

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

28TH NOVEMBER 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, J. M. L. A. Griffiths (Substitute), R. J. Laight and M. Thompson

Observers: Councillors K. J. May and C. B. Taylor

Officers: Ms. J. Pickering, Ms. A. Scarce and Ms. J. Bayley

54/16 **APOLOGIES AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES**

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors C. J. Spencer and P. L. Thomas and it was confirmed that Councillor J. M. L. A. Griffiths was attending as a substitute for Councillor Spencer.

55/16 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND WHIPPING ARRANGEMENTS**

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

56/16 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board held on Monday 31st October 2016 were submitted.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board held on 31st October 2016 be approved as a correct record.

57/16 **FINANCE AND BUDGET WORKING GROUP - REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Chairman presented the report and explained that it outlined the work of the Finance and Budget Scrutiny Working Group to date and contained a number of recommendations. These meetings had also been attended by the Executive Director of Finance and Corporate Resources as well as the Leader of the Council.

During the Group's meetings the following areas had been considered:

- The Council's Efficiency Plan. The Government had recently confirmed that the contents of the Council's Efficiency Plan had been approved.
- The reserves and capital programme.

- The Council's asset register. During discussions Members had discovered that there were a number of low cost properties in which the local authority had a share.
- Fees and charges 2017/18.
- An initial investigation of budget savings. The Chairman advised that this would become an increasingly significant focus of the group in the build up to the budget setting process in February.

The Board was informed that the Government's approval of the Council's Efficiency Plan provided some certainty in respect of the revenue settlement for the Council. However, uncertainty remained about the future arrangements for provision of the New Homes Bonus and Business Rates funding to local authorities.

The group had proposed a number of recommendations which were designed to have a constructive influence on the Council's budget setting process. This included a proposal for the review of the management structure, which had been raised in the Efficiency Plan, to be brought forward in order to achieve savings at an earlier date. The group was also suggesting that more ambitious savings than had been originally anticipated could be achieved from this review.

At its next meeting the Group would consider a draft report outlining budget savings and pressures as well as an update on the New Homes Bonus.

RECOMMENDED that recommendations (a) to (l), as detailed in the group's report, be considered by Cabinet on 7th December 2017.

58/16

MEASURES DASHBOARD WORKING GROUP - UPDATE

The Chairman of the Measures Dashboard Working Group, Councillor S. A. Webb, explained that Members could now access the dashboard on their iPads. The system operated at a relatively slow speed though it was understood that the ICT team were working to address this problem. Unfortunately Councillor S. J. Baxter was struggling to attend meetings of this group and therefore another volunteer from the Board was urgently required to replace her.

RESOLVED that, subject to identifying a Member to replace Councillor Baxter, the Measures Dashboard Working Group recommence meetings in January 2017.

59/16

CABINET RESPONSE TO THE PREVENTING HOMELESSNESS TASK GROUP REPORT

Councillor C. Taylor, Portfolio Holder for Planning Services and Strategic Housing, presented the Cabinet's response to the Preventing Homelessness Task Group. On behalf of the Cabinet he welcomed the group's findings and thanked the Chairman of the review, Councillor C. Bloore, for his hard work.

Following consideration of the group's report by Cabinet the Council had received notice about a significant reduction in funding for St Basils. This had occurred following a cut to the funding available from Worcestershire County Council (WCC) to St Basils, which would potentially have a negative impact its ability to continue to provide housing to young people who were homeless. Under these circumstances, whilst it was accepted that the proposed allocation of £15,000 to the Essential Living Fund (ELF), as detailed in the Task Group's fourth recommendation, was well intentioned it was suggested that this funding might more appropriately be used to support an organisation with an immediate need for financial assistance.

The purpose of recommendation 4 was subsequently discussed in detail. Members noted that the original intention of this proposal had been to provide financial assistance through the ELF to struggling families and individuals who might otherwise be at risk of becoming homeless rather than to assist those who were already homeless. The group had anticipated that over the next couple of years more people would request support from the ELF once further changes to the Benefits system had been implemented. Members noted that both cases were worthy of support and would benefit vulnerable individuals. However, St Basils and the young people the organisation served were considered to be in more immediate need.

The Board discussed the extent to which the £15,000 would help St Basils address their financial difficulties and whether additional funding would be required to support similar organisations in future as a result of the County Council's funding decisions. Relatively short notice had been provided to St Basils in this case, and it was possible that in future years the organisation would have more time to prepare to obtain funding from alternative sources. Members noted that the Council could also provide ongoing financial assistance to similar organisations if funding for groups that supported young people at risk of homelessness was recognised in the Council's budget as an unavoidable pressure.

Members expressed concerns that funding decisions taken by WCC were resulting in financial implications for Bromsgrove District Council. Whilst the Council had a statutory duty in respect of homelessness WCC had statutory responsibilities in relation to looked after children and it was suggested that many such children might need to access support from organisations such as St Basils. Members therefore concurred that it would be useful for the Leader of the Council to write to WCC to raise their concerns about the financial implications of their funding choices for the Council.

