

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

22ND AUGUST 2017, AT 6.00 P.M.

PRESENT: Councillors L. C. R. Mallett (Chairman), C. Allen-Jones, C. J. Bloore, S. R. Colella, R. J. Deeming, R. L. Dent, M. Glass, C.A. Hotham, C. J. Spencer, P.L. Thomas and M. Thompson

Observers: Councillor H. J. Jones, Councillor K. J. May and Councillor M. A. Sherrey

Officers: Mrs. S. Hanley, Ms. J. Pickering, Mr. D. Allen, Mr. D. M. Birch, Ms. J. Bayley, Mr. M. Bough, Ms. A. Scarce and Ms C. Welsh

22/17

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors R. J. Laight and S. A. Webb with Councillors R. Deeming and R. Dent attending as substitutes respectively.

23/17

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND WHIPPING ARRANGEMENTS

Councillor C. A. Hotham declared an other disclosable interest in respect of Minute No. 29/17 as his wife was a GP. He left the room for this item and took no part in the debate.

24/17

MINUTES

The minutes of the meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Board held on 24th April and 26th June 2017 were submitted.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Board held on 24th April and 26th June 2017 be approved as correct records.

25/17

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

RESOLVED that under S.100 I of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006, the public be excluded from the meeting for the following matters on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12 (A) of the said Act, as amended:

This paragraph is:

Subject to the “public interest test”, information relating to Paragraph 3 – financial or business affairs.

Minute 26/7 – Burcot Lane Site Redevelopment - Presentation.

26/17

BURCOT LANE SITE REDEVELOPMENT - PRESENTATION

The Board received a presentation on the subject of the redevelopment of the site of the former Council House on Burcot Lane.

[During consideration of this item Members discussed matters that necessitated the disclosure of exempt information. It was therefore agreed to exclude the press and public prior to any debate on the grounds that information would be revealed which relates to financial or business affairs].

27/17

UPDATE IN RESPECT OF COUNCIL'S ECONOMIC PRIORITIES

The Portfolio Holder for Economic Development, the Town Centre and Strategic Partnerships, Councillor May, provided an update in respect of the Council's economic priorities. Following the delivery of a detailed presentation on this subject to Council in July a workshop session had been held during which Council representatives had liaised with representatives of Worcestershire County Council, the Worcestershire LEP, and the Bromsgrove Economic Development Theme Group. A key aim of the workshop had been to encourage more joined up thinking and greater co-operation in respect of economic development in the district. In addition a new strategy, exploring future growth areas, had been commissioned and would report to Cabinet in due course.

During consideration of this item the Executive Director of Finance and Corporate Resources also provided Members with an update in respect of the Investments and Acquisitions Strategy, which was due to be considered by Cabinet and Council in September. This strategy explored the potential to invest in land or buildings for commercial use. The Council would use its borrowing powers to invest in assets, subject to a business case that demonstrated the income that would be generated from the site. The level of risk associated with projects would dictate the value of the investment in the site and would be within the boundary of the District.

Following Councillor May's verbal presentation Members discussed the following matters in detail:

- The redevelopment of Bromsgrove town centre in recent years and the need to ensure that the whole of the high street received support.

- The extent to which redeveloping land for commercial use and renting this to customers represented a change of policy for the Council. The Board was advised that new income streams were important to explore given the challenging financial circumstances facing local government.
- The location of the land that would be purchased for the industrial units. Officers explained that whilst other local authorities were exploring purchasing land throughout the country Bromsgrove District Council would focus on only obtaining land for this purpose in the district.
- The feasibility study that had been commissioned by NWEDR to improve connectivity within Bromsgrove town centre without losing the distinct characteristics of the local economy. This study would also explore the potential to encourage people using Bromsgrove Retail Park to visit the town centre.
- The potential for pop up stores to be introduced in Bromsgrove town centre.
- The extent to which the Council's Economic Strategy remained relevant, in light of changing financial circumstances for the Council and the emerging Neighbourhood Plans and the Green Belt review.
- The focus of the Council on future development and moving forward constructively building on the foundations provided by the Economic Strategy.
- The potential for the Council to work with Worcestershire LEP to help new companies to grow whilst continuing to be based in the district.
- The difficulties involved in encouraging some landowners to make their land available for commercial development rather than as housing.
- The option for Council to use compulsory purchase orders to obtain land in challenging circumstances.
- The potential for the Council to purchase premises on Bromsgrove High Street and to rent these out to local businesses.

