

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

13TH OCTOBER 2014 AT 6.00 P.M.

PRESENT: Councillors H. J. Jones (Vice-Chairman, in the Chair), C. J. Bloore (from Minute No. 57/14), J. S. Brogan, R. A. Clarke, S. R. Colella, B. T. Cooper, R. J. Laight, P. Lammas, R. J. Shannon and C. J. Tidmarsh

Invitees: Councillors D. W. P. Booth, R. L. Dent and M. A. Sherrey.

Officers: Mr. K. Dicks, Ms. S. Morgan, Ms. A. Scarce and Ms. J. Bayley

54/14 **APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors L. C. R. Mallett, S. P. Shannon and C. J. Spencer.

55/14 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND WHIPPING ARRANGEMENTS**

There were no declarations of interest or whipping arrangements.

56/14 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Board held on 15th September 2014 were submitted.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 15th September be approved as a correct record.

57/14 **TOWN CENTRE**

The Chairman welcomed the Leader of the Council, Councillor M. A. Sherrey, and the Portfolio Holder for the Town Centre and Regulatory Services, Councillor R. L. Dent, to the meeting together with Councillor D. W. P. Booth, as the former Portfolio Holder with responsibility for the town centre. Following the delivery of a detailed presentation by Officers on the subject of the town centre redevelopment process at the previous meeting of the Board the Chairman explained that Members were now invited to consider the contents of the relevant minute from the meeting of the Board on 25th September, which were tabled at the meeting, and to ask the Portfolio Holders a series of questions.

The following points were discussed during the course of a question and answer session:

- After receiving formal notice from Opus that the company would no longer be able to proceed with the scheme Officers had been working through the alternative options for the redevelopment.
- The Council needed to review the options available in the context of the current market.
- Officers had been working with the town centre redevelopment team, the legal team and marketing experts to identify the options for the site. A meeting was due to take place in November to discuss the outcomes of this work.
- The withdrawal of Opus would not place the redevelopment back at the initial stage of the process as the investigative works, particularly in relation to the geography of the site, would be transferable to any scheme.
- Officers were aware that there also remained considerable interest in the site.
- The former Leader of the Council, the Deputy Leader and the previous Portfolio Holder responsible for the town centre had been involved in the original negotiations for the site and it was anticipated that this would happen again for the current negotiations.
- Officers would need to report back to Cabinet in due course as the original decision that had been made by Members on the subject related to the development of the scheme by Opus. A special meeting of Cabinet would be called, if necessary, to ensure there were no unnecessary delays.
- Until all of the options had been properly investigated Officers were unable to provide more details for the consideration of the Board as this could potentially undermine the Council's negotiating position.
- Briefings would be provided to the group leaders in the forthcoming weeks to ensure that Members were as fully briefed as possible on progress with this matter.
- Members discussed the potential to enter into confidential session in order to discuss a number of key issues in further detail but took the decision for the meeting to remain open to the public.
- The Chief Executive and the Leader of the Council had been notified on the same day of the decision by Opus to withdraw from the scheme.
- The strategic plans for the redevelopment remained on track. This phase of the redevelopment process would form one part of a 15 year plan to redevelop the town.
- There was continuing commitment to retaining a cinema in the redevelopment of the town centre if at all possible.
- The deadline for the Recreation Road development was also discussed. Members were advised that the planning application for this development was due to be submitted shortly.
- The development of the Sainsbury's site was also considered. Members were advised that the supermarket remained committed to the town in the medium-term.

RESOLVED that the content of the discussion be noted.

OVERVIEW OF BUDGET REPORT

The Financial Services Manager presented a report which provided an initial overview of the projected budget for the Council from 2015/16 – 2017/18. During the course of the presentation the following matters were highlighted for Members' consideration:

- The report was designed to form part of a new robust approach to budget scrutiny at the Council.
- Officers were estimating that there would be a shortfall of £613,000 in 2015/16 and a shortfall of £884,000 in 2016/17.
- The Council would continue to identify savings within a framework of three financial principles: reducing waste in the system, designing a new system to reduce waste and costs, and reducing the costs associated with enabling service provision.
- Budgets had been listed in the report in relation to the Council's strategic purposes. Some services had been listed in more than one appendix because the service had links to multiple strategic purposes rather than as a result of double counting.

