

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

26TH OCTOBER 2015 AT 6.00 P.M.

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

Observers: Councillors G. N. Denaro, S. P. Shannon and M. A. Sherrey

Officers: Mrs. S. Hanley, Mr. D. Allen, Ms. S. Morgan, Ms. A. Scarce and Ms. J. Bayley

55/15 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES**

An apology for absence was received on behalf of Councillor S. R. Colella and it was confirmed that Councillor C. Hotham was attending as his substitute.

56/15 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND WHIPPING ARRANGEMENTS**

Councillor B. T. Cooper explained that he wanted to clarify his interests, as reported in his Disclosable Pecuniary Interest (DPI) form, as it related to his appointment as the Council's representative on the Worcestershire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC). He explained that he believed it was appropriate to provide further information on this subject following a named vote at a meeting of the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee in July 2015 in relation to his request for a dispensation to take part in debates and decisions regarding health issues at meetings of HOSC.

Councillor Cooper advised that he was a qualified doctor with a 'zero hours' consultant contract with the NHS. He also has an NHS pension. He has a private medico-legal practice, writing reports about legal claims for NHS Trusts in the South East of England. All of Councillor Cooper's interests had been fully declared in his DPI form for Bromsgrove District Council and these declarations had similarly been submitted to and approved by Worcestershire County Council.

57/15 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board held on 28th September 2015 were submitted.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Board held on 28th September 2015 be approved as a correct record.

58/15

BURCOT LODGE EMERGENCY HOMELESS UNIT

The Strategic Housing Manager provided a verbal update on progress that had been made since August 2015 in respect of Burcot Lodge Emergency Homeless Unit. He explained that Officers had considered various options for the replacement of Burcot Lodge:

- The potential for Redditch Borough Council to provide temporary accommodation to Bromsgrove residents. This option had been discussed with Redditch Officers. However, concerns had been raised about a potential conflict with homelessness pressures within the Borough and the conclusion had therefore been reached that this option would not be feasible.
- Discussions had been held with representatives of Birmingham City Council about the potential for Bromsgrove residents to access their facilities. However, no guarantee could be provided that spaces would be available when needed and therefore this option was not considered to be viable.
- Officers had met with representatives of Bromsgrove District Housing Trust (BDHT) to discuss alternative options. Further investigation of relevant finances, particularly following government changes to funding for social housing, was needed. Officers anticipated that this option would provide the best opportunity to ensure that temporary accommodation could continue to be provided to residents at risk of homelessness.

A number of key issues were subsequently raised by Members on this subject:

- The amount of progress that had been achieved in identifying a suitable solution to this problem since the subject was last discussed by the Board.
- The Council's statutory duty to ensure that accommodation was made available to people at risk of homelessness.
- The timelines for the Council's move to Parkside and the sale of the Council House site, which included Burcot Lodge.
- The information that had been requested by the Board in August, including financial details for each option and the timeline for resolving the issue.
- The limited use of Bed and Breakfast accommodation traditionally within the district and the work of BDHT to ensure that this option was not regularly used to provide temporary accommodation to families in light of legal requirements.
- The time that would be required to convert existing properties for use as temporary accommodation and the need to take this into account when formulating a timeline.
- The pressures on the availability of affordable housing to residents across the country.
- The potential value of further investigation of this subject by the Board.

- The need for Overview and Scrutiny to avoid duplicating the work of Officers in relation to this subject.

The Chairman expressed disappointment that a written report had not been provided for the Board's consideration. There was general consensus that further written updates should be provided for Members' consideration on this subject at subsequent meetings to ensure that progress continued to be monitored.

RESOLVED that

- (1) A written update report, containing the timeline for the replacement of Burcot Lodge Emergency Homeless Unit, be presented for Members' consideration at the Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting on 23rd November 2015; and
- (2) A written update, containing financial implications and any confidential information relating to the replacement of Burcot Lodge Emergency Homeless Unit, be presented for Members' consideration at the Overview and Scrutiny Board's meeting to be held on 14th December 2015.

