

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

31ST OCTOBER 2016 AT 6.00 P.M.

PRESENT: Councillors L. C. R. Mallett (Chairman), S. A. Webb (Vice-Chairman), C. Allen-Jones, S. J. Baxter, S. R. Colella, B. T. Cooper, M. Glass, R. J. Laight, C. J. Spencer, P.L. Thomas and M. Thompson

Observers: Councillor G. N. Denaro

Officers: Ms. J. Pickering, Ms. D. Poole, Mrs B. Talbot, Ms. A. Scarce and Ms. J. Bayley

41/16 **APOLOGIES AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES**

At the start of the meeting all those present observed a minute's silence in memory of Councillor Pete Lammas who sadly passed away in October 2016.

There were no apologies for absence.

42/16 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND WHIPPING ARRANGEMENTS**

There were no declarations of interest nor of any whipping arrangements.

43/16 **MINUTES**

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

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting held on 19th September 2016 be approved as a correct record.

44/16 **SICKNESS ABSENCE UPDATE REPORT**

The Head of Business Transformation and Organisational Development and the Human Resources and Development Manager presented the Sickness Absence Update Report and in so doing highlighted the following areas for Members' consideration:

- The report framework had been amended, as requested the last time the Board had considered the report, to focus on sickness absence rates for Bromsgrove staff only and to provide a breakdown of absences per service area.

- Across all shared services there was a sickness absence rate of 5.76.
- The sickness absence rate for Bromsgrove staff alone was 2.44.
- The sickness absence levels for both Bromsgrove and the shared services were significantly lower than the national average.
- The main causes of sickness absence were listed as “other” and “stress” related.
- The causes of stress related absences could be due to personal circumstances, working conditions or a mixture of the 2 and varied between people.
- The Council had invested in the Employee Assistance programme and staff using the programme could access useful support.
- Sickness absence data was updated on the dashboard on a regular basis.

Following presentation of the report Members discussed a number of points in detail:

- The significant number of causes of sickness absence listed as “other”. The Board was informed that the choice of category for the report was influenced by options available on relevant Council systems.
- The value of identifying sickness absences caused by working conditions.
- The difficulty of reaching conclusions based on monthly data.
- The need to reflect on sickness absence days per person in recognition of the differing sizes of teams across the organisation.
- The differences in rates of sickness absence between departments and the potential causes of this.
- The number of staff listed for Environmental Services. Members were advised that these numbers reflected the Council’s role as host authority for the shared service.
- The difficulties of calculating sickness absence rates per authority in a shared services environment. The Board was advised that staff divided their time between partner organisations as and where required.
- The focus on sickness absence for full time equivalent (fte) staff, taking into account part-time workers and job share arrangements.
- The extent to which the Council was confident that the sickness absence figures provided were an accurate reflection of sickness levels, given the relatively low rate of absences compared to the national average. Officers confirmed that the accuracy of these figures was dependent on compliance within teams with Council policies.
- Plans within the Council to introduce a new electronic system which would make it easier to report sickness absences.
- The length of sickness absence classified as long-term. Members were informed that the Council treated absences of over 28 days as long-term sickness absence.

- The role of the manager in cases of sickness absence. The Board was advised that the employee had to contact their manager on the first and third days. After 7 days had passed the employee and manager would agree a process for maintaining contact, though after a month had passed the manager needed to visit the employee.
- The recording of sickness absence data for auditing purposes.

RESOLVED that future Sickness Absence Update reports provide data across all shared services, excluding Housing Services.

45/16

STAFF SURVEY TOPIC PROPOSAL & POTENTIAL JOINT WORKING REPORT

The Chairman advised that he had attended the meeting of the Redditch Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 25th October to present the Board's proposal to establish a joint review of the staff survey. Councillors S. A. Webb and S. R. Colella had accompanied the Chairman to this meeting and had helped to outline the background to the proposal and to present the terms of reference for the review. Redditch Members had concluded that they would like to participate in the exercise and had appointed 3 Members to the review.

The Board considered the terms of reference and potential timescales for the review. As this would be the first joint scrutiny investigation involving Bromsgrove and Redditch Members only, it was agreed that an initial deadline of 6 months should be set, though this could be amended at a later date if necessary. Following questions from Members it was confirmed that costs would not be shared as Redditch Members were not paid specifically for taking part in Task Groups, though received an allowance for serving on the parent Committee. Meetings would take place in alternate locations and the review would be chaired by a Bromsgrove Member as the exercise had been proposed by the Bromsgrove Overview and Scrutiny Board.