Following the presentation of the report Members discussed a number of areas in further detail:

- Officers had accounted for both the predicted 1% pay increase as well as for pay increments. The bandings for pay increments were set in accordance with national pay levels.
- The Board had an important role to play in scrutinising the Council's budget for the year ahead.
- The anticipated amount that the Council would derive from the New Homes Bonus was discussed. Members commented that there was no guarantee that this bonus would continue to be provided in future years and it was therefore suggested that the Council needed to recognise the risks involved when calculating the potential contribution of the bonus to the overall budget.
- Officers confirmed that they had recognised the risks involved and had been cautious when calculating the likely figure for the New Homes Bonus.
- The level of Council reserves and how these funds should be used was considered.
- Members were advised that the 3% increase in fees and charges was applied generally to services in line with inflation levels and market forces.
- Some fees and charges were set at a statutory level. In addition it was considered prudent to vary the charges for other services by a different amount, depending on the demand for that service and the needs of the customer.
- The number of staff who were employed directly by Bromsgrove District Council rather than through a shared service was discussed and Officers agreed to provide Members with further detail on this outside of the meeting.

- There was a deficit in the Council's pension fund for staff who had already retired and were drawing their pensions, which was comparable to the situation at other local authorities.
- The Council had agreed with the actuary to reduce the pension fund deficit over 21 years, a practice which was similarly being applied at a number of local authorities in the country.
- Officers were in the process of reviewing Section 106 agreements and the use of Section 106 monies. Members requested that the list of agreements be circulated for their consideration.

The Overview and Scrutiny Board had a role to play in reviewing the strategic direction of the budget and was responsible for holding the Cabinet to account for decisions made in respect of the budget. Officers suggested that the Board could also make a useful contribution to the Council's budget setting process by reviewing particular elements of it in more detail.

Members commented that for future budget updates it would be useful to receive further information clarifying which services were statutory and which were discretionary alongside the expenditure for each type of service. This would enable the Board to identify whether there were any opportunities to reduce expenditure.

Following recent debates Members concurred that it would also be useful for more information about the town centre redevelopment and off street parking costs to be provided for Members' consideration.

Finally, the Board agreed that they would appreciate further information about which services the Council delivered on behalf of Worcestershire County Council as part of the budget scrutiny process. Members requested that any updates on this subject should detail the extent to which Worcestershire County Council covered the costs of delivering those services.

RESOLVED that further information about the following matters be provided to support the budget scrutiny process:

- (a) the costs of the town centre redevelopment
- (b) off street parking costs
- (c) the costs of services delivered on behalf of Worcestershire County Council; and
- (d) a clear outline of which services were statutory and which were discretionary services and the Council's expenditure on both types of service.

59/14

QUARTERLY RECOMMENDATION TRACKER

Members considered the content of the quarterly recommendation tracker report which detailed the progress that had been made with the implementation of scrutiny recommendations.

Officers advised that the Chairman of the former Artrix Outreach Task Group, Councillor S. P. Shannon, and relevant Officers had met with the new Director

of Artrix. This had been a constructive meeting as the Director had been receptive to and appeared to be willing to implement many of the group's proposals.

Members expressed concerns that the Board had not received enough information about the implementation of recommendations made by the Planning Policy Task Group in September 2012. For this reason Members commented that it would not be appropriate to remove the item from the report. Further information was therefore requested from Officers regarding the action that had been taken in response to the group's proposals.

The Board had not yet requested an update from Worcestershire Regulatory Services in respect of the progress that had been made in issuing regular reminders to taxi drivers at taxi ranks about leaving their car engines running whilst waiting for their next customer. Officers suggested that this could be considered for inclusion in the Board's Work Programme when the tracker was next presented for the consideration of Members.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

60/14

ACTION LIST

The Board considered the latest version of the Overview and Scrutiny Action List.

In respect of the further information that had been requested by the Board on 15th September in respect of the transformation of Development Control, Members noted that a list of contact details for all Planning Case Officers had been circulated by email. However, further details about the removal of overtime payments and the car allowance scheme remained outstanding.

Information had also not yet been provided to clarify whether the Environmental Services team had access to appropriate equipment to clean the High Street, as requested at the previous meeting of the Board on 25th September.

Members discussed how long non-executive Councillors should reasonably expect to wait for information requested following an Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting. Officers confirmed that a response should ideally be provided within a week.

RESOLVED that the Action List be noted.

