



Overview and Scrutiny **Annual Report**

2014 - 2015



Bromsgrove
District Council

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OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT 2014-15

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FOREWORD FROM THE CHAIRMAN

Welcome to Bromsgrove District Council's Overview and Scrutiny Board's Annual Report for 2014/2015.

It is the first time for some years that the position of Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Board has not been held by a member of the controlling group within the Council. It is important that the Scrutiny Board both is, and is seen to be, independent of the Council's Cabinet and Administration and with it able to challenge and be a 'critical friend'.

It has certainly been a busy year for the Overview and Scrutiny Board with three additional meetings needing to be scheduled due to the volume and importance of the areas the Board wished and needed to consider. The past 12 months has seen a range of activity and discussion at the Overview and Scrutiny Board.

With a number of major projects underway at the Council, the Board has worked on specific scrutiny examinations of issues including delays and decisions within the Town Centre regeneration programme, and the replacement of the Dolphin Centre. Additionally a Task Group was completed into Leisure Provision within the District, led by Cllr Caroline Spencer, and a short, sharp review of car parking, led by Cllr Sean Shannon. Regrettably the cross party findings of the latter in respect of parking charges and allowing pay on foot in our car parks were all rejected by the Cabinet.

My thanks go to Cllr Rod Laight for his work representing Bromsgrove Council, supported by Cllr Peter Lammas, on the Worcestershire Regulatory Services Joint Scrutiny Task Group. Many on the Board were struck by the frank reality Cllr Laight's report brought to bear in terms of the impact of funding cuts on the viability of WRS and the risk to communities within Worcestershire as a result.

In relation to the function of the Board in driving improvement in public services, members of the Board have been very minded to the performance of the Development Control function at Bromsgrove Council. The designation of the Planning Authority by the Department of Communities and Local Government mid-way through the year served to increase the Board's focus on the operation of Development Control at Bromsgrove and any backlogs in determining applications.

Other areas of scrutiny have included the Staff Survey and approaches to tackling bullying and to strengthen HR systems at the Council; the decision to invest in iPADS for Councillors and the resulting issues with the roll out; and the proposed structural changes within Environmental Services. As in previous years the Board has scrutinised the North Worcestershire Community Safety Partnership as well as

having received regular and thorough updates from our representative on the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Cllr Brian Cooper.

At the end of the term of our Board we were extremely sorry to learn of the passing of one of our Members, Councillor John Tidmarsh. John had been a long standing Member of the Board and was always ready to make insightful contributions in our meetings. We will all miss him.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of the Members of the Board, and those Democratic Services Officers that have supported our work and enabled the Board to get through such a fulsome work programme this year.

**Councillor Luke Mallett
Chairman**

INTRODUCTION

We are pleased to present the Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report which outlines our work during 2014-15 and provides general information on the overview and scrutiny processes at Bromsgrove District Council.

Overview and Scrutiny is a key part of the democratic decision making process in local councils, where elected councillors outside of the Cabinet can contribute to shaping council policy, community well being and accountability. This is done by reviewing council services and policies, community issues and key decisions and making recommendations for improvement.

The four key principles of Overview and Scrutiny are:

- Provides a 'critical friend' challenge to executive policy makers and decision-makers.
- Enables the voice and concerns of the public to be heard.
- Is carried out by 'independent minded members' who lead and own the scrutiny role.
- Drives improvement in public services

The Members of the Board consider these principles when selecting topics to investigate whether it is holding the executive to account, reviewing policies, policy development or scrutiny of external bodies.

MEMBERSHIP (The Board is made up of 13 Members)



Cllr. Luke Mallett – Chairman



Cllr. Helen Jones
(Vice Chairman to 20/01/15)



Cllr. Rod Laight
(Vice Chairman wef 21/01/15)



Cllr Chris Bloore



Cllr James Brogan



Cllr. Roy Clarke



Cllr. Steve Colella



Cllr. Brian Cooper



Cllr. Pete Lammas



Cllr. Chris Scurrell (from 21/01/15)



Cllr. Rory Shannon



Cllr. Sean Shannon



Cllr. Caroline Spencer



Cllr. John Tidmarsh
(to 27/03/15)

THE ROLE OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

Overview and Scrutiny is a key part of the Council's political structure and it plays a vital role in improving the services that people of the District use, whether a resident, employed here or just visiting. It does not just look at the way the Council does things, it can look at anything which affects the lives of people within the District and it allows citizens to have a greater say in Council matters.

Overview and Scrutiny allows Councillors to review and scrutinise decisions, look at existing practices and make recommendations to help ensure the residents of Bromsgrove District receive excellent services. The aim is to ensure overview and scrutiny adds value to the Council's decision-making process and makes a positive contribution towards policy development.