59/15

OVERVIEW OF THE COUNCIL'S BUDGET - PRESENTATION AND CURRENT BUDGET SPEND LINKED TO THE COUNCIL'S STRATEGIC PURPOSES

The Financial Services Manager delivered a presentation on financial planning at the Council for the period 2016/17 to 2019/20 and also outlined key points in a report on the Medium Term Financial Plan 2016/17 to 2018/19. During the delivery of this presentation the following issues were highlighted for Members' consideration:

- The intention of the report and presentation was to provide Members with an opportunity to identify areas suitable for further scrutiny as part of the budget setting process.
- When planning the budget for the following three year period officers considered various different scenarios and the risks that could impact on funding levels.
- Assumptions had to be made when considering budget projections, which also needed to take into account risks such as the potential for a change to occur to inflation levels during the year.
- Officers would review all potential savings in order to determine whether these would be one off savings or could be achieved again in subsequent years.
- Worcestershire County Council (WCC) had recently agreed to reduce funding for positive activities for young people in the district. Funding for Bromsgrove would consequently be reduced from £125,000 to £50,000 from April 2016.
- The financial implications for the Council following any reductions in funding received from WCC.
- Balances of £4.2 million placed the Council in a relatively strong financial position.

- Capital receipts could only be used for capital expenditure, not for revenue spend.
- Councils had been advised that in due course they would be able to keep 100 per cent of business rates. However, the full detail of how this would operate and the timeframes for the implementation of this process remained to be confirmed.
- GP Practices had been appealing over their business rates and the potential for other retailers to also appeal and the implications in the long-term to Council finances.
- Councils could utilise financial support from the “safety net” in cases where total business rates fell below the baseline level. However, Bromsgrove was not eligible to access this safety net whilst it remained a part of the business rates pool which was set to continue for at least 12 months.
- Officers were anticipating that the national living wage would increase to £9 per hour by 2020.

Members proceeded to discuss a number of matters in further detail following the delivery of the presentation:

- The work of Cabinet Members to review assumptions underpinning the budget setting process and the potential for the Overview and Scrutiny Board to assist in this process.
- The decreasing size of the revenue support grant allocated to the Council by the Government and the likelihood that this would cease to be provided by 2020.
- The cost of borrowing for the replacement of the Dolphin Centre and the use of reserves.
- The focus of the appendices to the report on the costs of service delivery in relation to the Council’s strategic purposes.
- Additional financial costs which did not relate to service delivery and were not therefore included within the figures that had been provided in the report.
- The anticipated shortfall of £196,000 in 2016/17 and the action that would need to be taken to ensure that the Council secured a balanced budget by the end of the year.
- The provision of figures within the report originally included within the Medium Term Financial Plan 2015/16 to 2018/19. Members commented that it would be useful for figures to also be provided which demonstrated how the Council’s budget was varying from these projections during the year.
- The value of further information about pressures on the budget. Members were advised that this information would be presented for their consideration in the following edition of the report.
- The assumption that Council Tax would rise by 1.9 per cent during the year and the potential for the government to change the level of the cap on increases in Council Tax before triggering a referendum.
- The likely impact of changes to tax credits on demand for Council services and the possible support that the Council could provide to residents placed in a difficult financial position by these changes.

- The impact of universal credit on residents living in the district and the support that could be provided to those effected.
- The use of reserves to cover expenditure in 2016/17 and 2017/18 and the overall impact that this might have on the Council's budget.
- The pension deficit for local government staff and the contribution from the Council towards employees' pensions. The Council had reached agreement with the actuaries to make contributions in increasing amounts over a 21 year period. Members requested further information about the schedule for these payments.

Following this debate Members

RESOLVED that the following information be provided in future budget reports to the Overview and Scrutiny Board:

- (1) Figures for service delivery which had been budgeted for when the Council's budget was set in February 2015;
- (2) Comparable figures showing actual and anticipated spend by the end of the year;
- (3) Areas of concern within the budget; and
- (4) Budget assumptions and the different scenarios that had been considered when calculating these assumptions.

60/15

EVENING CAR PARKING TASK GROUP

Councillor K. J. May, Chairman of the Evening Car Parking Task Group, provided an update on the progress of the review. She explained that the group had held two meetings to date. During one of these meetings Members had interviewed the Council's Partnerships and Projects Manager and the relevant lead Environmental Services Manager. The next meeting of the group would take place later in the week.

61/15

INCREASING PHYSICAL ACTIVITY IN WORCESTERSHIRE JOINT SCRUTINY TASK GROUP

Councillor J. M. L. A. Griffiths, the Council's representative on the Increasing Physical Activity Joint Scrutiny Task Group, provided a verbal update on the progress of the review. Members were advised that the group had interviewed Officers from Worcestershire County Council who were responsible for organising health walks alongside representatives of the county branch of the Ramblers' Association. Councillor Griffiths explained that she had raised the subject of an Olympic legacy during this meeting and had been advised that this had had very little impact on participation in walking activities.

