

**BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD**

**MONDAY, 16TH SEPTEMBER 2013 AT 6.00 P.M.**

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

Observers: Councillors D. W. P. Booth, M. A. Bullivant and M. J. A. Webb

Officers: Ms. J. Pickering, Mr. J. Staniland, Ms. A. De Warr, Mr. G. Revans, Mr. R. Savory, Ms. J. Bayley and Ms. A. Scarce

19/13 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors R. L. Dent and L. C. R. Mallett.

20/13 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND WHIPPING ARRANGEMENTS**

Councillors J. M. L. A. Griffiths and C. J. Spencer both declared a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest as members of the Bromsgrove Arts Centre Trust in respect of Item No. 12. As such Councillors Griffiths and spencer withdrew from the meeting and were not present and took no part in its consideration and voting thereon.

21/13 **MINUTES**

The Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting held on 15<sup>th</sup> July 2013 were submitted.

**RESOLVED** that the minutes be approved as a correct record.

22/13 **UPDATE ON THE BROMSGROVE TOWN CENTRE REGENERATION AND PUBLIC REALM IMPROVEMENTS**

The Senior Project Manager delivered a presentation on the subject of the Bromsgrove town centre regeneration and public realm improvements (Appendix A).

During the delivery of this presentation the following points were highlighted for Members' consideration:

- The quality of the resurfacing works that had been delivered in areas of the town centre as part of the public realm improvements and remedial work required to correct problems occurring in the initial stages of this process.
- The selection of road surfacing materials, including the colour of those materials, had been influenced by both the outcome of public consultation and practical considerations about resilience to wear and tear.
- Trials had been undertaken by both Worcestershire County Council (WCC) and an external contractor to test load bearing capacity on the High Street. The results from these trials and previous tests would influence the final design plans for the project.
- Public realm upgrade works would take place in September to November 2013, though would be halted over the festive season to minimise the impact on Christmas and New Year sales.
- Restrictions on vehicular access would remain in place on the High Street. Gates were due to be introduced to further deter vehicular access, though enforcement remained necessary to encourage compliance.
- Rear access to businesses located on the High Street had been checked to ensure that deliveries could continue to these premises following the introduction of the gates.
- Specific zones had been introduced on pavements that could be used by businesses to display A-Boards. Tactile markers would be installed around these zones to help notify pedestrians with visual impairments about the location of these obstacles on the pavement.
- The previous Town Centre Manager for Bromsgrove had not been replaced. It was possible that at a later date this situation would be reviewed, though assistance continued to be provided by various Council services to local businesses when required.
- It was anticipated that, as part of the project, the Recreation Ground on Recreation Road would receive funding through the Planning process to help revitalise the area.
- A variety of options would be considered for the development of Windsor Street. This could include a mixed-use development, whereby a mixture of retail, residential and office units might be introduced on the site.
- There had been some initial discussions between representatives of the Council and WCC in respect of future leisure centre options. No decisions had been made on this subject to date.

**RESOLVED:**

- (a) that a further update on the subject of Bromsgrove town centre regeneration and public realm improvements be provided for the Board's consideration in 6 months time; and
- (b) that the report be noted.

23/13 **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY TOPIC PROPOSAL - CAR PARKING CHARGES**

The Chairman explained that an Overview and Scrutiny Topic Proposal had been received from a local resident, Mr Charles Bateman, on behalf of the Bromsgrove Forum for Older People, to review car parking charges in the district.

Members noted that the Board had considered car parking on a number of occasions, most recently in September 2012. This had included scrutinising the results of a review of the Blue Badge scheme in the district and consideration of a briefing paper on the decline in usage. At which time the Board had been advised that a more detailed review of car parking would be undertaken once the shared service arrangements with Wychavon District Council had been finalised.