RESOLVED that

- (1) The terms of reference for the Staff Survey Joint Task Group be agreed;
- (2) Councillors S. R. Colella, C. J. Spencer and S. A. Webb be appointed to the Staff Survey Joint Task Group;
- (3) Councillor S. R. Colella be appointed Chairman;
- (4) The review take place over a period of 6 months; and
- (5) The Task Group commence its investigation as soon as possible.

46/16

SOCIAL MEDIA TASK GROUP MEMBERSHIP REPORT

The Chairman explained that the Board needed to consider membership of the Social Media Task Group, following agreement at the previous meeting to launch this investigation. A total of 4 Members had put their names forward including Councillors R. J. Laight, S. Shannon, M.

Thompson and L. Turner. Officers confirmed that Councillor C. Bloore, who had proposed the review, had advised that he would unfortunately be unable to participate in the exercise due to work commitments.

Members noted that a Chairman also needed to be appointed and only Members of the Board could take on this role. Proposals were received for both Councillor R. J. Laight and M. Thompson respectively to be appointed as Chairman. However, Councillor Thompson withdrew his name, confirming that he would be happy for Councillor Laight to be appointed to this position.

RESOLVED that

- (1) The terms of reference of the Social Media Task Group be agreed;
- (2) Councillors R. J. Laight, S. Shannon, M. Thompson and L. Turner be appointed to the Task Group;
- (3) Councillor R. J. Laight be appointed as Chairman;
- (4) The review take place over a period of 6 months; and
- (5) The Task Group commence its investigation as soon as possible.

47/16

PLANNING DELEGATIONS - PROPOSAL FROM FULL COUNCIL

The Chairman advised that this item had first been raised in the form of a Notice of Motion submitted by Councillor P. McDonald, at a meeting of Council on 21st September 2016, which had called upon the Council to create a working party to review delegated powers in relation to planning matters. There had been some concerns about a lack of clarity in respect of the delegated powers and how these were being utilised at a local level. At Council Members had agreed that this matter should be referred to the Overview and Scrutiny Board for further consideration and various options were available to the Board in terms of investigating the matter in further detail.

The Board discussed the topic and noted that there were no detailed terms of reference which might help to clarify the parameters for any investigation of this subject. There was general consensus that further information about the matter would be useful and Members agreed that a presentation should be provided at a future meeting of the Board about Officers' delegated powers for Planning from the Head of Planning and Regeneration. The Portfolio Holder for Planning Services and Strategic Housing, Councillor C. Taylor, and Councillor P. McDonald should also be invited to attend.

RESOLVED that the Head of Planning and Regeneration be invited to deliver a presentation on the subject of Officers' delegated powers for planning at a future meeting of the Board.

48/16

PLANNING BACKLOG DATA TO 30TH SEPTEMBER 2016

The Board considered the latest update regarding the Planning backlog data for the period up to 30th September 2016. Members noted that the

report covered a rolling 2 year period and that the data had to be gathered on a quarterly basis for reporting to the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG).

There was general consensus that it was important for the Board to continue to monitor the Council's performance in respect of the Planning backlog to ensure that problems which had resulted in the designation status for the service in the past did not occur again. However, Members agreed that the frequency of these reports could be reduced from quarterly to biannual updates.

RESOLVED that in future the Planning Backlog Data monitoring update reports be reported for the consideration of the Board on a biannual basis.

49/16

QUARTERLY RECOMMENDATION TRACKER

The Board was advised that the Preventing Homelessness Task Group's recommendations had been included on the update, though the formal response from the Cabinet was not due to be considered until November. Members were also informed that Councillor K. May had asked to attend a meeting of the Board in January 2017 to provide an update on progress in respect of the recommendations that had been made by the Evening and Weekend Car Parking Task Group.

