

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

28TH SEPTEMBER 2015 AT 6.00 P.M.

PRESENT: Councillors L. C. R. Mallett (Chairman), K.J. May (Vice-Chairman),
C. Allen-Jones, S. J. Baxter, S. R. Colella, M. Glass, J. M. L. A. Griffiths,
R. D. Smith, P.L. Thomas and M. Thompson (Substitute)

Observers: Councillor G. N. Denaro, Councillor R. L. Dent, Councillor S.
P. Shannon, Councillor M. A. Sherrey and Councillor C. B. Taylor

Officers: Ms. J. Pickering, Mrs. C. Felton, Mr. G. Revans, Mr. I. Roberts,
Mrs. S. Sellers, Ms. A. Scarce and Ms. J. Bayley

40/15 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND NAMES SUBSTITUTES**

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors C. J. Bloore and
B. T. Cooper and it was confirmed that Councillor M. Thompson was attending
as a substitute for Councillor Bloore.

41/15 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND WHIPPING ARRANGEMENTS**

There were no declarations of interest or whipping arrangements.

42/15 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board held on 24th
August 2015 were submitted.

The Chairman explained that, as requested at the previous meeting of the
Board, a letter had been sent from the Chief Executive to the Medical Director
and Chief Executive of NHS Arden Herefordshire and Worcestershire. A
response had already been received confirming receipt of the letter.

Officers noted that at the previous meeting of the Board reference had been
made to the financial costs involved in launching a Task Group review.
Unfortunately the costs quoted in the minutes appeared to relate to the
previous year's figures. In 2015/16 Task Group Members would receive a
single £130 payment and the Chairman of the Task Group a single £260
payment.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Board held on 24th
August 2015 be approved as a correct record.

43/15

TOPIC PROPOSAL REPORT - PARTNERS ROLE IN THE PLANNING PROCESS

Councillor S. R. Colella presented a topic proposal detailing the terms of reference for a proposed review of the role of partners in the Development Control and strategic planning process. He explained that this topic proposal form had been drafted taking on board feedback provided in response to another proposal that he had presented at the previous meeting of the Board. The review, if approved, would investigate the role of statutory partners in the planning process and their influence over planning outcomes and their legal obligations.

The proposal form was discussed by Members of the Board. On the one hand it was suggested that a review of this subject would provide useful clarification for the benefit of elected Members. On the other hand concerns were expressed that it would be difficult to undertake this review without addressing specific planning applications, which was not within the remit of Overview and Scrutiny. Furthermore, questions were raised about the potential for a review of this subject to result in any measurable outcomes.

At Members' request the following details of the voting were recorded in respect of the Board's decision as to whether to launch the proposed review of the role of partners in the Development Control and strategic planning process.

For the launch of the review: Councillors S. J. Baxter, S. R. Colella and M. Thompson.

Against the launch of the review: Councillors C. Allen-Jones, M. Glass, J. M. L. A. Griffiths, K. J. May, R. D. Smith and P. L. Thomas.

The Board subsequently

RESOLVED to take no further action on this matter.

44/15

TO CONSIDER ANY OTHER BUSINESS, DETAILS OF WHICH HAVE BEEN NOTIFIED TO THE HEAD OF LEGAL, EQUALITIES AND DEMOCRATIC SERVICES PRIOR TO THE COMMENCEMENT OF THE MEETING AND WHICH THE CHAIRMAN, BY REASON OF SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES, CONSIDERS TO BE OF SO URGENT A NATURE THAT IT CANNOT WAIT UNTIL THE NEXT MEETING.

The Chair explained that, in consultation with the Monitoring Officer in advance, he had agreed for the meeting to receive an update on the Hanover Street / George House site as a matter of urgent business.

(During consideration of this item Members discussed matters that necessitated the disclosure of exempt information. It was therefore agreed to exclude the press and public prior to any debate on the grounds that information would be revealed relating to financial and business affairs).

45/15

PRESENTATION ON THE WORK OF THE PLACE TEAM

The Head of Environmental Services delivered a presentation on the subject of the work of the place team for the consideration of the Board. During this presentation the following points were highlighted for Members' consideration:

- The work of the place team was aligned to a number of key operational principles.
- The restructure of the Environmental Services team had been completed.
- Staff in the new structure were expected to work holistically as part of a multi-skilled workforce.
- It had taken time for some members of the team to learn the new ways of working. Training and support was being provided.
- Some posts remained vacant though it was anticipated that these would be filled shortly.
- The Council was working closely with key partners, such as Bromsgrove District Housing Trust (BDHT), to meet the needs of residents.
- Staff were being encouraged to develop links with ward and parish Councillors and to participate in estate walkabouts with elected Members.
- Contact information for lead operational officers in Environmental Services was circulated for Members' consideration.
- Key lessons had been learned from the restructure. The recruitment process had coincided with the main growing season and this had meant that in some cases staff had been distracted from core tasks at a busy time of the year.
- It would take time to embed the new ways of working as culture change could be a time consuming process.
- Route optimisation had enabled the Council to develop efficient waste and recycling collection services. However, these might need to be reviewed at a future date as and when larger housing developments emerged.