During consideration of this item the Portfolio Holder for Leisure, Cultural Services, Environmental Services and Emergency Planning, was invited to speak. He explained that the review which the Board had been advised about was now in the process of being undertaken. The review was considering practices at neighbouring local authorities and similar Councils as well as projected future parking provision in new developments and the impact of extended cycle lane provision on demand for parking spaces. The Portfolio Holder had also asked Officers to visit Trafford Council to investigate the changes to car parking which it had implemented in Altrincham. Members were advised that the review was due to be completed in November 2013.

It was acknowledged that there had been a decline in the amount of Council funding generated from car parking charges. This had largely occurred because the Council had adopted a more flexible approach to enforcement and the introduction of the pay on foot scheme. In some circumstances where a fine would previously have been issued staff were instead providing drivers with verbal warnings. However, the Council would not tolerate illegal or inconsiderate parking and charges continued to be levied. The car parks which operated the pay on foot scheme eliminated parking fines in respect of vehicles being "out of time".

**RESOLVED** that the results of the car parking review, as mentioned in the preamble above, be considered by the Board before deciding whether or not further investigation was required.

24/13 **MAKING EXPERIENCES COUNT QUARTER 1 REPORT**

The Head of Customer Services introduced the report and highlighted the following points:

- There had been an increase in the number of complaints received by the Council during the quarter and common themes linked to these complaints.

- The increase in complaints in respect of Environmental Services had mainly resulted from the recent rollout of the route optimisation programme, However, it was anticipated that this process would settle shortly and that there would be fewer complaints in the following quarter.
- The relatively high number of complaints for the benefits service had occurred largely due to problems with the Council's telephony system. This system had been changed and Officers anticipated that there would be a decline in associated complaints.
- A number of graphs had been included in the report to demonstrate the patterns in customer enquiries by phone and face to face together with trends in payment methods during the period.
- The Customer Services team received a significant number of calls from customers about services that were not delivered by the local authority, demonstrating that customers trusted the Council to act as an accurate source of general information.

Members discussed the number of complaints that had been received relating to the garden waste bin sticker system and the reasons why this might be the source of a complaint. A variety of problems had been identified including misunderstandings about where the stickers should be displayed or the need for residents to display the stickers to receive the garden waste collection service. There had also been some delays between payment for the service and the issuing of stickers which in some cases had meant that customers had not received the service as soon as they should.

The Board noted that a number of the complaints that had been received in respect of Environmental Services were not in fact directly related to the route optimisation programme, but were due to the standard of customer service received. The Head of Customer Service informed Members that the changing rounds for crew members may also have had an impact on this. These problems had been recognised at a corporate level and staff were in the process of receiving customer service skills training.

There was some debate about the need for the Board to consider the Making Experiences Count report on a quarterly basis and concerns were expressed about the resources required to produce the report, particularly in cases where the Board was not proposing actions. It was suggested that it was important for the Board to continue to receive this report to ensure that complaints and compliments were subject to proper scrutiny and serious problems could be addressed in a transparent manner. As Members had concurred at the previous meeting that the Board should continue to receive this report it was agreed that the report should continue to be submitted for Members consideration.

**RESOLVED** that the report be noted.

## 25/13 **QUARTER 1 FINANCE MONITORING REPORT**

The Executive Director, Finance and Corporate Resources presented the Finance Monitoring Report for the period April to June 2013. She advised Members that during this period there had been an under spend in the

Council's revenue budget of £70,000 compared to anticipated expenditure for the quarter. There had also been a slight under spend in the capital budget of £27,000.