The detailed terms of reference and procedure rules for the Overview and Scrutiny Board can be found at Part 3 (Part C) and Part 8 of the Council Constitution. The Council Constitution can be accessed by using the following link.

<http://www.bromsgrove.gov.uk/cms/council-and-democracy/councillors-and-committees/decision-making/council-constitution.aspx>

Number of Meetings

The Overview and Scrutiny Board met on a monthly basis during 2014-15 and there were a total of 13 meetings throughout the year. Ten meetings had been scheduled in to the Calendar of Meetings with an additional 3 meetings been arranged due to workload of the Board and pre scrutiny work on a late item, these were held in August, September and December.

REPORTS RECEIVED AND RECOMMENDATIONS MADE BY THE BOARD

During the course of the year the Board received a number of reports, including the following and made a number of recommendations:

Staff Survey

During discussion of its Work Programme, back in October 2013 the Board had requested a summary of the Staff Survey which had been undertaken. This was received, in the form of a presentation, at its meeting in June 2014. As part of the discussions following the presentation the Board agreed a number of recommendations and suggestions, with the requested that an update be received at a future meeting in order to ensure that the areas highlighted from the survey and subsequent suggestions which had come out of the steering group and theme groups which had been set up following the analysis of the responses received. This update was received at the February 2015 meetings when Members discussed actions which had come from the survey and what progress had been made in putting those actions in place. There were a number of points which Members continued to have concerns about and it was agreed that these would be addressed and a further response prepared by the relevant officers. It was also confirmed that a further survey would be issued in September 2015 and the Board requested to be kept updated following this.

Task Group Guidelines Review

Task Group guidelines were removed from the Constitution during a review in early 2011. The Overview and Scrutiny Board adopted new guidelines which covered both Task Groups and Short Sharp inquiries at its meeting on 1st March 2011. It is good practice to review such guidelines at regular intervals and following discussion it was agreed that a review would take place at the Board's meeting on 14th July 2014 a number of changes were agreed, including the reintroduction of the guidelines to the Constitution. The outcome was that the revised guidelines were referred to the Constitution Working Group for consideration. That Group is currently working on a number of revisions to the Constitution and it is hoped that these guidelines will be included.

Council Tax Support Scheme

This report was considered at an extra meeting which had been arranged following Full Council referred this back to Cabinet and following discussions with the Leader, it had been agreed that the Board would be given the opportunity to pre-scrutinise

the scheme, allowing any recommendations from the Board to be considered by Cabinet before a final decision was taken.

Development Control

During consideration of the Making Experiences Count Quarter 4 Report Members highlighted that there had been an increase in the number of complaints that had been received during the period in respect of planning matters. In particular, there were concerns about the delays in resolving planning applications that appeared to be causing these complaints. Members therefore received a verbal update from the Head of Planning and Regeneration with the outcome being that the Board would receive a six monthly update containing data on the backlog of outstanding applications in order to monitor progress on this. The first of these reports was received by the Board at its January meeting, when a number of further points and concerns were raised. The Head of Planning and Regeneration and the Portfolio Holder attended the March meeting and discussed those concerns in more detailed.

Overview of the Budget

For the first time, the Board has been able to take a more active role in the scrutiny of the Council's budget. They have considered a number of reports over five meetings, including an Overview of the Budget, Fees and Charges Report, Capital Budget and a pressures and savings report. Whilst considering these reports, Members had highlighted the difficulty in respect of timing, as often the Board did not receive them until after Cabinet had considered them, therefore rendering it unable to do any constructive pre-scrutiny work. With this in mind the meetings for 2015/16 have been scheduled a week prior to the Cabinet meetings to enable this work to be carried out more successfully.

The Board also continue to receive regular quarterly finance monitoring reports and this year put forward a number of recommendations in respect of the format of these reports. These recommendations were considered by Cabinet and will be incorporated within the quarterly monitoring reports from the new municipal year.

Town Centre

Members continued to show an interest in the regeneration of the Town Centre and received an update from the Town Centre Regeneration Programme Manager at its meeting on 25th September followed by the attendance of the Leader of the Council and relevant Portfolio Holder at its October meeting. From the discussions held at those meetings it was agreed that the Board would be given the opportunity to pre-scrutinise the reports which were due to be considered by Cabinet in December, in respect of the Hanover Street Remarketing and the disposal of Stourbridge Road site. Further details in respect of this pre-scrutiny work are detailed below.

George House/Hanover Street Car Park Site

It was highlighted at the Board's November meeting that Cabinet would be receiving a report on the Hanover Street Remarketing and the disposal of the Stourbridge Road site and it was agreed that the Board would hold an extra meeting, prior to Cabinet to pre-scrutinise these reports. A number of officers together with the Leader and relevant portfolio holder and a representative from the commercial property consultants involved, attended a very productive meeting, which led to a number of recommendations being considered and whilst the wording of those recommendations was slightly amended, they were agreed by Cabinet in principle.

