

Bromsgrove District Council **Legal, Equalities & Democratic Services**



Overview and Scrutiny **Annual Report**

2015 - 2016



Bromsgrove
District Council

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OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT 2015-16

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FOREWORD FROM THE CHAIRMAN

Welcome to the Bromsgrove District Council's Overview and Scrutiny Board's Annual Report for 2015-2016.

The Board have been active this year in supporting scrutiny around the town centre regeneration, in particular the Hannover Street / George House development. The Board held an additional meeting in June 2015 to allow for pre-scrutiny of the proposals and a further meeting in September 2015 to provide input into the final decision.

The Board became aware, as a result of the Making Experiences Count Quarter 4 Report in 2014, of increasing complaints relating to Development Control and planning matters. The Board has this year sought to work with the Portfolio Holder for Planning and the officers in Development Control to monitor progress in moving the Council out of designation. Regular reports were received at the Board and it welcomed news early in 2016 that the Council had been taken out of designation by central Government.

A further focus for the Board this year has been the issue of homelessness in Bromsgrove and the future of homelessness provision when the current Burcot Lodge closes, my thanks to Councillor Sean Shannon for raising this subject with the Board. Following a number of officer presentations on plans to provide homelessness support in the future it was agreed by the Board to launch an investigation into the impact of the future closure of Burcot Lodge and the potential impacts to the Council and our local residents of the changes imposed by central Government to the benefits system.

The Board has also spent considerable time considering leisure services and specifically scrutinising the Dolphin Centre replacement this year. The Board felt it necessary in December to remind the Cabinet of the original Board recommendation regarding sports hall provision alongside the Dolphin redevelopment.

The Board has a responsibility for finance monitoring, overview of the budget and corporate performance. There is still some way to go in achieving timely and clear information to support this vital function of the Board. We look forward to working with finance and performance officers this year to build on the improvements of the past two years and also to build the corporate dashboard into our oversight as a Board.

A particular focus of work for the Board this year has again been the vexed issue of car parking in Bromsgrove, and the interplay with growing the local economy. My particular thanks to Cllr Karen May who led the task group on this issue, and the

members of the Council that supported this important work. The Cabinet chose to accept the majority of recommendations in respect of this task group aside from pushing forward with developing an Economic Development Strategy for the town, choosing instead to implement a review of the existing Economic Priorities to strengthen the focus on car parking as a driver in the local economy.

In terms of the operation of the Board this year, the year began with a training workshop for members. This proved an excellent opportunity for us, existing members and new, to develop our skills and knowledge of scrutiny. We are grateful to our officers for developing and facilitating this workshop. The session highlighted a number of areas for future discussion by the Board. Members also chose to adopt a more cross-party approach to delivering their function – resolving to no longer sit or identify by political group at Overview and Scrutiny Board meetings.

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.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of the Members of the Board, in particular the Vice Chairman, Councillor Karen May, and those Democratic Services Officers that have supported our work so diligently and professionally, enabling the Board to achieve and deliver its programme of work this year.

Councillor Luke Mallett
Chairman

INTRODUCTION

We are pleased to present the Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report which outlines our work during 2015/16 and provides general information on the overview and scrutiny processes at Bromsgrove District Council.

There were a number of Members who were new to the Overview and Scrutiny process this municipal year and the Board took the opportunity to reinforce the importance of its Members being 'a' political.

On 15th June 2015 a training/work planning evening was held, to which all non-Executive Members were invited. This consisted of basic background information about the role of Scrutiny in the decision making process together with a number of interactive exercises, based on Members experiences with residents and the Council's strategic purposes. The aim was to highlight those concerns which affected residents the most and then consider how best Scrutiny could assist in making changes where appropriate.

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, as defined by the Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS), the lead charitable organisation supporting Overview and Scrutiny in the country, 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 11 Members)



Cllr Luke Mallett – Chairman



Cllr Karen May
(Vice Chairman)



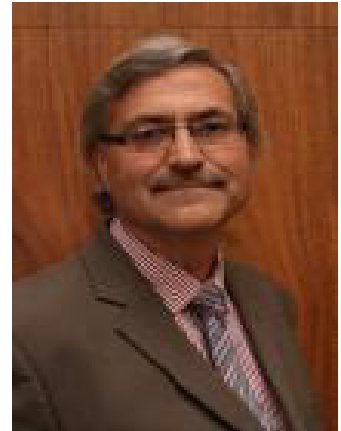
Cllr Chris Allen-Jones



Cllr Sue Baxter



Cllr Chris Bloore



Cllr Steve Colella



Cllr Brian Cooper



Cllr Richard Deeming
(w.e.f. 14th December 2015)



Cllr Malcolm Glass



Cllr June Griffiths
(from 2nd June to 13th December 2015)



Cllr Roger Smith



Cllr Phil Thomas

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 5 and Part 12 of the Council's Constitution. The Council's Constitution can be accessed by using the following link.

