

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

27TH JUNE 2016 AT 6.00 P.M.

PRESENT: Councillors L. C. R. Mallett (Chairman), S. A. Webb (Vice-Chairman), C. Allen-Jones (from Minute Item No. 6/16), C. J. Bloore, S. R. Colella, B. T. Cooper, C.A. Hotham (Substitute), P. Lammas (Substitute), R. D. Smith (Until Minute Item No. 11/16) and P.L. Thomas

Observers: Councillor G. N. Denaro and Councillor K. J. May

Officers: Ms. J. Pickering, Ms L. Jones, Mr D Riley, Ms. A. Scarce and Ms. J. Bayley

1/16 **ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN**

A nomination for the position of Chairman was received in respect of Councillor L. C. R. Mallett.

RESOLVED that Councillor L. C. R. Mallett be nominated as Chairman of the Board for the ensuing municipal year.

2/16 **ELECTION OF VICE CHAIRMAN**

A nomination for the position of Vice Chairman was received in respect of Councillor S. A. Webb.

RESOLVED that Councillor S. A. Webb be appointed Vice Chairman of the Board for the ensuing municipal year.

3/16 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES**

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors S. J. Baxter, M. Glass and C. J. Spencer. The Board was advised that Councillor C. A. Hotham was attending as a substitute for Councillor Baxter and Councillor P. Lammas was attending as a substitute for Councillor Spencer.

4/16 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND WHIPPING ARRANGEMENTS**

During consideration of Minute item 8/16 Councillor B. T. Cooper declared an other disclosable interest as the Council's representative appointed to the Bromsgrove and Redditch branch of the CAB. This declaration was made following reference to close working relationships

between the Council and the CAB to support the local authority's customers.

There were no declarations of any whipping arrangements.

5/16 **TO CONFIRM THE ACCURACY OF THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD HELD ON 25TH APRIL 2016**

The minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board held on 25th April 2016 were submitted.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting held on 25th April 2016 be approved as a correct record.

6/16 **WCC INCREASING PHYSICAL ACTIVITIES IN WORCESTERSHIRE TASK GROUP - FINAL REPORT**

The Overview and Scrutiny Board considered the Joint Increasing Physical Activities in Worcestershire Task Group's final report. Members were advised that the Chairman of the review, Councillor R. Udall, had been unable to attend the meeting due to an urgent appointment in Worcester, though he had offered to attend the subsequent meeting of the Board to present the report. Bromsgrove District Council's representative on the review until December 2015, Councillor J. M. L. A. Griffiths, had also been unavailable to attend the meeting. In their absence Members agreed to note the content of the report.

RESOLVED that the Joint Increasing Physical Activities in Worcestershire Task Group's final report be noted.

7/16 **CABINET RESPONSE TO THE EVENING AND WEEKEND CAR PARKING TASK GROUP FINAL REPORT**

Councillor K. J. May attended the meeting in her capacity as the former Chairman of the Evening and Weekend Car Parking Task Group to answer Members questions on the subject of the review. The review had been completed and the response of Cabinet to the group's proposals had been provided for the Board's consideration. In line with standard practice the Board would monitor progress with the implementation of the group's recommendations on a quarterly basis.

Members were advised that the Council was considering the procurement process needed to arrange for an external expert to provide advice in respect of car parking and the Council's economic priorities. Once an external consultant had been recruited it was anticipated that various Council representatives, including members of the Task Group, would be consulted about future car parking needs and arrangements.

Concerns were raised about changes to parking charges at Barnt Green Railway Station. The Board agreed that this should be discussed further with the newly appointed Town Centres Manager.

RESOLVED that the Cabinet response to the Evening and Weekend Car Parking Task Group's final report be noted.

