

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MEETING OF THE SCRUTINY STEERING BOARD

TUESDAY, 29TH APRIL 2008 AT 6.00 P.M.

PRESENT: Councillors P. M. McDonald (Chairman), J. T. Duddy (Vice-Chairman), Mrs. M. Bunker, B. Lewis F.CMI (during Minute Nos. 107/07 to 113/07), D. L. Pardoe and C. B. Taylor

Observers: Councillor Dr. D. W. P. Booth JP and Councillor P. J. Whittaker

Officers: Mr. K. Dicks, Mr. T. Beirne, Mr. P. Street, Mrs. C. Felton, Ms. D. Poole, Mr. M. Hanwell, Mrs. S. Sellers and Ms. D. McCarthy

107/07 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

An apology for absence was received from Councillor R. J. Deeming.

108/07 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

No declarations of interest or whipping arrangements were made.

109/07 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting of the Scrutiny Steering Board held on 1st April 2008 were submitted.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting be approved as a correct record.

110/07 **SCRUTINY PROPOSALS**

(As Mr. Bateman, a representative from the Older People's Forum, was present specifically to hear the outcome of agenda item number 8, Scrutiny Proposals, it was agreed that this would be considered as the first main item.)

Members of the Scrutiny Steering Board discussed two scrutiny requests. The first scrutiny request had been submitted by Mr. Bateman which related to the removal of the concessionary parking passes for the over 60's.

The Board welcomed public interest in scrutiny, however, there was some concern as to whether or not sufficient reliable data was available to carry out an in-depth scrutiny at the present time. It was, therefore, suggested by the Vice-Chairman that as the decision to remove concessionary parking passes for the over 60's had only been implemented in March 2008, the Board could wait until there was 6 months worth of data and request that an officer report be submitted to the Board for further consideration when the necessary

evidence was available to scrutinise. There was also a concern that this did not link to the Council's priorities.

However, an alternative view was that a Task Group needed to be established straight away and this was discussed at length. Members were also reminded at this point that the topic "Older People" was already on the work programme which might include car parking as part of its scrutiny investigation. It was also stated that an alternative option was for the Board itself to scrutinise the subject matter rather than a Task Group carrying out an in-depth scrutiny.

The second scrutiny request was from the Chairman of the Board, which had originally been a motion for the Council Meeting on 23rd April 2008 but had been referred to the Board by the Monitoring Officer in accordance with the Council's Constitution. The second scrutiny request related to establishing a Senior Citizens' Task Group to review the quality of service to older people given by Bromsgrove District Council. It was pointed out that this topic was virtually identical to the subject "Older People" which was already on the work programme. Councillor Mrs. Bunker stated that Focus Groups were to be established, one rural and one urban, to find out what older people themselves believed should be scrutinised.

RESOLVED:

- (a) that a Car Parking Task Group be established to look at the removal of the concessionary parking passes for the over 60's and specifically the justifications for the decision, as stated in Mr. Bateman's scrutiny request; and
- (b) that the second scrutiny request, relating to establishing a Senior Citizens Task Group, be deferred until the next meeting of the Scrutiny Steering Board.

111/07 **CABINET RESPONSE TO THE REFUSE AND RECYCLING SCRUTINY REPORT**

Consideration was given to the Cabinet's Response to the Refuse and Recycling Scrutiny Report which included extra suggestions made by the Cabinet regarding additional work in relation to value for money of the service, together with more general suggestions relating to future scrutiny reports.

It was noted that the Portfolio Holder for Street Scene and Recycling, Councillor Mrs. Sherrey, was not in attendance to present the response and in particular, answer questions to clarify what the Cabinet was suggesting in relation to future scrutiny reports.

Members of the Scrutiny Steering Board were satisfied with the Cabinet's Response to the Refuse and Recycling Scrutiny Report and understood the Cabinet's proposal for the Scrutiny Steering Board to request the Task Group to undertake further work to include a value for money analysis of the service. However, there was a concern by the Board that Member Training on Value for Money was required before this particular scrutiny investigation took place to ensure a thorough scrutiny. It was stated that, following the suggestion at a previous Scrutiny Steering Board Meeting for Value for Money training to be

provided, it had since been agreed by the Modern Councillor Steering Group that it would be incorporated within the Member Training Programme to be held during the first quarter of 2008/09.