During consideration of this item the Board discussed the following areas in detail:

- The cemetery toilet works had been delayed, partly because the initial plans had not complied fully with disability access requirements and partly because the costs quoted through the tendering process had been higher than anticipated. A further report on this subject, addressing these issues, was due to be considered by Cabinet in due course.
- There were a number of vacant posts in various service areas. The delays in recruitment helped to meet specific vacancy savings, though many vacant posts were also held vacant during the transformational reviews to ensure that staff at risk were given further employment opportunities.
- Savings had been achieved in spending on climate change, primarily due to the departure of the Council's former Climate Change Manager. The Board welcomed the work of an intern in the department but, due to the importance of measures to tackle climate change, requested a further update on future plans to replace the manager.
- The Council could place short-term investments in building societies that had a AA+ rating, though could also place investments in the local authority's bank.
- As agreed at the last meeting of Council £31,000 had been allocated to the recruitment of apprentices. Apprentices had already been recruited to IT and Depot services and there is a current opportunity within Legal and Democratic Services.
- The Executive Director, Finance and Resources informed Members that although Officers had proposed some initial ideas in respect of financial savings, these proposals were indicative and although the value of savings was required it may be from other areas as it was accepted that some of them would require approval from elected Members before action could be taken.

**RESOLVED** that the report be noted.

26/13 **QUARTER 4 SICKNESS ABSENCE AND PERFORMANCE HEALTH REPORT**

The Executive Director, Finance and Corporate Resources presented the report and highlighted the following points for Members' consideration.

- The fall in the average number of days claimed due to sickness by each person compared to the previous quarter had been welcomed as an indication that there would be a subsequent decrease in the average number of sick days that would be claimed during the year.
- Sickness absence rates had decreased for both short-term and long-term absences.

- Support was available to staff experiencing long-term absence due to sickness, including occupational health support.
- Absence due to sickness was classified as long-term in cases where it extended beyond a 28 day period.
- Staff absent due to sickness for a long period would be paid during the first 6 months only. Staff absent for longer periods would continue to receive support wherever possible, though in some instances early retirement might be considered a suitable resolution to the situation.
- Whilst levels of long-term absence due to sickness for staff in Worcestershire Regulatory Services (WRS) appeared to be high it had declined when compared to the previous quarter.

The Board discussed the report and noted that the statistics relating to the WRS could be considered as part of the WRS Joint Scrutiny Task Group review. There had been some initial problems with long-term sickness absence in the service and some staff, with the changes to a new service provision. The staff are being supported back to work by the HR and management team at WRS.

The potential for Members to interpret the statistics effectively was debated. Whilst detailed information was provided about both long-term and short-term sickness absence as well as the support available to staff, the numbers of staff affected were not detailed. Furthermore, the numbers of staff employed in each department had not been provided for comparison purposes, which made it difficult to assess the levels of sickness absence in each department effectively. For this reason it was suggested that these figures should be provided in future versions of this report.

**RESOLVED:**

- (a) that the WRS Joint Scrutiny Task Group be asked to consider sickness absence statistics for staff as part of the review; and
- (b) the report be noted.

**27/13 AIR QUALITY TASK GROUP DRAFT FINAL REPORT**

The Chairman of the Task Group presented the final report for the consideration of the Board. He explained that the exercise had followed a previous review of the subject that had been completed in 2007. There had been some concerns about progress with the implementation of the actions proposed in 2007 and the recent review had therefore sought to address any outstanding issues as well as to tackle any problems with air pollution that had occurred since the previous review.

The Board was advised that under Part IV of the Environment Act 1995 local authorities had a statutory duty to undertake periodic reviews of ambient air quality within their boundaries. The Council was therefore required to review and assess air quality against national air quality standards and objectives. In cases where it was unlikely that an air quality objective would be met an Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) had to be declared for the relevant pollutant.

In 2007 there had been a single AQMA in the district. By 2013 there were 4 AQMAs, which was the highest number for any district in Worcestershire. To some extent air pollution levels in Bromsgrove district were considered to be high due to the close proximity of the local motorway network. However, the Task Group had concluded that further action could be taken to improve air quality in the district.

The potential for specific infrastructure improvements to address air pollution in the district was discussed in some detail. It was suggested that the Task Group could have identified specific actions that could have been taken to reduce emissions in particular areas. However, it was noted that action was scheduled to take place and additional funding would be made available by bodies such as the Birmingham and Solihull Local Transport Body (LTB) which could be invested in infrastructure enhancements where appropriate.