8/16

MAKING EXPERIENCES COUNT - ANNUAL UPDATE REPORT

The Customer Services Manager presented the Making Experiences Count Annual Update Report for the consideration of the Board. During the delivery of this presentation the following points were highlighted for Members' consideration:

- There had been 32 compliments and 48 complaints about Council services received during quarter 4 of 2015/16.
- There had been a decline in the number of complaints received about Council services during the fourth quarter compared to quarter 3 of 2015/16.
- There had also been 24 MP enquiries during quarter 4 of 2015/16.
- There had been one complaint referred to the Local Government Ombudsman during this period. This related to a planning enforcement issue which had been impacting on a resident's property.
- There had been a decline in the number of face-to-face enquiries in quarter 4 compared to previous quarters. This decline had been anticipated and followed standard patterns during the year.
- As agreed by the Board the previous year Officers were proposing to continue to present an update to the Board about the customer feedback that had been received during the year on an annual basis.
- The data for quarters 1, 2 and 3 would be reported more regularly to Councillors alongside the Members' bulletins.

Following presentation of the report the following points were discussed in further detail:

- The decline in the numbers of customers contacting the Council directly for support, either by phone or in person. The Board was advised that this was partly as a result of new working arrangements which tended to address problems at an early stage.
- The complexity of the cases that continued to be reported directly to the Council by customers.
- The availability of different payment methods that could be used by customers to pay bills and plans to introduce contactless payment methods at Council buildings in due course.
- The role of the Financial Inclusion Team (FIT) and their close working relationships with relevant external agencies such as the Bromsgrove and Redditch branch of the CAB.

- The inclusion of a category entitled “other” amongst the list of demands received by the Council from customers and the areas covered by this category. Members were advised that this covered a range of areas, including general enquiries from the public to clarify information about different subjects unrelated to local government.
- The focus of the report and complaints procedure on monitoring complaints that had been received about Council services.
- The types of issues addressed through MP enquiries and the fact that these often involved obtaining clarification about Council procedures rather than making complaints.
- The changes that had recently been made to the Council’s complaints and compliments systems which would mean that in future MP enquiries would not be included within the data for complaints.
- The inclusion of complaints about Worcestershire Regulatory Services (WRS) within the data.
- The potential for calls made to direct dial lines to be recorded amongst the data. Concerns were raised that by not recording these calls areas of significant concern to the public might not be identified.
- The need for services to report issues reported via direct dial lines to the Customer Service team and the potential IT software challenges that might be encountered.
- The Council’s policy regarding complaints and the ways in which compliance with this policy was monitored.
- The need for deadlines to be met when responding to complaints. Officers confirmed that where deadlines were not met this would be recorded in the annual report to Members.

At the end of these discussions the Board

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

9/16

WRITE OFF OF DEBTS - ANNUAL UPDATE REPORT

The Revenue Services Manager presented the Monitoring of Write Offs Report covering the period April 2015 to March 2016. Details about the debts that had been written off during the period and the procedure that Officers followed to recover those debts had been provided within the report. Members were advised that the levels of write offs fell within the Council’s bad debts provision and compared favourably with performance in the previous financial year.

The Board considered the content of the report in detail and raised a number of specific points about the content:

- The content of the graphs in the report, which had been added at the request of the Board at a previous meeting.

- The amount of correspondence issued in the form of reminders to encourage residents to pay their debts.
- The absence of staff due to sickness during the previous financial year and the impact that this had had on recovery of debts during the period.
- The effect of changes to Council Tax support on customer demand, particularly in respect of clarifying the impact on an individual's circumstances.
- The ability of residents paying 20 per cent Council Tax to meet this requirement and the numbers in this category who were unable to pay. Officers explained that they were unable to provide these figures partly because the IT software used by the team did not enable Officers to isolate this data and partly due to difficulties identifying the causes of an individual's debts without looking at every case in detail.
- The level of debt that had been written off for non domestic rates (NDR) and how this compared to levels that had been written off for Council Tax.
- The difficulty for the Council in terms of recovering unpaid NDR in cases where a company had gone into liquidation. Members were informed that the local authority had to abide by strict legislative requirements in these cases.
- The need for a company that had gone into liquidation to provide the Council with proof of debt.
- The role of Enforcement Officers in recovering debts.
- The work of Officers to recover both NDR and Council Tax debts. The Board was advised that Officers applied equal effort to both areas to recover debts.
- The potential for the Council to work with individual residents to develop a payment plan to pay back debts over time in a manageable way.
- The need for Officers to assess debts and payment arrangements on a case-by-case basis.
- The number of cases that had resulted in a summons to court.
- The areas referred to as "other" in the write off tables for Council Tax and NDR. Members were informed that this covered a range of areas, including cases where it would not be appropriate to pursue the debt due to an individual's health and in cases where the Council had made an error.
- The types of Council error that could arise. Members requested further information on this subject.

