

TRAINING FEEDBACK – 15th June 2015

Work Planning Exercises

Members were asked to write down the top 5 issues which had been highlighted to them by residents over the last 6 months.

They were then asked to “match” these with the relevant Council Strategic Purposes.

The strategic purposes were split between 2 Groups in order for Members to discuss whether the topics raised were worthy of further scrutiny and, if so, what form that investigation should take. If Members decided that the matter did not warrant further scrutiny they were asked to provide reasons for this decision.

Finally, each group was asked *“How the Council can get the best out of its Overview and Scrutiny Board”*.

GROUP 1

Councillors Luke Mallett, Chris Allen Jones, Malcolm Glass and Phil Thomas.

Help me find somewhere to live in my locality

- Community Transport facilities
- Planning Applications – slowness
- Planning Issues – Particularly enforcement
- Local Plan Development
- Residential developments causing traffic problems
- Social Housing issues
- Lack of affordable social housing for young people
- BDHT addressing issues re sites.

Members felt that the issue of community transport was a valid one and could cover the following areas – is there a lack of community transport, are there particular communities that are affected? As there were a lot of areas to cover this could be a topic suitable for a Task Group.

In respect of Planning Members were informed that the Board had received a number of presentations on the transformation process and the backlog of applications which had led to the designation position of the Council’s planning team. The Board now has in place regular updates in respect of the backlog of applications and the work being carried out to reduce this. A Task Group had also carried out an in depth investigation into Planning Policy, which had included a section on the Marlbrook Tip. It was also highlighted that there was now a Marlbrook Tip Working Party which included all parties, which met regularly and the notes and agendas from

those meetings were readily available on the Council's website. However, Planning Enforcement might be an area where further information would be useful to ensure that matters were being dealt with in a timely and appropriate manner.

The issues around social housing were discussed in detail and Members felt that this could include whether there was sufficient social housing for the needs of the district and of the appropriate quality. It might be appropriate for a Task Group to look at this due to the size of the subject and Members discussed whether a public meeting would also be appropriate.

Recommend: Potential for Task Groups to be added to the work programme in respect of Community Transport and Social Housing.

Provide good things for me to see do & visit

- Youth provision
- Sports hall for badminton

In respect of youth provision and the sports hall for badminton, Members were informed that the Board had previously commissioned Task Groups focusing on Youth Provision and Leisure Services (the latter Task Group had looked at the provision of a sports hall within the new Dolphin Centre business plan in detail). The Board might therefore wish to revisit those Task Group recommendations to assess the impact they have had.

Recommend: Revisit the Task Group recommendations from the Youth Provision and Leisure Services reviews in order to assess the impact they have made.

- Access to services over the boundary (Redditch)
- Residents "paying" for services they cannot access e.g. within the Town Centre.

These were issues which Members agreed were not appropriate for scrutiny exercises. However, due to the time available the group did not have a chance to discuss why they had reached this conclusion.

Help me run a successful business

- Parking availability/charges/policy
- Town Centre shops
- Town Centre Regeneration

It was explained that parking was something which the Board had looked at on a number of occasions, having carried out both Task Groups and more recently a short sharp review. Following the short sharp review the Board had suggested that this item be picked up again in 12 months' time; with this in mind the areas discussed could be included within that piece of work. Those areas included parking for businesses, using parking as a way to drive economic regeneration, analysing what type of parking is available and the cost and whether this impacted on visitor numbers to the town centre.

For those Members new to Overview & Scrutiny it was explained that the Board had over the years received a number of presentations/reports on some of the key issues in the Town Centre. It was therefore suggested that the Board would need to refine what they wished to look at, (for example progress to date, value for money, what has already been achieved and future plans).

Recommend: Potential for a Task Group to be set up.

- Road signs – unsuitable for HGV's for businesses in the area.

There was one issue which Members felt more appropriate to be taken up with the County Council.

Help me to live my life independently

There were no issues under this heading.

Help me to be financially independent

There were no issues under this heading.

GROUP 2

Councillors Karen May, Sue Baxter, Brian Cooper, Roger Smith and Michael Thompson.

Keep my place safe & looking good

This strategic purpose received the most "issues" and was broken down by the group into 3 categories; county council, district council and other partners. As the other partner issues were specific to certain incidents it was agreed that these should be dealt with outside of the Board.

County Council

- Highways – condition of road surfaces
- Footpaths
- Strategic infrastructure
- Road safety – speeding vehicles

Whilst it was accepted that District Councillors were unable to deal directly with these issues, it would be useful, particularly for new Councillors, to have a better understanding of the work of the County Council and it was therefore suggested that a request be made to County Council officers and the relevant portfolio holder to attend an O&S meeting and give a presentation on these areas. It would be useful for Members to provide some initial questions/areas that they would like to be covered by that presentation and this could be discussed in more detail at the O&S meeting when discussing the work programme. Whilst it was unlikely that the Board would feel a task group was necessary, this could be discussed following receipt of that presentation.

It may also be useful to open this meeting up to all Councillors.

Recommend: Presentation(s) to be included within the work programme.

District Council

- Off street parking
 - Over hanging trees/dead branches
 - Drainage
 - Dog fouling enforcement
 - Litter
 - Rubbish / cost of brown bins / build-up of traffic on collection days
 - Travellers
 - Footpaths and un-adopted footpaths and/or roads
1. The group discussed the issues raised and it was felt that the main concerns appeared to be around reducing the number of incidents (it was acknowledged that these were issues which were on-going and constantly raised by residents), what enforcement action could be taken and which team was responsible for specific areas. It was therefore initially felt that a presentation from the enforcement team, explaining their role and the work they carried out would be useful, before a decision was made as to whether any further investigation was necessary.
 2. Members also discussed the role of Planning Enforcement which, it was accepted was a separate issue, but equally clarification on the role of the officers

and the process in this respect would be useful. Comments were also made that it would be useful to know whether the application part of Development Control being in designation had had any effect on enforcement issues.

3. The new Place Team was also discussed as Members were aware that there had been a trial of this new way of working, but were unsure as to if and when this had been rolled out across all Wards. Members thought it would also be useful to know what partnership working this team carried out with the County Council and Parish Councils. It may be useful for the Board, particularly as it has a lot of Members who are also new to the Council, to receive an update on the work of this Team and the current position in respect of the roll out. Members also discussed whether this would be a subject which would warrant regular updates and monitoring by the Board.

Recommend: Presentation(s) to be included within the work programme, with the possibility of further investigation being required in the future.

To be dealt with outside of the Board

- Train station car parking
- Safety fencing alongside the railway and beside residents' properties
- Damaged bridge wall over river (open and dangerous)

Members felt these issues were specific to a ward and agreed that these should be taken up by the Member with officers outside of the Board.

How the Council can get the best out of its Overview and Scrutiny Board

Each group was asked to respond to this question and the following suggestions were made.

- Build a good working relationship between the Board and the Cabinet Members.
- The Board to work as a group and not as individuals
- Treat each other with respect (including officers)
- Give positive feedback on the work of the Board to others within your group.
- Be selective with items on the work programme and not to be overly ambitious (restrict the number of items per meeting).
- Selecting the best approach to scrutiny for the subject.
- Officers to be brief in their presentation of reports

- Members to feel confident in being able to talk openly and not be influenced by others outside of the Board.

Recommend: **That the Board take these thoughts into account in its future work.**