Following the presentation a number of key points were discussed in further detail by the Board:

- An increased emphasis on team working in order to encourage staff to take ownership of their work.
- Continuing use of schedules for services such as litter picking. These would be adapted to meet the needs of local areas as staff became familiar with their localities.
- Provision of staff contact details to the public and the most appropriate ways to report environmental concerns to the place teams.
- Communication between staff and the public, including Parish Councillors. Members were advised that there were standard timeframes within which staff should be responding to customers, including sending acknowledgements in complicated cases which would take time to resolve.

- The trial of the new working arrangements that had taken place in Winyates, Redditch and subsequently in Wythall.
- The success of the trial in Wythall and the extent to which ward and Parish Councillors in the area had appreciated the outcomes of this way of working.
- The enhanced role of ward Councillors in areas where there were no Parish Councils.
- The need to change the ways in which the Environmental Services teams had been working as these had been shaped by compulsory competitive tendering some time ago.
- The potential for Place team representatives to attend PACT meetings.
- The option for Place team representatives to participate in estate walkabouts at the weekends. This would be particularly helpful for Councillors with working responsibilities.
- Arrangements for gritting Council land and the responsibility of Worcestershire County Council for gritting the main highways during periods of inclement weather.

RESOLVED that the presentation be noted.

46/15

GARDEN WASTE COLLECTION CHARGES 2016/17

The Environmental Services Manager presented a report on the subject of garden waste collection service charges for 2016/17. Members were advised that there were two key proposals in the report:

- For the Council to establish direct debit payments as the primary method for customers to pay for the garden waste service from 2017.
- A proposal for the Cabinet to increase the charge for the garden waste collection service to £40 with effect from 1st February 2016.

Members were advised that a trial had already been undertaken with new customers to encourage payment for the service via direct debit. 80 per cent of new customers had indicated that they were willing to pay for the service using this method. The advantage of the direct debit payment process for the Council was that it was the cheapest way in which payments could be processed. The Board was advised that there would remain the potential for customers to pay using other payment methods where direct debit was not feasible or appropriate.

The potential for an incentive scheme to be offered to encourage existing customers to pay for the garden waste collection service via direct debit was briefly discussed. Members were advised that this option had been considered and it was possible that incentives such as raffle prizes for customers who arranged to pay by direct debit would be appealing.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

47/15

QUARTER 1 FINANCE MONITORING REPORT

The Chairman advised the Board that the Finance Monitoring report for the period 1st April to 30th June 2015 had already been presented for the consideration of Cabinet and Council. This was the only time when the report would be presented to the Board at such a late stage and in future the Chairman had been assured that Members would have an opportunity to pre-scrutinise the content in advance of any decisions being taken.

The Executive Director of Finance and Corporate Resources presented the report for Members' consideration. She explained that the report had been produced in a new format which had taken into account a number of suggestions that had been made by the Board at previous meetings. Figures had also been presented in line with the Council's strategic purposes to enable Members to consider how Council spending was allocated in relation to corporate priorities.

The Board briefly discussed the strategic purposes. Members were advised that the strategic purposes had been agreed by Members. Each Director had assumed responsibility for a particular set of strategic purposes and Members discussed the potential for each Head of Service's role to be aligned to the strategic purposes.

The provision of disabled facilities grants to residents was also considered by the Board. Members noted that in previous years some residents had struggled to access this funding which had undermined their ability to live their lives independently. The Board was advised that to an extent delays occurred due to the time it usually took for Worcestershire County Council's occupational health advisers to assess the resident's needs. However, In order to provide further clarification in respect of this matter it was agreed that information on this subject should be requested from the relevant Head of Service for inclusion in the next edition of the report.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

48/15

EVENING CAR PARKING TASK GROUP - MEMBERSHIP

The board was advised that five Members had been appointed to serve on the Evening Car Parking Task Group and the first meeting of the group would take place on Wednesday 30th September.