Following further discussion Members

RESOLVED that the content of the Write off of Debts Annual Monitoring Update report be noted.

10/16

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORKING GROUPS MEMBERSHIP REPORT

The Chairman noted that at the previous meeting of the Board Members had agreed to establish a Finance and Budget Working Group and a Performance Dashboard Working Group. These two groups would focus on scrutinising the Council's budget and measures dashboard respectively. The membership of the groups needed to be agreed and Members concurred that a maximum of 5 Members, comprising members of the Board, should be appointed. A lead Member would be expected to provide regular verbal updates on the work of the group for the consideration of the Board.

For the Finance and Budget Working Group Members agreed that the following Members should be appointed: Councillors S. R. Colella, B. T. Cooper, L. C. R. Mallett, R. D. Smith and P. L. Thomas.

In respect of the Performance Dashboard Working Group the Board agreed that the following Members should be appointed: Councillors C. Allen-Jones and S. A. Webb. Members requested that Councillors S. J. Baxter and C. J. Spencer be approached after the meeting to find out whether they would be willing to serve as Members of the group.

RESOLVED that

- (1) Councillors S. R. Colella, B. T. Cooper, L. C. R. Mallett, R. D. Smith and P. L. Thomas be appointed to serve on the Finance and Budget Working Group for the ensuing municipal year;
- (2) Councillors C. Allen-Jones and S. A. Webb be appointed to serve on the Performance Dashboard Working Group for the ensuing municipal year; and
- (3) Councillors S. J. Baxter and C. J. Spencer be invited to serve as members of the Performance Dashboard Working Group in 2016/17.

11/16

PLANNING BACKLOG DATA AS AT 31ST MARCH 2016

The Board considered an update on the planning backlog data for the period 1st April 2014 to 31st March 2016. Members noted that as agreed at the previous meeting when this update report had been considered no Officer had attended to present the report. The data would, however, continue to be provided on a quarterly basis for Members' consideration.

Members noted that it would have been useful for a brief explanation to be provided about the reasons why 6 planning applications in the period January to March 2016 had received extensions of time. There was general consensus that in future where extensions had been agreed an explanation should be provided in the report. Members also concurred that it would be useful to invite the Portfolio Holder for Planning Services

and Housing to attend meetings of the Board when these reports were presented to answer any questions from Members.

RESOLVED that the planning backlog data as at 31st March 2016 be noted.

12/16

PREVENTING HOMELESSNESS TASK GROUP - VERBAL UPDATE

The Chairman of the Preventing Homelessness Task Group, Councillor C. J. Bloore, provided an update on the work of the Task Group since the previous meeting of the Board. The Chairman thanked Councillors S. J. Baxter, S. Shannon and R. D. Smith for their hard work on the review and noted that Councillor H. J. Jones had stood down as a member of the group following her appointment as Chairman of the Council.

Members were advised that the group had held a number of meetings, both at Parkside and external venues, and had interviewed a range of witnesses. This included:

- A visit to St Basils and interview with staff.
- A visit to the Basement Project and interview with staff.
- An interview with the Portfolio Holder for Planning Services and Housing alongside relevant Council Officers.
- An interview with representatives of the Bromsgrove and Redditch branch of the CAB.
- An interview with representatives of Fry Housing Trust.

The following meeting of the group would take place later in the week and would provide Members with an opportunity to reflect on progress to date. Members remained on track to report their findings for the Board's consideration in September 2016.

