

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

16TH FEBRUARY 2015 AT 6.00 P.M.

PRESENT: Councillors L. C. R. Mallett (Chairman), R. J. Laight (Vice-Chairman), C. J. Bloore, J. S. Brogan, R. A. Clarke, S. R. Colella, S. J. Dudley, P. Lammas, R. J. Shannon, S. P. Shannon and C. J. Tidmarsh

Invitees: Councillor D. Booth

Officers: Ms. J. Pickering, Ms. D. Poole, Mr D Riley, Ms L Wood, Ms. J. Bayley and Ms. A. Scarce

111/14 **APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received on behalf of Councillors B. T. Cooper, C. R. Scurrall and C. J. Spencer. Councillor S. J. Dudley confirmed that he was attending as a substitute for Councillor Cooper.

112/14 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND WHIPPING ARRANGEMENTS**

There were no declarations of interest nor of any whipping arrangements.

113/14 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board held on Wednesday 21st January 2015 were submitted.

Members questioned whether a timetable had been set for the roll out of Universal Credit and other welfare reforms in Bromsgrove district. Officers confirmed that this was due to take place in autumn 2015, though the Council had not yet been notified of a specific date.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Board held on 21st January 2015 be approved as a correct record.

114/14 **ACTION LIST**

Officers explained that the majority of the actions detailed on the actions list had been resolved prior to the meeting. The only outstanding action concerned the Artrix and Officers were able to confirm that the venue took responsibility for maintaining the building.

115/14 **STAFF SURVEY**

The Acting Human Resources and Organisational Development Manager delivered a presentation on the subject of the staff survey. During the delivery of the presentation she raised the following points for Members' consideration:

- The survey, which was circulated in August 2013, had been completed by 40 per cent of staff.
- There had been delays in analysing the data due to the complexity and volume of the feedback.
- Responses had been treated as confidential and every effort had been made to ensure that individual respondents could not be identified.
- There had been a low response rate from Bromsgrove depot, which would be addressed in any future surveys.
- A Working Group, comprising senior Officers, had been established to consider the feedback provided in the surveys.
- Sub-Groups had also been established to consider four key themes, chaired by members of the Working Group.
- The four key themes identified from analysis of the feedback were; management and the need for managers to manage staff in a different way in a changing environment, the need for more effective internal communications, the importance of an appropriate working environment that enabled staff to be a healthy workforce, and failures in ICT support and the impact of IT improvements on wider service delivery.
- Action had been taken in a variety of areas to address the concerns raised by staff.
- The first event relating to the Council's Time to Change pledge would take place at Bromsgrove Council House on 5th March 2015.
- The Council was participating in the Worcestershire Works Well accreditation process.
- A new performance management framework was being piloted in the business transformation team.
- A new induction process, which would include face-to-face support, mentoring and podcasting, was due to be introduced.
- A generic skills matrix was being launched focusing on 25 skills all staff required in addition to any technical and specialist abilities.
- Additional support for staff was being made available in Bromsgrove and the Phone a Friend service was due to be re-launched with new volunteers.
- Monthly updates were being delivered through Oracle newsletters.
- A staff choir had been launched due to identified links between singing and wellbeing.
- In total 11% of respondents had reported that they had experienced some form of bullying from either the public or other officers in the workplace. The Council's Bullying Policy had been promoted in an attempt to address this problem.
- The information available to staff in respect of corporate priorities, performance measures and strategic purposes had been updated and various ICT policies would be rewritten to ensure they were user friendly for staff.

- The new survey would be launched outside the school holiday period in order to maximise the number of responses.
- Officers were intending to use the same questions in the survey to ensure that the feedback could be compared to the data from the 2013 survey.

Following the delivery of the presentation Members discussed a number of points in further detail:

- The need for first aider and fire warden training to be delivered as part of the corporate training programme.
- The current content of the Bullying Policy and the extent to which changes needed to be made to the policy in order to secure a reduction in bullying.
- The type of issues that were considered bullying by staff.
- The training delivered in wellbeing sessions, covering healthy eating, physical exercise, breaks from work and health checks.
- The potential for exit interviews to take place in order for the Council to have an understanding why staff left. (Members were informed that these would be introduced across the organisation and the fact that these could only be undertaken on a voluntary basis.)
- The arrangements for the new Performance Development Review (PDR) framework which would look forward towards achieving objectives rather than backwards at past behaviour.
- Some concerns were expressed about the limited number of PDRs that staff had undertaken in recent years and the impact that this could have on both staff morale and performance.
- The provision of regular one-to-one meetings for staff and the fact that these varied in content and timescales.
- The payment of staff by increments rather than in accordance with an assessment of service performance.
- The number of times members of the Corporate Management Team had attended team meetings and the breakdown of attendances at these meetings.
- The number of new members of staff who would be employed by the Council in the following year.
- The potential value of a podcast in the corporate induction process and the benefits of face-to-face contact when welcoming new staff to the organisation.
- The content of the Oracle newsletters and the potential for these newsletters to be sent to Members alongside the monthly newsletter for Councillors.
- The operation of staff from Redditch Town Hall and the extent to which the working environment in the building was appropriate for shared services.
- The work that had been delivered in accordance with the Council's Equalities Plan.
- The reasons why the review of key behaviours in a customer driven organisation had been superseded. Officers explained that this had occurred as part of the on-going work to transform the organisation.