The group had been concentrating on consulting with sports clubs and groups. It was acknowledged that there were other physical activities that people could participate in on a daily basis including cleaning and gardening. The group had not submitted evidence in relation to a recent report to the County Council's Cabinet concerning the future delivery of positive activities. The group had not yet considered evidence from district Councils about the physical activities they provided to residents.

Discussions were currently taking place about potential future meeting dates. Members were advised that the final deadline for the review appeared to be unclear, though the group would be proposing recommendations at some point based on the evidence they had gathered.

62/15 **WORCESTERSHIRE HEALTH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

Councillor B. T. Cooper, the Council's representative on HOSC, explained that the latest scheduled meeting of the Committee had been cancelled. The next meeting would take place on 4th November 2015.

63/15 **ACTION LIST**

Officers advised that all of the items listed on the Board's Action List remained outstanding. Members were assured that the Planning Application Backlog report, which had been due for consideration in October, would now be presented at the Board's November 2015 meeting.

64/15 **CABINET WORK PROGRAMME**

Officers advised that a number of items listed on the Cabinet Work Programme were also scheduled for the consideration of the Overview and Scrutiny Board in due course. This included:

- High Street Refurbishment – Phase 2 Consideration of Options.
- Medium Term Financial Plan Assumptions
- Medium Term Financial Plan Update
- Churchfields Multi Storey Car Park Improvements
- Fees and Charges.

However, in a number of cases these items had been postponed so would be considered later in the municipal year.

65/15 **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD WORK PROGRAMME**

A number of updates were provided in respect of the Overview and Scrutiny Board's Work Programme.

a) **West Midlands Scrutiny Network**

Councillor K. J. May explained that she had attended the latest meeting of the West Midlands Regional Scrutiny Network in Sandwell on 23rd October 2015.

During the meeting training had been delivered by John Cade from the Institute of Local Government Studies (INLOGOV), University of Birmingham, concerning best practice in scrutiny work programming. He had suggested that Members should consider the following when determining whether to launch a review:

- Public interest in the subject and whether it would address the concerns of local people.
- Ability to change and whether a scrutiny review could realistically influence that change.
- Performance, prioritising reviews of poorly performing Council services as well as relevant partner's services.
- Extent, in terms of the relevance of the subject to the whole district. Good scrutiny should not focus on issues of particular concern to a single Member's ward.
- Replication, to make sure that a review would not duplicate work that was being conducted by other Council staff or partners.

An update had also been provided on the subject of Combined Authorities and scrutiny arrangements in this environment.

b) Performance Measures Dashboard

The Chairman commented that a computer had recently been installed in the Members' Room to enable Members to access the corporate dashboard. To enable Members to use the data provided on the dashboard to facilitate effective scrutiny the Chairman suggested that it would be useful to invite officers to attend a future meeting of the Board to deliver a presentation on this subject. This presentation could address the background to the dashboard and provide an explanation of the measures on the dashboard and how these were identified.

c) Recommendation Tracking

Members discussed progress with the implementation of recommendations that had been made by scrutiny Task Groups in recent years. It was commented that Members were keen to receive updates on this work to ensure that the findings of reviews were not ignored and particular concern was raised about the impact of the recommendations that had been made by the Youth Services Provision Task Group.

Officers explained that the Board received a scrutiny tracker report on a quarterly basis, with the next edition due at the end of the calendar year. Recommendations remained on the tracker until they had been implemented. In addition, updates were provided in respect of specific Task Group recommendations approximately a year after the review had concluded.

There was general consensus that it would be useful, particularly following Worcestershire County Council's recent agreement to change their funding for positive activities, to reconsider the findings of the Youth Services Provision Task Group. Following circulation of the report for the consideration of Members it was possible that additional areas might be identified as being suitable for further scrutiny.

d) General Work Programme Issues

Officers confirmed that the updates on Burcot Lodge Emergency Homeless Unit, which had been requested during the meeting, would be incorporated into the Work Programme.

RESOLVED that

- (1) The Head of Business Transformation and Organisational Development and Policy Manager be invited to attend a meeting to deliver a presentation on the subject of the measures dashboard;
- (2) the Board's Work Programme be noted.

The meeting closed at 7.45 p.m.

Chairman