The following points were also highlighted for Members' consideration:

- A significant source of air pollution, including emissions of pollutants that could be harmful to human health, were HGVs.
- Public awareness of air pollution and the potentially harmful impact on people's health had increased since the previous review of this subject in 2007.
- Responsibility for addressing air pollution in the county was divided between WCC and WRS. Closer working, or clearer responsibility arrangements, was considered necessary by the Task Group to ensure that progress could be made in tackling air pollution in the district.
- The review had been briefly discussed at a recent meeting of the Worcestershire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC) and the Chairman had expressed an interest in viewing a copy of the group's report.

**RESOLVED** that the Air Quality Task Group's report and recommendations be submitted for Cabinet approval.

#### 28/13 **ARTRIX OUTREACH WORK TASK GROUP REPORT**

Members discussed the proposed terms of reference for the Artrix Outreach Provision Task Group that had been submitted for the Board's consideration. The review would take a maximum of 6 months and was due to start in October 2013.

A total of 10 Members had expressed an interest in participating in the review. This compared to a maximum of 7 Members as recommended in the Overview and Scrutiny Board Inquiry/Task Group Guidelines. The Board noted that each Member of a Task Group would receive an allowance when participating in the review. In order to minimise the financial costs involved in completing this exercise Members agreed that Councillors B. T. Cooper and R. J. Shannon should step down from the review.

**RESOLVED:**

- (a) that the proposed terms of reference for the Artrix Outreach Work Task Group be approved;
- (b) that the review commence its investigation as soon as possible;
- (c) that the review be completed within 6 months from the date of the first meeting; and
- (d) that subject to the withdrawal of Councillors B.T. Cooper and R. J. Shannon, as detailed in the preamble above, all of the Members who have expressed an interest in the review be appointed to the Task Group.

**29/13 WRS JOINT SCRUTINY EXERCISE**

Officers confirmed that the first meeting of the WRS Joint Scrutiny Task Group was scheduled to take place on Thursday 26th September 2013 at Bromsgrove Council House and would start at 6.30pm.

**30/13 WORCESTERSHIRE HEALTH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD**

Councillor B. T. Cooper, the Council's representative on the HOSC, provided an update on the latest work of the Committee.

Members were advised that an update had been scheduled to be provided on the position of the Acute Services Review at the meeting of the Committee in September. However, this item had been withdrawn from the agenda immediately prior to the meeting and no updates had been made available.

The Committee had discussed services available to patients who had suffered a stroke since the inception of the new acute stroke services. Whilst a number of patients had travelled to Worcestershire Royal Hospital for treatment a significant number had also travelled to Birmingham for treatment, particularly residents living in the north of the county. The report had not contained any information about the outcomes of the centralisation of services, though it was anticipated that further information would be made available at a later date.

**31/13 CABINET WORK PROGRAMME 1ST OCTOBER TO 31ST JANUARY 2014**

The Board considered the latest edition of the Cabinet Work Programme. The following points were raised during the discussions:

- A report on the subject of the Homelessness Grants Schemes, scheduled for consideration by the Cabinet on 4th December 2013, was noted as being of potential interest to the Board following previous scrutiny of the matter.
- The Dodford-Inn application to be included on the Assets of Community Value Register had been resubmitted for consideration of the Cabinet as there had not previously been sufficient information available to enable Members to make a decision.



- WCC had advertised Catshill Library for sale. Catshill and North Marlbrook Parish Council had previously applied for the Library to be registered as an asset of community value. As such the Parish Council was entitled to a specific amount of time to gather funding to purchase the property.
- The Playing Pitch Strategy was considered to be a timely subject to review.

**RESOLVED:**

- (a) That Officers be invited to present a summary of the Playing Pitch Strategy to the meeting to be held on 14<sup>th</sup> October 2013; and
- (b) the Cabinet Work Programme be noted.