<http://svmodern.gov:9072/ieListMeetings.aspx?CId=329&Year=0> (Please click on the latest date to access the most recent version of the Council's constitution).

Number of Meetings

The Overview and Scrutiny Board met on a monthly basis during 2015-16 and there were a total of 12 meetings throughout the year. Eleven meetings had been scheduled in to the Calendar of Meetings with an additional meeting arranged due to pre-scrutiny work being held on 2nd June 2015.

REPORTS RECEIVED AND RECOMMENDATIONS MADE BY THE BOARD

The Board continues to receive regular updates in order to monitor the progress of recommendations it has made, through the Quarterly Recommendation Tracker. This contains both recommendations put forward by Task Groups and accepted by the Cabinet, together with recommendations put forward by the Board itself. In respect of Task Groups the Board does, where necessary, receive an update report 12 months following acceptance of its recommendations.

During the course of the year the Board received a number of reports and made a number of recommendations. There has been excellent support from the relevant Portfolio Holders this year, with regularly attendance from a number of them when a report which relates to their portfolio has been presented to the Board. This has given them an opportunity to hear first-hand the debate and ideas that the Board have put forward. On a number of occasions, whilst the Board has not made any recommendations in respect of an item it has endorsed and supported those recommendations which would be considered by Cabinet at its meeting.

George House/Hanover Street Car Park Site

It was highlighted at the Board's November 2014 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.

A special meeting of the Board was held on 2nd June 2015 in order to consider a report which focused on the outcome of the marketing exercise for the Hanover Street Car Park and George House site; the process that had been followed by the Council, the preferred bidder's identity and further detail about the bid, prior to the report being considered by Cabinet. The discussions covered such areas as any planning permissions which would be required, any implications on car parking and the actual process which had been followed.

The topic was further discussed at its meeting in September 2015 when the Board was given the opportunity to comment on changes to the way in which the development would be built, prior to the matter being discussed at Cabinet and the final decision being made at full Council

Development Control

During consideration of the Making Experiences Count Quarter 4 Report in 2014, 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 2015 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.

The Board has continued to receive quarterly updates in respect of the backlog and actions that have been taken to reduce that backlog. A report was received at its August 2015 meeting and a further report, which contained amendments that had been requested, came to the November meeting. It is hoped that in the future Members will be able to access the information via the Corporate Dashboard (see item below for full details of this), but it is currently agreed that it would be more appropriate for the Board to continue to receive a report.

Disposal of Burcot Lodge Emergency Homeless Unit

At its July meeting the Board considered a topic proposal in respect of Burcot Lodge, which provided emergency housing to vulnerable individuals at risk of homelessness, was due to be included as part of the sale of the Council House site. After consideration Members requested further information before making a decision as to whether it was appropriate for a Task Group to be formed. A report was received at the August meeting which provided broad details of the options which were being considered and Members requested a further update which came to its October meeting. A final update was presented to the Board at its January 2016 meeting, which provided details of the current position and the options for replacement of the Unit, following the sale of the old Council House site, which would be considered by Cabinet together with the financial implications of those options. The information received in that update report led the Board to agree to a Short Sharp Review being set up to look into the effects of the closure of the Unit together with potential impact to the Council and its residents of the forthcoming changes imposed by central Government to the benefits system.

Finance Monitoring and Overview of the Budget

The Board continued to receive regular quarterly finance monitoring reports and, following a recommendation from the previous municipal year, the format of those reports has been updated to include a number of suggestions made by the Board.

For the second year running, 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 the reports 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, where possible, been scheduled a week prior to the Cabinet meetings to enable this work to be carried out more successfully. This is something which will be further addressed in the next municipal year. The Board has scheduled at its April meeting an item which will consider how successful it feels this year's budget scrutiny work has been and whether there are any changes that could be made for the future which would allow the Board to play a more active role in the process, particular reference will be made to the timing of when reports are received as it was felt that whilst progress has been made, this could be improved further in the future.

Leisure Provision Task Group and the Dolphin Centre

During consideration of the Quarterly Recommendation Tracker at the November 2015 meeting the Board was advised that a number of the recommendations that had been made by the Leisure Provision Task Group remained to be implemented. Members of that Task Group had carried out pre-scrutiny of the business case for the replacement Dolphin Centre. Members were keen to hear of progress in respect of the recommendations which had been made. An update was therefore requested from the Head of Leisure and Cultural Services. A detailed update was provided at the December meeting which led to Members making a further recommendation to the Cabinet reminding them of the original recommendation which had been agreed.