50/16

POTENTIAL TOPIC FOR FURTHER INVESTIGATION - PRIMARY HEALTH CHILD CARE

Councillor S. R. Colella informed Members that he felt the subject of proposed changes to health community services and primary care access across Bromsgrove in the NHS was a suitable subject for further scrutiny. In recent months Health Visitors in Worcestershire had been served with notice that changes would be made to the service in order to achieve efficiency savings. As a result of these changes it was possible that Health Visitors' working hours would be reduced to a 3 day week with the further 2 days redeployed to address other work commitments. There was also the possibility that a significant number of Health Visitors would be made redundant as a result of service changes. These changes would potentially impact on local service provision and could create difficulties for patients living within the district, in terms of distances of travel to access services.

A scrutiny investigation of this subject would help Members to appreciate the potential implications of service changes for patients. However, Members noted that the subject could also be referred to the Worcestershire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC) or to the Worcestershire Health and Wellbeing Board for discussion.

RESOLVED that Councillor B. T. Cooper raise the subject of changes to health community services and primary care access at a forthcoming meeting of the Worcestershire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

51/16

WORCESTERSHIRE HEALTH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - UPDATE

Councillor B. T. Cooper, the Council's representative on the Worcestershire HOSC, explained that he had been unable to attend the last meeting of the Committee. However, the minutes from this meeting had been attached for Members' consideration. These minutes demonstrated that there had been two main items on the agenda for consideration at the meeting:

- The local scrutiny approach to the consultation on the future plans for Worcestershire Acute Hospital NHS Trust services - Consideration had been given during the meeting to a proposal to scrutinise this matter jointly with neighbouring HOSCs in Birmingham and Herefordshire. However, Worcestershire HOSC had decided to review this matter separately.
- Future of Acute Hospital Services in Worcestershire.

52/16

CABINET WORK PROGRAMME

Members considered the Cabinet Leader's Work Programme for the period 1st November 2016 to 28th February 2017. During consideration of this item the Chairman noted that the Board was already scheduled to pre-scrutinise the Review of CCTV in the District, due to be considered by the Cabinet on 7th December. The Finance and Budget Working Group would pre-scrutinise the Council's proposed fees and charges for 2017/18 on behalf of the Board and report any recommendations where relevant.

Reference was also made to the Bromsgrove District Local Plan, scheduled for consideration by the Cabinet on 4th January 2017. It was clarified that this item would entail provision of an update on feedback from the Planning Inspector regarding Local Plan No. 4 and did not relate to the Council's Plan. Members interested in contributing to the debate about the Council Plan were urged by the Chairman to attend the Cabinet meeting on 2nd November when this item would be considered in detail.

53/16

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD WORK PROGRAMME

Members received a number of updates during consideration of this item.

- a) Finance and Budget Working Group – Chairman, Councillor L. C. R. Mallett

Councillor Mallett explained that the Working Group had been holding frequent meetings during which a range of budgetary

issues had been discussed. This included consideration of the Council's borrowing costs and the asset register which had revealed that the Council had an interest in over 100 properties. The Working Group had discovered that the Council had a 30 per cent investment in some affordable housing with occupiers having mortgages on the remaining 70 per cent. Limited benefits to the Council had been identified from ownership of these assets and Officers had therefore been asked to investigate this matter further.

At future meetings of the Working Group Members would consider financial regulations and proposals from Heads of Service in respect of the Capital Programme. The Working Group would also be monitoring the outcomes of the Efficiency Statement.

At the following meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board a report detailing the Working Group's recommendations to date and the evidence basis for these recommendations would be presented for Members' consideration.

b) Measures Dashboard Working Group – Chairman, Councillor S. A. Webb

Councillor Webb advised that Members of the Working Group did not yet have access to the dashboard on their iPads. This was causing delays for the Working Group. Officers in the ICT Team had been contacted about this problem and had advised that providers of the Good Software to the Council's iPads were working to resolve this issue. However, no estimate had been provided for the timeframes involved in completing this work. Consequently the Board agreed that the Working Group's meetings should be postponed until Members could access the dashboard on their iPads. The Board requested that Members' concerns about the delays and limited access to the dashboard should be conveyed to the Head of Business Transformation and Organisational Development.

c) Overview and Scrutiny Board - Work Programme

Members were advised that pre-scrutiny of the Review of CCTV in the District would be the main item on the agenda for the Board's consideration in November. An agreement was reached that the Planning delegations item, discussed earlier in the meeting, should be scheduled for consideration at the meeting of the Board in December.

The meeting closed at 7.10 p.m.

Chairman