There was also a concern over the Refuse and Recycling Task Group's terms of reference for the additional work and it was suggested by officers that detailed terms of reference with specific outcomes should be compiled to prevent any confusion on what was expected. It was further suggested that this could be compiled by the Task Group itself for the Board to consider and agree at a later date.

The final point discussed in relation to the additional scrutiny work for the Refuse and Recycling Task Group was that sufficient time would need to be given to enable the scrutiny work to be completed.

In relation to the general recommendations, the Board believed that ensuring scrutiny recommendations were prioritised as being low, medium or high in future scrutiny reports to indicate to officers the order in which any approved recommendations should be implemented was a good suggestion. However, there was some confusion in relation to the final two suggestions in the report which the Board felt clarification from the relevant Portfolio Holder would have been helpful.

There was a lengthy discussion in relation to the final suggestion which asked the Board to consider opportunity costs when agreeing recommendations. The majority of the Board believed that all recommendations would have an opportunity cost and although it was understood that officer time would be required to implement approved recommendations, it was felt that the financial implications stated in Scrutiny Report referred to direct costs which affected the budget.

RESOLVED:

- (a) that the response from the Cabinet relating to the Refuse and Recycling Scrutiny Report be noted;
- (b) that the Refuse and Recycling Task Group be given approximately 10 weeks to complete its work from the date of its first meeting;
- (c) that suggestions on the way forward for this Task Group, including the preparation of specific terms of reference and the need for Value for Money training, be discussed and agreed at the next meeting of the Board;
- (d) that, in future, the scrutiny recommendations contained within scrutiny reports be prioritised as being low, medium or high priority so to indicate to the Cabinet and officers the order in which the recommendations (if approved) would need to be implemented;
- (e) that the third suggestion (listed as 18 in the Cabinet Response) relating to (i) making clear which scrutiny recommendations involved officer actions which were already being undertaken and the Task Group would like to see continued; and (ii) issues which were considered by the Task Group but which did not form part of the final recommendations be made clear in a separate section of the report, should not be implemented; and

- (f) that the fourth suggestion (listed as 19 in the Cabinet Response) relating to taking account of opportunity costs (e.g. officer time) of certain recommendations within future scrutiny reports should not be implemented due to the reasons discussed by the Board.

112/07 **MOBILE HOME LICENSING**

At the previous meeting of the Scrutiny Steering Board, Members had requested a report on why a decision on Mobile Home Licensing (which had been included on the Forward Plan) had been delayed. The Board had also felt it was necessary to invite the relevant Portfolio Holder and therefore, Councillor Whittaker was present for this item.

Consideration was given to the report which outlined the background and the reasons for the delay. It was explained that the delay was due to: (a) recruitment difficulties within the department which meant the necessary site inspections could not be carried out; and (b) the revised Model Standard Conditions for Mobile Homes which had only been issued in April 2008.

The Board was informed that it was anticipated that all mobile home sites would be inspected by the summer 2008 and the revised model standards were in the process of being analysed. Questions, particularly in relation to recruitment issues, were answered by both Councillor Whittaker and Mr. Street, (Executive Director - Partnerships and Projects).

The Board raised a particular concern as to whether residents would be made homeless if a landlord, who wished to have residents removed from a site, decided not to conform to the standard conditions and instead face enforcement. It was believed that it was likely there would be an appeal process for residents but Mr. Street stated he would investigate what the consequences would be and inform the Board at a later date. There was also a discussion on planning permission, fees and contractual arrangements.

RESOLVED:

- (a) that the report be noted; and
- (b) that the Executive Director - Partnerships and Projects inform the Members of the Board what the consequences would be if enforcement action was taken against a landlord who did not conform to the standard conditions because it was their wish to have residents removed from a site.

