

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MEETING OF THE CABINET

5TH OCTOBER 2016 AT 6.00 P.M.

PRESENT: Councillors G. N. Denaro (Leader), K.J. May, R. D. Smith and P. J. Whittaker

Observers: Councillor C. J. Bloore and Councillor L. C. R. Mallett

Officers: Mr. K. Dicks, Mrs. S. Hanley, Mrs. C. Felton, Ms. J. Bayley and Ms. A. Scarce

33/15 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

An apology for absence was received from Councillor C. B. Taylor.

34/15 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor R. D. Smith declared an other disclosable interest in respect of Minute Item no. 37/16 as a former Member of the Preventing Homelessness Task Group. Members were advised that, as detailed in the report, he had resigned from the group when he had been appointed to Cabinet and had not been involved in the group's discussions of their final recommendations.

35/15 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 7th September 2016 were submitted.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of Cabinet held on 7th September 2016 be approved as a correct record.

36/15 **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD**

The Leader welcomed the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Board, Councillor L. C. R. Mallett, to the meeting.

The minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board held on 19th September 2016 were submitted.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board held on 19th September 2016 be noted.

**REPORT OF THE TASK GROUP ON PREVENTING HOMELESSNESS
IN BROMSGROVE**

The Leader welcomed Councillor C. J. Bloore, Chairman of the Preventing Homelessness Task Group, to the meeting and invited him to deliver a presentation in respect of the review findings and the group's final recommendations.

Councillor Bloore explained that the review had been launched following the Overview and Scrutiny Board's consideration of a request from Councillor S. Shannon to investigate future changes to Burcot Lodge. Initially a Short, Sharp Review had been established to consider the levels of homelessness within Bromsgrove district but this had been extended into a Task Group investigation once it had been established that the subject was suitable for more detailed scrutiny.

During the course of the investigation Members had gathered evidence from a variety of sources. This included reviewing Council policies, interviews with Council staff and relevant Portfolio Holders, interviewing representatives of key organisations such as Bromsgrove District Housing Trust (BDHT), the CAB and Fry Housing Trust, and visiting Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) bodies that supported young people at risk of homelessness, including St Basils and the Basement Project. The group had analysed a significant amount of information about welfare changes in the country and had discussed the potential impact of these changes on local residents as well as the ways in which Council services could be adapted to best meet the needs of residents who would be affected by these changes.

At the end of the investigation the group had proposed four recommendations. The first of these recommendations, in respect of the introduction of a local authority lettings scheme, addressed the increasing reliance of many people on accommodation within the private rented sector. Cabinet was informed that whilst many residents might be able to afford the monthly rent they could struggle to raise a deposit and meet additional costs required to secure a private tenancy. In some cases residents found it difficult to secure suitable accommodation within the private rented sector due to concerns amongst landlords about their circumstances. A local authority lettings agency could help residents to address these costs and secure accommodation. The group had concluded that further investigation was required from Officers into this matter to ensure that the most appropriate model was adopted in the district.

The second recommendation proposed that the Homelessness Grant should be used for purposes of priority homelessness support. The Cabinet was advised that the grant was not ring fenced. In the past unspent funding from the grant had been returned to balances and the group was keen to avoid this in future.

The third recommendation proposed that the Council should continue to prioritise funding from the Homelessness Grant for offender rehabilitation work and emergency accommodation for young people. Members had considered suggesting that funding should be allocated to particular VCS groups but had concluded that this would not be appropriate due to the challenges facing the sector moving forward.

The final recommendation referred to use of £15,000 which had been set aside at the start of the review in case the group identified any areas requiring funding that could help to address homelessness in the district. The group had concluded that it would be appropriate to allocate this funding to the Essential Living Fund (ELF) as it provided useful assistance to residents who were experiencing financial difficulties that could place them at risk of becoming homeless.

At the end of the presentation Cabinet discussed the content of the report and the group's recommendations. In response to questions from Cabinet Members Councillor Bloore confirmed that the group had considered information about a number of local authority lettings agencies in the country, including schemes managed by Ashford Borough Council and Birmingham City Council.

Cabinet noted that the review had been conducted by a cross party group of Councillors who had investigated the subject of homelessness in extensive detail. Members of the Task Group and the Democratic Services Officers who had supported the review were thanked for their hard work.

The Leader explained that an Executive Response to the report and recommendations would be produced, together with a timeline for the implementation of the recommendations, following consultation with the relevant lead Portfolio Holder. This would be reported for the consideration of the Overview and Scrutiny Board in due course.

RESOLVED that

- (1) Officers should investigate the introduction of a local authority lettings scheme that would help customers to access private rented accommodation. This investigation should take into account working in partnership with Redditch Borough Council. The outcomes of this investigation should be reported for the consideration of the Overview and Scrutiny Board and Cabinet;**
- (2) The Council should commit to use all of the Homeless Grant for the purposes of priority homelessness support;**
- (3) Subject to the Council continuing to receive the Homeless Grant, it should continue to prioritise funding in respect of offender rehabilitation and emergency accommodation for young people, in order for services to remain sustainable within the district; and**

- (4) The £15,000 of funding allocated by the Portfolio Holder be allocated to the Essential Living Fund (ELF) and any surplus be ring fenced for use in the next financial year.**

The meeting closed at 6.20 p.m.

Chairman