Scrutiny of Crime and Disorder Partnerships

The Board has a statutory duty to hold at least one meeting a year which covers the scrutiny of the work of the crime and disorder partnerships. In the case of Bromsgrove District Council this is the North Worcestershire Community Safety Partnership.

At its March meeting the Board received an update on the work of the North Worcestershire Community Safety Partnership (NWCSP) which had been the first merged community safety partnership to be approved by the West Mercia Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC). The NWCSP and the South Worcestershire Community Safety Partnership were due to be reviewed in 2015 to assess the extent to which both partnerships were fit for purpose. There was a statutory requirement for a 3 year rolling plan to be produced outlining how the partnership intended to address key crime and community safety priorities, as identified through its annual Strategic Assessment report.

Members discussed the funding available to the Partnership and how it managed to work towards its 5 key priorities with a limited budget which had to be applied for from the PCC on an annual basis. The amount of funding available had been based on previous year's allocations received from Central Government. Discussions had been held with the office of the PCC earlier in the year when the Partnership had raised concerns around Community Safety funding in future years. From those discussions it was hoped that this would be amended to bi-annually.

WORCESTERSHIRE HEALTH OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE (HOSC)

The Council's representative on this Committee must be a Member of the Overview and Scrutiny Board and provide the Board with regular updates on the work being carried out.

Councillor Brian Cooper has provided the Board with regular updates on what has been discussed at these meetings and where appropriate the minutes from a relevant meeting have been provided for Members' information.

Councillor Cooper highlighted the following areas and responded to questions from other Members during his updates:

- The Development of the Integrated Community Hubs
- The Acute Hospital Review
- Community Stroke Services
- Mental Health Liaison
- Hospital Treatment for patients based in North Worcestershire

Councillor Cooper provided Members with an overview of the work carried out by the Committee at its April meeting which Members found most helpful.

TASK GROUPS INVESTIGATIONS & SHORT, SHARP REVIEWS CARRIED OUT

The detailed final reports of all these investigations can be found on the Council's website within the Overview & Scrutiny section.

Leisure Provision Group

Membership: Councillors Caroline Spencer (Chairman), June Griffiths, Helen Jones, Luke Mallett, Chris Scurrall, Elaine Shannon and Sean Shannon

Deadline: 17th November 2014

A topic proposal completed by Councillor Rita Dent was submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting held on 24th March 2014. The aim of Councillor Dent's proposal was to ensure that the Leisure Provision provided by the Council was what the residents wanted and met their needs, together with identifying any possible duplication of activities and any possible savings that could be made.

Following discussion it was agreed by the Overview and Scrutiny Board that a Task Group would be established to scrutinise the Leisure Provision and that Councillor Caroline Spencer would be appointed Chairman. At the Board meeting held on 14th April 2014 Members agreed both the Membership of the Task Group and its Terms of Reference and set a timescale for completion of the work of within 6 months of the date of its first meeting.

It should be noted that, although not within the terms of reference of the Task Group, but due to the fact that there was no Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting during May 2014, the Board asked Task Group Members to pre-scrutinise the Dolphin Centre Business Case which was due to be presented to Cabinet, on its behalf.

The Group held its first meeting on 19th May and at the following meeting duly considered the Business Case report and the Chairman of the Task Group provided a short interim report containing its findings and a number of suggested recommendations at the Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting held on 16th June 2014, which were then passed to Cabinet for its consideration.

The Task Group held 6 meetings in total and put forward a further 4 recommendations, which were considered by Cabinet at its meeting held on 3rd December 2014, whilst some slight amendments were made to the wording of 2 of the recommendations they received overall approval from Cabinet and will be implemented in due course.

Car Parking Short, Sharp Review

Membership: Councillors Sean Shannon (Chairman), Roy Clarke, Pete Lammas, Luke Mallett and Rory Shannon

Deadline: 21st January 2015

Following consideration of the Finance Monitoring Quarter 1 Report at the Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting on 25th September 2014 it was noted that there appeared to be both a decline in revenue from Civil Parking Enforcement together with a decrease in use of car parking facilities within the Town Centre. Members discussed residents' preferences when parking in Bromsgrove and referred back to the Recreation Road South Car Parking Task Group Report which had recommended that the Pay on Foot system be introduced where possible at other Council owned car parks.

To ensure that car parking arrangements remained fit for purpose Members agreed that the contents of the Task Group's final report should be revisited as part of a Short Sharp Review. It was therefore resolved at that meeting that a Short Sharp Review of car parking arrangements in the district, made up of the members, and taking into account the findings, of that original Task Group's final report.