113/07 **ICT SPATIAL PROJECT**

As agreed at the previous meeting of the Scrutiny Steering Board, a presentation on the Spatial Project was given by Ms. Poole (Head of E-Government and Customer Services) and Mr. Hanwell (Spatial Project Manager) and was introduced by the relevant Portfolio Holder, Councillor Booth.

An information pack which had been made available to Members was a referred to during the presentation.

There was a lengthy discussion on this item and several questions were asked during and after the presentation. Questions posed related to: the decision taken to change suppliers (due to the poor performance of the original suppliers); the monitoring of the project by Members (specifically the Performance Management Board); the total cost of the project; and the savings to be made. It was felt by Members of the Board that the presentation had not covered Value for Money as requested.

Although it was understood that the cost for Phase 2 (FM2) of the Spatial Project was already included within the Capital Programme, due to the significant amount, it was questioned whether the decision to approve the second phase should be considered by the full Council.

RESOLVED that the presentation be noted.

RECOMMENDED that the decision to approve Phase 2 (FM2) of the Spatial Project costing approximately £2M be taken by the full Council rather than the Cabinet.

114/07 **NEW SCRUTINY TASK GROUP**

Consideration was given to the membership and terms of reference of the combined Anti-Social Behaviour and Alcohol Free Zones Task Group.

It was explained within the report that from the nine Members who had expressed an interest to serve on the newly amalgamated Task Group, three Members had indicated they would be equally happy to withdraw their membership form to allow others to remain on the Task Group.

A discussion ensued relating to the Task Group membership, particularly in relation to one Member, Councillor S. Shannon. There was a concern raised that this particular Member did not view the scrutiny process in a positive light and therefore it was questioned by the appointed Task Group Chairman whether or not he should serve on the Scrutiny Task Group. The Chairman of the Scrutiny Steering Board disagreed with this view and informed the Board that no other Labour Group Members would attend any meetings of this Task Group.

The scrutiny exercise scoping checklist which included the terms of reference was also discussed. It was confirmed that the witnesses suggested on the scoping checklist to give evidence was not an exhaustive list and the Task Group could add to it during the scrutiny exercise.

RESOLVED:

- (a) that the Anti-Social Behaviour and Alcohol Free Zones Task Group comprise of the following seven Members: Councillors K. Taylor (Chairman), Mrs. M. Bunker, Mrs. H. Jones, Mrs. C. McDonald, P. McDonald, Mrs. C. J. Spencer and C. J. Tidmarsh (with the understanding that Councillors Mrs. C. McDonald and P. McDonald would not attend any meetings of the Task Group);

- (b) that the Scrutiny Exercise Scoping Checklist which includes the terms of reference be agreed; and
- (c) that the Task Group be given 4 months to complete its scrutiny investigation.

115/07 **JOINT COUNTYWIDE SCRUTINY ON FLOODING**

A verbal update on the progress of the Joint Countywide Scrutiny on Flooding was given by the Chairman. Members were informed that meetings had taken place on 7th and 28th April 2008 and at the last meeting representatives from the County Landowners Association and National Farmers' Union (NFU) had been in attendance.

RESOLVED that the verbal update from the Chairman of the Scrutiny Steering Board be noted.

116/07 **RECOMMENDATION TRACKER**

The Board considered the recommendation tracker report which listed all Cabinet approved Scrutiny recommendations and the actions taken to implement them.

RESOLVED that the recommendation tracker be noted.

117/07 **CABINET'S FORWARD PLAN**

Consideration was given to the Cabinet's Forward Plan which contained the key decisions scheduled to be made over the next few months.

RESOLVED that the Cabinet's Forward Plan be noted.

118/07 **WORK PROGRAMME**

Members considered the work programme for the Scrutiny Steering Board which included details of a recent scrutiny review meeting.

There was a discussion on whether or not further scrutiny relating to the ICT Spatial Project was required.

RESOLVED

- (a) that no further scrutiny be undertaken in relation to the ICT Spatial Project and therefore be removed from the work programme; and
- (b) that the work programme be noted and updated, as appropriate, to reflect decisions made at this meeting, including (a) above.

The meeting closed at 8.15 p.m.

Chairman