Corporate Dashboard

Part of the role of Overview and Scrutiny is performance monitoring. This area of work has been neglected of late as the Council no longer has Key Performance Indicators set by central Government. However, officers have been working towards developing a new Performance Measures Dashboard. The aim of the Dashboard is to present performance data in a new and meaningful way in line with the Council's systems thinking approach to service delivery.

The Board received a demonstration on the Dashboard at its December 2015 meeting and discussed how best it could be used for the purpose of Overview and Scrutiny. It was anticipated that Members would be able to access the Dashboard individually and officers would upload data onto it, with explanatory notes and contact details of lead Officers. Members were encouraged to access the Dashboard and provide feedback to officers whilst it was still in its early stages of development.

Staff Survey Update

The Board had previously received the results of the staff survey back in June 2014 and in light of the discussions at that meeting had placed an update report on its Work Programme to be scheduled in when convenient. As some time had elapsed since that meeting, the Board was keen to ensure that the actions arising from the survey had been dealt with and requested an update report to be brought before the February 2016 meeting. At that meeting Members considered the progress which had been made in respect of the action plans that had been put in place learnt that a further survey would be sent out in April. This would be along similar lines to the original survey in order to provide comparative data. It was also hoped that analysis of that data would be available much sooner than the previous survey. The Board requested that it have sight of this and the item was therefore retained on its Work Programme for the new municipal year.

Scrutiny of the North Worcestershire Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership

The Board has a statutory duty to hold at least one meeting a year which covers the scrutiny of the work of the local Crime and Disorder Reduction (CDRP) partnership. In the case of Bromsgrove District Council this is the North Worcestershire Community Safety Partnership.

At its March 2016 meeting the Board considered a report from the Community Safety Manager which provided a comprehensive update in respect of the work of the North Worcestershire Community Partnership, which covered funding and projects which were being undertaken.

WORCESTERSHIRE HEALTH OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE (HOSC)

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

Councillor Brian Cooper has continued as the Board's representative this year providing regular updates on what has been discussed at these meetings. Where appropriate the minutes from a relevant meeting have been provided for Members' consideration.

During the year Councillor Cooper highlighted the following areas and responded to questions from other Members when raised:

- Primary Care commissioning and GP access
- Worcester Cancer Services
- Alexandra Hospital Maternity Services
- Draft Joint Health and Well-being Strategy 2016-19
- Worcestershire Acute Hospitals Trust and an unannounced CQC inspection.
- Health services for patients living on the borders of Worcestershire.

In December 2015 the Chairman reported that he had been approached by another member of the Council who was concerned about the services that were being provided to residents who were members of GP Practices that were not part of a Worcestershire Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG). At the request of the Board Councillor Cooper raised this for the consideration of HOSC, though it was not possible for the Committee to consider the matter in detail until after the local elections in May 2015. The Committee then brought this matter to the attention of the CCGs, though no solution was identified to the problem.

The Board remained concerned about this issue, particularly after learning that similar concerns had been raised at a local CALC meeting. In order to address these issues and residents' concerns the Board agreed that the Chief Executive of the Council should be asked to write a letter to the Chief Executive and Medical Director of NHS Arden Herefordshire and Worcestershire Area Team as, in their capacity as the senior leads for the regional branch of NHS England, it was suggested that they might be in a position to influence CCGs to work better together to resolve this problem to the benefit of patients. A letter was subsequently sent to the team and an acknowledgement was received. The Board had agreed that it might also be useful to consult with a representative of Worcestershire HealthWatch about this matter and it is possible that further information about progress in terms of addressing these problems may be made available when this occurs.

Following the updates at the November and December meetings, the Board put forward 2 recommendations; one in respect of the inclusion of Air Quality as a priority in the draft Joint Health & Well-being Strategy 2016-19 and the second was a request for the Leader to clarify the Council's position in respect of the outcome of the Worcestershire Acute Hospitals Trust being placed in special measures following the CQC inspection.

Cabinet supported the Board's proposal in respect of the inclusion of Air Quality as a priority in the Joint Health and Well-Being Strategy and recommended that Council endorse the proposal from the Board. In January 2016 the Leader attended a meeting of the Board to provide further clarification about the Council's position in respect of Worcestershire Acute Hospitals Trust being placed in special measures.

TASK GROUP 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 and Scrutiny section.

Evening & Weekend Car Parking Task Group

Membership: Councillors Karen May (Chairman), Margaret Buxton, Malcolm Glass, Sean Shannon and Shirley Webb

Deadline: March 2016

At its meeting held on 24th August 2015 the Overview and Scrutiny Board considered a topic proposal entitled Review of Evening Car Parking which had been submitted by Councillors Karen May and Luke Mallett. The aim of investigation was to assist Officers in evaluating the success of the trial of free evening car parking which had been implemented in February 2015, with the possibility of recommendations being made for future car parking arrangements.