During consideration of this item it was suggested that the group might wish to consult with representatives of Betel of Britain, a drug addiction treatment centre. The Chairman of the group commented that this suggestion could be considered at the following meeting of the group.

13/16

WORCESTERSHIRE HEALTH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - UPDATE

The Council's representative on the Worcestershire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC), Councillor B. T. Cooper, provided a verbal update on the work of the Committee. The Board was advised that during the meeting of the Committee on 27th April there had been 2 main items for discussion:

- The future of Acute Hospital Services - The Clinical Senate had considered proposals for the future of Acute Hospital Services and a final report had been due to be sent through to NHS England in May. Subject to NHS England's approval the proposal would be

placed out to consultation in the autumn and it was anticipated that changes would be implemented early in 2017.

- The quality of Acute Hospital Services - The quality of the Acute Hospital Services had been reviewed following the concerns raised in the Care Quality Commission's (CQC's) inspection report in December 2015. Members were advised that the CQC was scheduled to revisit services in November to check whether any progress had been achieved.

The Board was advised that the next meeting of the Committee would take place at the end of June.

14/16

CABINET WORK PROGRAMME 1ST JULY TO 31ST OCTOBER 2016

The Chairman explained that the Board considered the content of the Cabinet Work Programme at every meeting in order to identify any items that might be suitable for pre-decision scrutiny. When selecting topics Members needed to be mindful of the date when Cabinet was scheduled to receive a report to ensure that sufficient time was available for the Board to consider the matter in advance.

The draft Council Tax Support Scheme 2017/18, scheduled for the consideration of Cabinet on 6th July 2016, was briefly discussed. Members were advised that this would respond to points raised during public consultation.

Members noted the importance of the Efficiency Statement, scheduled for the consideration of Cabinet on 7th September 2016, to the Council's budget position over the following 4 year period. The Board therefore agreed that a presentation on this subject should be provided for Members' consideration on 8th August.

The Chairman noted that in recent months residents had expressed a number of concerns about CCTV. For this reason Members agreed that the Review of CCTV in the District should be subject to pre-scrutiny at the meeting of the Board on 8th August.

The potential for further reports to be presented for the consideration of Cabinet on the subject of membership of the West Midlands Combined Authority was briefly discussed. Members were advised that no reports were listed on the Cabinet Work Programme at present. There was some uncertainty as to whether Bromsgrove District Council could decide to join the combined authority at an earlier date than had previously been anticipated and the Portfolio Holder for Finance, ICT, HR and Enabling Services agreed to share information with Members in respect of the timeframes once it was available.

RESOLVED that subject to incorporating the items detailed in the preamble above into the Overview and Scrutiny Board's Work Programme the content of the Cabinet Work Programme for the period 1st July to 31st October 2016 be noted.

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Board was informed that the Artrix SLA Annual Report was scheduled for consideration on 19th September. In addition, the Chairman requested that a date be identified soon for consideration of the Staff Survey.

Arrangements for Member training in respect of Overview and Scrutiny were discussed during the meeting. Members noted that further training had been requested at the previous meeting of the Board. However, a number of Members suggested that they would struggle to attend on the suggested date of 18th July. Furthermore it was suggested that items for scrutiny could effectively be identified when considering the Board's Work Programme at future meetings. Members therefore agreed not to hold the scheduled Overview and Scrutiny training session in July 2016.

The potential for the Overview and Scrutiny Board to consider the work of Worcestershire Regulatory Services (WRS) was also discussed. Members noted that it was particularly important to hold the shared service to account for performance. Officers explained that the Joint Worcestershire Regulatory Services Board had responsibility for reviewing the work of WRS and considered updates on service performance at every meeting. The Board agreed that the latest performance figures for WRS should be circulated for Members' consideration. The Chairman suggested that any further ideas to review WRS should be outlined in a completed topic proposal form which could be presented for the Board's consideration in due course.

The meeting closed at 7.25 p.m.

Chairman