At its first meeting held on 22nd October the Members discussed the areas they wished to cover together with details of specific data they required from the Environmental Services Manager, who was invited to attend the following meeting of the Group.

The Review Group held a total of 3 meetings and made 3 recommendations which were considered by Cabinet at its meeting held on 4th February 2015. A notice of motion had been received at full Council in respect of free car parking in the evening, whilst the Review Group was carrying out its investigations. Unfortunately, circumstances overtook the work of the Group and the Cabinet chose to reject all recommendations.

JOINT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY INVESTIGATIONS

Joint Worcestershire Regulatory Services Scrutiny Task Group

Bromsgrove District Council representatives: Councillors Rod Laight (lead) and Pete Lammas (substitute).

Deadline: June 2014.

The Joint WRS Scrutiny Task Group was established in 2013 to review the shared Worcestershire Regulatory Services (WRS). Elected Members from each of the Councils in Worcestershire have been appointed to the review which is being hosted and chaired by the Council as the host authority for the shared service.

The key objectives of the review were for the group: to review the final business case for the shared service; to compare previous service levels at individual local authorities with current service levels in the shared service; to assess the performance of the services compared to previous performance levels; to investigate levels of customer satisfaction; and to review the governance arrangements for the shared service.

The final report, which contained 12 recommendations, was considered by all those participating authorities' Overview and Scrutiny Committees and by this Committee at its July 2014 meeting. The recommendations were passed to the Worcestershire Shared Services Joint Committee, the decision making body for WRS, in October 2014.

The Joint Committee approved a number of the group's proposals, though initially rejected all recommendations relating to changes to the governance arrangements for WRS. However, in February 2015 further proposals were brought forward by Officers in relation to the governance of the partnership and these were significantly influenced by the work of the Joint Scrutiny Task Group. These proposals are currently out to consultation. As the host authority for the review, we will be monitoring the implementation of the approved recommendations.

Members are asked to note that the Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Task Group are currently considering submitting this report in the Centre for Public Scrutiny's Good Scrutiny Awards 2015. It is likely that the report will be submitted in the category dedicated to "Working Together".

Recommendations: The Task Group proposed recommendations covering the following areas:

- Communications about the work of the partnership.
- Governance of the partnership.
- Finances and the sustainability of the partnership

The final report is available to view on the Council's website within the Overview and Scrutiny section.

Joint Integrated Waste Scrutiny Task Group

A proposal form put forward by Worcestershire County Council was considered at the Board meeting in April 2014 and reconsidered at the June meeting. Members were informed that the first meeting had still not been arranged and it was understood that only one other District had agreed to join this Group. The Board debated the role of review and its potential outcomes. It was agreed that further information would be requested prior to the Board agreeing whether or not to participate. Following further discussion at the July meeting it was agreed that the Council would not take part in this Scrutiny Task Group.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Overview and Scrutiny Board Meetings

Overview and Scrutiny Board meetings are open to the public. To find out more visit our website at www.bromsgrove.gov.uk/scrutiny or telephone 01527 881288 and ask to speak to the Democratic Services Officer.

Public Involvement

If you would like to have your say on issues being considered by Overview and Scrutiny or to suggest a topic for consideration you can email scrutiny@bromsgrove.gov.uk or complete the form on the Council's website <http://www.bromsgrove.gov.uk/cms/council-and-democracy/oands-welcome-page.aspx>

Giving Evidence

Members of the public or organisations with a special interest or knowledge about a particular topic being considered by Overview and Scrutiny can put forward evidence to a committee or appear as a witness to give evidence for an investigation. If you think you or your organisation might be able to participate in an issue currently under review, please contact us.

If you have a personal issue with a council service you may find it more useful to contact your local ward councillor who can help you decide the best way to take it forward.

Contact Overview and Scrutiny

If you would like to find out more about any aspect of the Overview and Scrutiny Board then you can email scrutiny@bromsgrove.gov.uk or telephone 01527 881288 and ask to speak to the Committee Services Officer.

Further information can also be found on the Council's website. Please go to <http://www.bromsgrove.gov.uk/cms/council-and-democracy/oands-welcome-page.aspx>

**Overview and Scrutiny
Legal, Equalities and Democratic Services
Bromsgrove District Council
The Council House
Burcot Lane
Bromsgrove B60 1AA**

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Bromsgrove
District Council

www.bromsgrove.gov.uk

Legal, Equalities and Democratic Services

Bromsgrove District Council, The Council House, Burcot Lane, Bromsgrove, Worcestershire B60 1AA.

Telephone: (01527) 881288, Fax: (01527) 881414, DX: 17279 Bromsgrove

e-mail: scrutiny@bromsgrove.gov.uk