During discussions at that meeting Members were advised that a Task Group review of evening car parking would investigate use of the car parks during the evenings and the impact that this had had on the night time economy. It was envisaged that Members would consult with both local businesses and residents to ascertain the impact that free parking had had on the local economy and whether this free parking provision represented value for money for local tax payers. A review would also explore the potential for alternative parking arrangements to be introduced in the town. Following discussion the Board agreed that a Task Group review of this subject would provide information which could help the Cabinet when reviewing the outcomes of the trial and it was on this basis that Members agreed that the Task Group should be launched. It was also agreed that a report would be brought back to the Board in January 2016 before being presented to the Cabinet at its February 2016 meeting, which would be in time for the final budget setting process to be completed.

The Task Group held its first meeting on 30th September when it discussed how best to carry out its investigations. It quickly became apparent from the work already carried out at the early stages of the investigation that an assessment of the success of the introduction of free evening car parking was difficult to measure and any recommendations would have to be based on assumptions and anecdotal evidence.

This led the Members of the Group to unanimously agree that car parking as a whole needed to be reviewed in order to widen the area of benefit to residents and contribute to economic growth for the local traders and the district as a whole. The Task Group was mindful that part of the regeneration of the Town Centre will impact on car parking provision and believe that it would be prudent to undertake a full review at this time in order to ensure that going forward the Council's car parks meet the needs of both visitors to the Town Centre and the traders.

The Task Group therefore requested, at the Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting on 23rd November, an amendment to its terms of reference together with an extension of the time to complete its work. Following discussion the Board agreed to amend the Task Group's remit to cover Evening and Weekend Car Parking and to extend its timescale for completion to March 2016, with an interim report being produced in January 2016.

The Group made 4 recommendations which were considered by the Board at its March meeting, which cover a number of areas including the need for a car parking strategy to be put in place as soon as possible. Full details of the recommendations and the detailed final report can be found on the Overview and Scrutiny pages of the Council's website.

Preventing Homelessness in Bromsgrove Task Group

Membership: Councillors Chris Bloore (Chairman), Sue Baxter, Brian Cooper, Sean Shannon and Roger Smith

Deadline: September 2016

At its meeting held on 18th January and following a number of presentations and update reports in respect of the Burcot Lodge Emergency Homeless Unit disposal, the Board agreed that a Short Sharp Review should be established to look further into the effects of both the disposal of this unit and the impending changes to the welfare system imposed by central Government.

The Review Group held its first meeting on 25th February and its terms of reference were considered by the Board at its meeting on 29th February 2015. Following the initial meetings, it soon became clear to the Group that this was a complex subject and in order to do it justice it was requested at the March 2016 meetings of the Board that the review be extended to a full Task Group exercise. It will now present its findings and any recommendations at the Board meeting to be held in September 2016 and in the meantime continue to provide verbal updates on the progress of the investigation at future Board meetings.

JOINT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY INVESTIGATIONS

Increasing Physical Activity Joint Scrutiny Task Group

Bromsgrove District Council representative: Councillor June Griffiths (until 13/12/15)

Deadline: March 2016

The Worcestershire County Council's (WCC's) Overview and Scrutiny Performance Board (OSPB) at its meeting on 26th February 2015 discussed the Worcestershire Public Health Annual Report 2014, a theme of which was to increase opportunities for participation in physical activity. This highlighted that "physical activity rates decrease quite steeply after the age of 45"... (although) .. "when comparing with the region and England, Worcestershire participation rates are relatively high". It also noted that "there is fragmentation of responsibility between County, District and national (Sport England) levels."

The County Council was keen to ensure opportunities to access sport and physical activity were available to all, and were interested to find out what impact the 2012 Olympics had had on participation rates.

Following Councillor Griffiths standing down from the Board it was agreed that due to the Task Group's work coming to a conclusion a replacement would not be sought. However, it was requested that the Chairman of the Task Group attend the relevant Board meeting to present the findings of the Group. There has been some delay in the final report being produced, which originally was given as December 2015, and has currently slipped to June 2016. At the time of writing this was still awaited.

PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

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 <http://www.bromsgrove.gov.uk/council/the-council/overview-and-scrutiny.aspx> 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 at <http://www.bromsgrove.gov.uk/council/the-council/overview-and-scrutiny/public-participation.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 Democratic 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
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"ਅੰਗਰੇਜ਼ੀ ਵਿਚ ਮੱਦਦ ਚਾਹੁੰਦੇ ਹੋ?" ਵਰਸੈਸਟਰਸ਼ਾਇਰ ਹੱਬ [HUB] ਨੂੰ ਬਰੋਮਸਗ੍ਰੋ [Bromsgrove] ਵਿਖੇ 01527 881288 'ਤੇ ਟੈਲੀਫੋਨ ਕਰੋ

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