61/14

WCC HEALTH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Councillor B. T. Cooper, Bromsgrove District Council's representative on the Worcestershire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC), provided an update on the latest meeting of the Committee.

Members were advised that during the meeting, on 8th October, the Committee had received an update on the Community Service Development

programme. The Worcestershire Health and Care Trust had reviewed community health services and concluded that the centralisation of services was required in order to respond to the needs of local people. This conclusion had been mainly reached as a result of considering information about local demographics. However, services would continue to be made available to people in their own homes in cases where they were likely to struggle to access services at a central location.

The Committee had also considered further information about Personal Health Budgets, which were provided to patients with long-term health conditions and disabilities. Patients with Personal Health Budgets could choose which services they wanted to access in order to meet their needs. The scheme had originally been piloted but was due to be extended to all eligible patients.

There had been a discussion of Redditch and Bromsgrove Clinical Commissioning Group's response to the Acute Hospital Services Review, which was currently the subject of a consultation process. It had been reported during the meeting that there were some concerns that changes would be made to service provision locally during the course of the consultation. For this reason a working Committee had been established to assess action at the local level and to ensure that changes were not made to services during the consultation period.

Incontinence pads had been raised by Councillor Cooper as requested by the Board. There had been concerns during the summer that there were plans for patients to be charged for incontinence pads. However, no decision appeared to have been made as to whether to charge for incontinence pads and therefore it no further action appeared to be required.

Councillor Copper also clarified the role of HOSC. Members were advised that HOSC was one of Worcestershire County Council's scrutiny Committees. In the early 2000s the Government had required local authorities (the county Council in a two-tier authority area) to establish a HOSC in order to scrutinise changes to the local health environment and the potential impact of any proposed changes in the local community. The Worcestershire HOSC also was responsible for ensuring that any significant changes to services were subject to public consultation. In extreme circumstances where HOSC had major reservations about a particular issue they could refer the matter to the Secretary of State for Health. The HOSC had no direct working relationship with NHS England, though the role of HOSCs was due to change in response to the changing health environment.

62/14

CABINET WORK PROGRAMME

Members considered the content of the Cabinet Work Programme for the period 1st October 2014 to 28th February 2015.

Officers confirmed that the Board was scheduled to receive the Fees and Charges review at their following meeting. The Board would also be provided with a summary of the Finance Monitoring Report Quarter 2, though it was

unlikely that Members would be considering the same level of detail that would subsequently be reported to the Cabinet.

The appropriate timing of meetings of the Board was briefly debated. Members commented that in previous years there had been a discussion of the impact of the timing of the meetings on the potential for the Board to make a constructive contribution to policy development work through pre-decision scrutiny. Officers confirmed that the timing of the meeting of the Board was being considered and there was the possibility that meetings would take place the week prior to Cabinet in future in order to enable the Board to pre-scrutinise reports and policies more effectively.

63/14

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD WORK PROGRAMME

Members considered the latest edition of the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme.

Officers explained that an additional report would be presented for Members' consideration in November which had not been recorded on the Work Programme in time for publication. This report would outline the response of the Worcestershire Shared Services Joint Committee to the recommendations that had been made by the Joint Worcestershire Regulatory Services Scrutiny Task Group.

The Recreation Road South Car Park Task Group had been reconvened to undertake a Short, Sharp Review of car parking arrangements in the town as agreed at the previous meeting of the Board. Unfortunately only 2 original members of the group had responded to confirm that they would be interested in participating in the exercise. The Board agreed that other Members should be offered an opportunity to participate in the review if the original members of the Task Group were not available to do so.

Councillor C. J. Bloore apologised for not responding to Officers on this subject and explained that this had partly been due to problems accessing his email account using his Council Ipad. Officers urged Members to contact Democratic Services if they experienced any problems accessing their emails on their Ipads so that any such problems could be resolved as quickly as possible.

Councillor R. J. Shannon commented that he had received correspondence from a local constituent about the future of the farmers' markets in Bromsgrove town centre. Due to the potential relevance of this subject to the ongoing redevelopment of the town centre, which would be the subject of further budget scrutiny, he requested further information from Officers clarifying whether the farmers' market had permanently relocated to Webbs of Wychbold.

RESOLVED that membership of the reconvened Recreation Road South Car Park Task Group be extended to Members who were not involved in the previous review if the original membership is not all available.

Overview and Scrutiny Board
13th October 2014

The meeting closed at 7.16 p.m.

Chairman