At the end of these discussions the Board

RECOMMENDED that

- (1) The £15,000 referred to in the Preventing Homelessness Task Group's fourth recommendation be reallocated to St Basils to support their ability to continue to provide services in the district in 2017/18;
- (2) Support for housing services for young people at risk of homelessness should be added as an unavoidable pressure for the Council; and
- (3) The Leader of the Council should write to Worcestershire County Council to express concerns about the impact of the County Council's funding decisions at a local level, including on Bromsgrove District Council.

60/16

TASK GROUP UPDATES

The Board was provided with updates on progress in respect of the following Task Group investigations.

- 1) Social Media Task Group – Chairman, Councillor R. J. Laight

The first meeting of the Task Group was due to take place on 30th November. Councillor Laight advised that he would welcome additional Members on the review.

- 2) Staff Survey Joint Scrutiny Task Group – Chairman, Councillor S. R. Colella

Members were informed that the first meeting of the Task Group had taken place at Parkside on 22nd November. During the meeting Members had agreed to take a structured approach to the review and would address the key objectives detailed in the topic proposal form. The investigation would provide a useful opportunity for Members from Bromsgrove District Council and Redditch Borough Council to review the Councils' organisational cultures and to influence working practices across shared services. A number of dates had been identified for future meetings, with the first of these due to take place in Redditch on 7th December.

61/16

WORCESTERSHIRE HEALTH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Council's representative on the Worcestershire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC), Councillor B. T. Cooper, explained that he had been unable to attend the latest meeting of the Committee. Based on the agenda for this meeting he advised that the following items had been discussed:

- The Herefordshire and Worcestershire Sustainability and Transformation Plan.
- An update in respect of Worcestershire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust (WAHT).
- Proposals for change in respect of funding for public health.

At the latest meeting of Council in Bromsgrove the Leader had expressed concerns about the removal of specialist stroke rehabilitation beds from the Princess of Wales Hospital and the move towards concentrating such services in Evesham. Subsequently Councillor Cooper had approached the Chairman of HOSC to request that this item be considered further by the Committee and it was understood that this would be debated at a forthcoming meeting.

During discussions about this item consideration was also given to the potential for the Overview and Scrutiny Board to pre-scrutinise the Herefordshire and Worcestershire Sustainability and Transformation Plan. The plan contained many proposals that would impact on future service delivery and concerns were raised that district Councils had not been consulted effectively in respect of the contents. Members noted that generally health scrutiny was performed by the Worcestershire HOSC on behalf of the district and this might be easier to influence through the Council's representative on that Committee, Councillor B. T. Cooper.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of HOSC held on 16th November 2016 be circulated for the consideration of members of the Board once they have been published.

62/16

CABINET WORK PROGRAMME 1ST DECEMBER TO 31ST MARCH 2017

The Board considered the contents of the Cabinet Leader's Work Programme covering the period 1st December 2016 to 31st March 2017. Members were advised that since the work programme was published the date of the January meeting of Cabinet had been postponed by a week. In addition, the review of CCTV, which had been scheduled for the consideration of Cabinet in December, had been withdrawn since the publication of the work programme, though the Chairman had requested that a report on the subject of CCTV still be presented for the consideration of the Board in December.

During consideration of the work programme Members identified the following items which they agreed would be suitable for pre-scrutiny:

- Review of Economic Priorities.
- The Sport and Physical Activity Strategy.
- Bromsgrove District Local Plan. In connection with this item Members suggested that it would also be useful for the Board to receive an update on progress in respect of the Council's Green Belt Review.

Consideration was also given to pre-scrutinising the Engagement Strategy, which was scheduled to be presented at Cabinet in February 2017. This strategy would address methods for engagement by the Council with local communities. Members noted that to an extent

engagement with communities would also be addressed by the Social Media Task Group and that this strategy could therefore be reviewed as part of that investigation. During discussion of this matter Councillor J.M.L.A Griffiths indicated that she would be interested in participating in the Social Media Task Group exercise and it was agreed that she should be appointed to the review.

Members also discussed future arrangements for the distribution of New Homes Bonus Community Grants and the potential for this to be investigated further by the Board. Officers advised that one of the recommendations in the New Homes Bonus report, due to be considered by Cabinet in December 2016, was proposing a review of the process in the future and it was anticipated that this would lead to improvements in the long-term.

RESOLVED that

- (1) The Overview and Scrutiny Board's Work Programme be amended to include the items from the Cabinet Leader's Work Programme identified as being suitable for pre-scrutiny, as detailed in the preamble above.
- (2) Councillor J.M.L.A Griffiths be appointed to the Social Media Task Group.

63/16

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD WORK PROGRAMME

Officers advised that during the meeting of the Board in December Members would have an opportunity to consider a briefing report on the subject of planning delegations, which had been raised during a recent Council meeting. The Head of Planning and Regeneration would be presenting this report and Councillor P. McDonald had also been invited to attend this meeting because he had submitted a Notice of Motion on this subject at Council.

The meeting closed at 7.05 p.m.

Chairman