the WRS Management Board and with representatives of the Worcestershire Shared Services Joint Committee in the New Year.

67/13 **ARTRIX OUTREACH PROVISION TASK GROUP**

Councillor S. P. Shannon, Chairman of the Artrix Outreach Provision Task Group, provided an update on the progress of the review and confirmed that a number of meetings had taken place.

At an early stage the Council's Head of Leisure and Cultural Services and Arts and Events Manager had been interviewed. They had provided an overview of how outreach work was delivered in the district. The group had also interviewed the Artistic Director of the Artrix and the Outreach & Education Worker in order to gain an understanding of the level of outreach work that was being provided.

Further meetings had been arranged which would be taking place in December and January. During these meetings the Council's Arts and Events Manager and Arts Development and Events Officer would be interviewed. The group was also scheduled to interview Council representatives appointed to the Artrix Operating Trust as well as the Chairman of the Trust, Ms Dorothy Wilson.

The terms of reference for the review were briefly discussed. It was noted that these terms of reference would continue to be referred to throughout the review by the Group and would be made available for the consideration of the Board at the meeting to be held on 20th January 2014.

68/13 **AIR QUALITY TASK GROUP**

Officers confirmed that a meeting of the Air Quality Task Group was scheduled to take place on Friday 20th December. During this meeting Members would consider the response that had been received from the Cabinet to their recommendations. Any conclusions reached during this meeting would be reported back to the Board in January 2014 in the form of an official response to the Cabinet's decisions on the matter.

69/13 **WORCESTERSHIRE HEALTH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE (HOSC)**

The Chairman invited Councillor B. T. Cooper, as the Council's representative on the HOSC, to provide an update on its most recent meeting.

Councillor Cooper explained that during the latest meeting of the HOSC, which took place on 11th December 2013, Members had received two presentations. The first presentation was delivered by representatives of the South Worcestershire Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) and Worcestershire Health and Care Trust and focused on the role of Community Hospitals in the delivery of health care in South Worcestershire.

The second presentation had been delivered by representatives of Worcestershire Health and Well-being Board. The presentation provided a performance review of the Worcestershire Health and Well-being Strategy 2013 – 16. In particular information had been provided about the action that the Board was taking to address the key priorities for health and well-being in the county, which were:

- Older people and the management of long-term conditions.
- Mental-health and well-being.
- Obesity.
- Alcohol.

The HOSC had discussed the exclusion of smoking from the priorities included in the strategy. Although smoking was a significant cause of ill health, Members had been advised that levels of smoking in Worcestershire were declining. It had not therefore been included within the strategy's priorities.

70/13 **CABINET WORK PROGRAMME 1ST JANUARY TO 30TH APRIL 2014**

The Board considered the Cabinet Work Programme for the period 1st January – 30th April 2014.

Members noted that consideration of the Playing Pitch Strategy by the Cabinet had been postponed until April 2014. For this reason discussion of this matter by the Overview and Scrutiny Board had also been postponed.

71/13 **ACTION LIST**

Officers explained that there were a number of outstanding actions which remained to be implemented. However, a significant number had been resolved since the previous meeting of the Board, including through the incorporation of information into reports that had been presented during the evening.

72/13 **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD WORK PROGRAMME**

Members considered the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme and noted that the summary of the Playing Pitch Strategy would be considered by the Board at a meeting in either February or March 2014.

The informal Overview and Scrutiny Board Briefing in early December, focusing on the subject of the Council's budget, was also briefly discussed. It was noted that the item which had been requested at that meeting for inclusion on the Board's Work Programme, concerning savings made by the Council as a result of shared services, would be considered at a meeting on 20th January 2014.

Officers confirmed that the provisional meeting for 7th January 2014 would not be needed and that the detailed budget information would be brought to the Board meeting to be held on 20th January 2014.

The meeting closed at 8.10 p.m.

Chairman