Members also suggested the following amendments to the survey:

- An additional question on the subject of health and wellbeing concerning the option to work from alternative locations to the standard Office workspace.
- The potential for “paternity” to be added as an additional option as a reason why a member of staff may have been subject to bullying or harassment.
- The potential for the option “lack of belief” to be rephrased as “no religious belief”.

Following further discussion the Board

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

116/14 **QUARTER 3 WRITE OFF OF DEBTS REPORT**

The Revenue Services Manager presented the Quarter 3 Write Off of Debts report covering the period 1st October to 31st December 2014. Members were advised that a number of amendments had been made to the format of the report in accordance with requests made at previous meetings of the Board. This included provision of case studies and further information about the process that Officers followed to collect the debt.

Following presentation of the report Members preceded to discuss a number of points in further detail:

- The garden waste debts and the fact that invoices for this service were raised once a year.
- The potential to provide benchmarking figures for similar local authorities.
- Access to figures for Redditch Borough Council and the difficulty of using this data for comparative purposes due to differences between the District and Borough.
- Council tax arrears and how these figures were recorded for the existing financial year.
- The positive impact of the amendments to the report on the clarity of information provided.

Following further discussion it was

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

117/14 **MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN 2015/16**

The Executive Director for Finance and Corporate Resources presented the Medium Term Financial Plan 2015/16 to 2017/18. During presentation of this report the following areas were highlighted for Members’ consideration:

- The report had been amended slightly by comparison to the version that had been presented at the Cabinet meeting earlier in the month.
- These amendments took into account the revision that was required to the released from balances in 206/17 and 2017/18. The impact of the Council

Tax freeze on future years had not been built into the Cabinet recommendations and therefore the figures were different by £136k per annum.

- In future years Officers were assuming that the Council would increase Council Tax by 1.9%.
- The Council was one of three local authorities to generate levy to the Business Rates Pool and therefore benefit financially from this.
- £87,000 had been proposed to be allocated to the New Homes Bonus scheme. This represented 25% of Government funding that related specifically to the increase in grant from 2014/15 and Cabinet was recommending that this should be allocated to community schemes.
- Worcestershire County Council had received £500,000 from the Government for welfare reform and social care. The County Council had decided to pass this funding to all the districts in the county, divided according to need reported in previous years. This equated to £53k for Bromsgrove.
- Worcestershire County Council had also agreed to match fund the £30,000 Essential Living Fund (ELF) bid that had been proposed by the District Council.
- Officers were assuming that the Government grant settlement in future years would be reduced by 5%.
- Balances were due to fall from £3.7 million to £1.7 million unless further savings were made during 2016/17 and 2017/18.
- An internal audit review of the budget setting process had been launched to enable Officers to learn lessons that could help to improve the process in future years. The Chairman of the Board confirmed that he had contributed to this (and was positive about the improvements to Scrutiny of the budget this year).

Following presentation of the report Members proceeded to discuss a number of points in further detail:

- The involvement of Planning Officers in monitoring housing growth and the financial implications for the district.
- The potential for ward Councillors to submit capital bids on behalf of local communities if appropriate.
- Funding available to groups such as Two Pennies and NewStarts which provided advice and support to residents struggling to manage their finances.
- The Council's continuing support for the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB).
- The potential impact of the closure of the Redditch branch of the CAB on demand for Bromsgrove services and the need to ensure that grant funding from the Council was not used to subsidise services received by residents outside of the District.
- Financial support available to The Lounge in Alvechurch. The Chairman explained that this support had been provided by the Bromsgrove Local Strategic Partnership.
- The potential impact of further budget savings on the sustainability of Worcestershire Regulatory Services (WRS). Officers expressed

confidence that the savings could be achieved without having a detrimental impact on services.

- Proposals to change the governance structure of WRS, which was due to be considered at the next meeting of the Worcestershire Shared Services Joint Committee, and the beneficial impact that this might have on the sustainability of the partnership.
- The recent securing of contracts by WRS to deliver services on behalf of other organisations.
- The potential for a larger reduction than 5% to the Government grant to occur in future years. By 2019/20 Officers advised that it was possible that local authorities would be expected to be self-funding.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

118/14 **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD WORK PROGRAMME**

Officers advised Members that there would be a heavy agenda at the meeting of the Board on 16th March 2015. For this reason Members agreed not to add any further items for consideration at this meeting. It was also agreed that Councillor B. T. Cooper, the Council's representative on the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC), should be invited to deliver a detailed presentation on the outcomes of the Committee's deliberations in the first four months of the year at the April meeting of the Board.

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

119/14 **CABINET WORK PROGRAMME 1ST MARCH TO 30TH JUNE 2015**

Members considered the content of the Cabinet Work Programme for the period 1st March to 30th June 2015. Officers explained that following publication, the Modifications to the Bromsgrove District Local Plan item, which the Board had previously expressed an interest in scrutinising, had been removed from the Cabinet Work Programme and Members had been notified of the new timetable which would apply to this item.

The meeting closed at 7.55 p.m.

Chairman