49/15

INCREASING PHYSICAL ACTIVITY IN WORCESTERSHIRE JOINT SCRUTINY TASK GROUP - VERBAL UPDATE

Councillor J. M. L. A. Griffiths, the Council's representative on the Joint Increasing Physical Activity in Worcestershire Task Group, explained that she had been unable to attend the group's health walk in Worcester as she had been invited to attend another urgent meeting at County Hall. No further meetings had taken place since the walk took place, though dates were in the process of being discussed.

50/15

FINANCE BRIEFING - BUDGET SCRUTINY (PRESENTATION)

The Executive Director of Finance and Corporate Resources delivered a presentation regarding the Council's budget. During the delivery of this presentation she highlighted the following points for Members' consideration:

- As of September 2015 it was anticipated that there would be a shortfall in the budget of £196,000 in 2016/17 and a shortfall of £718,000 in 2017/18.
- The figures did not take account of the government grant settlement which was unlikely to be announced until December 2015.
- An assumption was being made that fees and charges would increase by 3 per cent.
- There would be use of £1.979 million from balances on a number of projects including the new leisure centre.
- Savings achieved in any given year were returned to balances.
- Reserves were allocated to particular projects such as new infrastructure.
- There was the potential for Overview and Scrutiny to undertake short, sharp scrutiny reviews to investigate particular budgets in cases where Members had any concerns.
- Over the course of the next few months, until the Council's budget was set in February 2016, scrutiny Members were also encouraged to speak to Heads of Service about any particular areas of the budget where they felt further information would be useful. Members did not need to wait until a Board meeting to raise any concerns.
- The Council's external auditors, Grant Thornton, had recommended that the Council improve its monitoring process in order to enhance the accuracy of end of year projections.
- The external auditors had also recommended that the Council needed to make its budget setting and financial monitoring process more transparent.
- Overview and Scrutiny had a role to play in questioning why certain savings achieved in a given year had occurred in cases where these had not been planned for.
- Members also needed to consider, when scrutinising the budget, whether the Council's strategic purposes continued to reflect customer concerns.
- A detailed schedule of the proposed budgets for the following three year period would be presented for the consideration of the Board in October.
- Officers were hoping to provide further information about the use of budgets to enable Members to assess the budget in context.
- There was the potential that an extra meeting of the Board would need to take place in January or February 2016 to consider the budget, depending on the outcome of the government grant settlement.
- There was the possibility that in 2017/18 the Council would need to take into account the potential impact of new housing developments on service delivery costs.

The costs of delivering enabling services were briefly discussed following the presentation. Members were advised that in the long-term the Council was aiming to change the balance of funding between frontline services and enabling services to place a greater emphasis on the operational level.

Members noted that there were a significant number of budget items due to be considered at the meeting of the Board in November alongside reports on other subjects. Concerns were expressed that the Board would not have sufficient time to review these items constructively and that further consideration of the Overview and Scrutiny Board's Work Programme might, therefore, be desirable.

RESOLVED that the contents of the finance briefing presentation be noted.

51/15 **WORCESTERSHIRE HEALTH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - UPDATE**

Members considered an update that had been provided by Councillor B. T. Cooper, the Council's representative on the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC), in advance of the meeting.

The following two items had been considered at the latest meeting of the HOSC on 16th September:

- The future of acute hospital services in Worcestershire.
- The quality of existing acute hospital services.

52/15 **ACTION LIST**

Officers explained that the action listed in respect of the Write Off of Debts report had been completed at the previous meeting of the Board. This item would therefore be removed prior to the next meeting. Reference was also made to a typographical error concerning the date by which officers had been asked to provide clarification about licensing charges for street cafes. This action remained to be completed.

53/15 **CABINET WORK PROGRAMME**

The Board noted that a number of items listed on the Cabinet Work Programme were scheduled for pre-scrutiny or had already been considered including:

- Hanover Street / George House site update.
- Green waste collection charges.
- High Street refurbishment – Phase II.
- Fees and charges.
- Burcot Lodge Hostel

Officers confirmed that the fees and charges report, listed on the Cabinet Work Programme for consideration in November, would in fact be presented in

December. Arrangements would be made for the report to be pre-scrutinised by the Board prior to a Cabinet decision being made on the subject.

54/15

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD WORK PROGRAMME

Members discussed the Board's Work Programme and noted that a significant number of items were scheduled for their consideration in October and November. To ensure that the Board could give sufficient time to scrutinise items in a constructive manner it was agreed that the Chairman and Vice Chairman should review the Work Programme and determine whether an additional meeting might be required.

The meeting closed at 8.20 p.m.

Chairman

By virtue of paragraph(s) 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A
of the Local Government Act 1972.

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