32/13 **ACTION LIST**

The Board was advised that there were a small number of outstanding actions that remained to be implemented. A number of actions had been requested from the Financial Services team and these were in the process of being addressed through various update reports to the Board. A further request for action relating to the work of the Youth Provision Task Group had not yet been addressed by Democratic Services, though would be shortly.

33/13 **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD WORK PROGRAMME**

The Chairman explained that the Board's Work Programme remained limited, apart from standing items. As the following meeting of the Board in October 2013 had a relatively small agenda it was suggested that Members should use this as an opportunity to "brainstorm" ideas for the Board's Work Programme during the year.

**RESOLVED** that, subject to the amendment detailed in the preamble above, the Board's Work Programme be noted.

The meeting closed at 8.35 p.m.

Chairman

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## Bromsgrove Town Centre Regeneration Programme Update

Overview & Scrutiny Board  
16 September 2013

### The Bromsgrove Town Centre Regeneration Programme

is run on behalf of a partnership of  
BDC / WCC / Fire / Police / PCT

to carry out the physical regeneration  
of Bromsgrove Town Centre

in tandem and facilitated by a review  
and rationalisation of Bromsgrove's  
Public Property Assets

## Strategic Framework

The Programme has multiple projects which  
contribute to strategic aims agreed by the partnership  
and defined by the Area Action Plan:

- **Four key strategic aims**
  - A revitalised and attractive town centre
  - A thriving and diverse economy
  - New multi-agency public service facilities
  - An improved Transport Infrastructure
- **Area Action Plan – Planning Policy Framework**
  - now forming part of the District Plan

### A revitalised and attractive town centre

- **Public Realm Upgrade**
- **Current WCC Highways / Works Programme**
  - Utility works complete
  - High Street South / New Road / Strand approaches complete
  - Final stages of WCC technical approval process
  - Load bearing tests 5 – 9 September
  - War memorial / Crown Close improvements complete
  - ASDA public realm works start 16 September
  - Cleggs Entry works start 18 September
  - High Street Lighting start September
  - High Street Drainage follow street lighting
  - Worcester Road resurfacing targeted for October/November
  - High Street resurfacing after Christmas shopping / January Sales

### A revitalised and attractive town centre

- **Townscape Heritage Initiative**
  - Applications being received against £1.2million Heritage Lottery Fund award
  - Several Worcester Road and High Street buildings coming forward for Shop front improvements, repairs and conversion of upper floors to residential or office use
  - Successful Community Archaeological Dig
  - Successful Living History Project
- **Other Projects**
  - New Christmas Lights
  - School Drive complete
  - Recreation Ground under negotiation with developers

### A thriving and diverse economy

- **Sainsbury**
  - work started on relocation of petrol station to new site on Birmingham Road
- **Recreation Road**
  - developer preparing planning application on continuing care retirement community
- **Windsor Street**
  - awaiting outcome of Parkside planning application
- **Hanover Street Car Park / George House**
  - continuing negotiations with preferred bidder

#### New multi-agency public service facilities

- New Police Fire & Ambulance Station
  - on schedule to open within 6 months.
- Library, Hub and WCC/BDC Offices
  - planning application submitted for Parkside.
- Leisure Centre
  - detailed technical review of options in progress
- New Health Centre
  - open

#### An improved Transport Infrastructure

- Bromsgrove 'Minor' Works Package within LTP3
  - Parkside Junction Improvements to be funded by Sainsbury
  - Traffic and Parking Management Study completed
  - Infrastructure Development Plan under development
- New Railway Station
  - scheduled to be open 2015
- Bus Station upgrade
  - complete
- Pavement resurfacing
  - Improved walkways in and around Town Centre
- New and improved cycle routes
  - Audit to be carried out

### Bromsgrove Town Centre Regeneration Programme Update

Overview & Scrutiny Board  
16 September 2013