At the end of these discussions the Board

RESOLVED that the update be noted.

28/17

STAFF SURVEY JOINT SCRUTINY TASK GROUP - FINAL REPORT

The Chairman of the Staff Survey Joint Scrutiny Task Group, Councillor S. R. Colella, presented the group's final report. In so doing he highlighted the following points for Members' consideration:

- The group had been keen to be proactive and focus on how improvements could be made to future staff consultation arrangements moving forward rather than to reflect back on past practice.

- The group had reviewed the content of the surveys and had noted that the number of questions may have deterred some staff from participating.
- The subject of those questions may have also deterred staff in certain teams from completing surveys as these did not necessarily relate to their work.
- During the review it had become apparent that senior managers were doing a lot of work to address many of the concerns that had been raised in completed staff surveys.
- The group had been keen to demonstrate that Members valued staff and the first proposal, to introduce a lead Councillor for supporting staff, was designed to address this.
- As the review progressed Members had become concerned about the performance management framework for staff and the lack of performance targets/measures. The group's fourth proposal was designed to address this.
- The Chairman thanked Members of the group, from both Bromsgrove and Redditch, who had participated in the review for their hard work. The Democratic Services Officers were also thanked for their support.

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

- The success of the review as the first joint Task Group involving only Members from Bromsgrove District council and Redditch Borough Council.
- The background to the review, including previous discussions about Members' concerns in respect of the survey at earlier meetings of the Board.
- The potential value of a member from the Board acting as lead Councillor for supporting staff.
- The need for this lead member to be appointed at the following meeting of the Board, subject to the proposal receiving Members' support.
- The arrangements in place for issuing a further staff survey, which was due to take place towards the end of 2017.

At the conclusion of these discussions the Board

RESOLVED that

- (a) A member of the Overview and Scrutiny function be appointed to the role of Lead Councillor for Supporting Staff;
- (b) A quarterly update on the Programme Board's Action Plan be received by the Overview and Scrutiny Board;
- (c) The Measures Dashboard Working Group's terms of reference be updated to include an area covering performance management

processes, performance target and objective setting across both authorities. (It is envisaged that this would be achieved through joint meetings being held on a regular basis with Redditch Borough Council's Performance Scrutiny Working Group, subject to the recommendation being resolved by its Overview and Scrutiny Committee).

RECOMMENDED that the Lead Councillor for Supporting Staff and the relevant Portfolio Holder assist in the formation of all future staff surveys and attend staff briefings

29/17

HOSPITAL CAR PARKING CHARGES

The Board considered a referral that had been received from Council to undertake a review of parking charges at hospitals, which had been the subject of a Notice of Motion to Council. Whilst concerns had been raised in the motion regarding the impact of parking charges on patients and their families it was noted that some of the content of the motion was factually incorrect. A number of Members who had recently visited hospitals in the county noted that signs were on display in the car parks and these clearly advised patients and visitors that, after covering the costs of maintaining the car parks, any revenue would be reinvested in hospital services.

Members discussed the subject of hospital car parking charges in further detail and in so doing noted the following:

- Concessionary charges were in place and patients / visitors could reclaim costs in certain circumstances.
- Many residents on low incomes would struggle to pay these charges and as such they might be regarded as unfairly penalising people with financial difficulties.
- Concerns were raised that a private company maintained the charging system on behalf of the Worcestershire Acute Hospital NHS Trust (WAHT) and this company might be generating a profit from charging patients and their families.
- The Council did not have the power to make decisions in respect of the charges levied by the trust for parking at hospitals in the county.
- There was the possibility that this subject might be suitable to refer to the Worcestershire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC) for further investigation.

Members noted that it would be helpful to obtain further information about the charges in place for parking at the hospitals in Worcestershire. This investigation could take into account any concessions that were available and the methods used to advertise these concessions to eligible patients and their visitors.

RESOLVED that Officers investigate charging arrangements for WAHT services, and available concessions, in further detail and report back for the Board's consideration in October.

(During consideration of this item Councillor C. A. Hotham declared an other disclosable interest as his wife was a GP. He left the room for this item and took no part in the debate).

30/17

FINANCE AND BUDGET WORKING GROUP - UPDATE

The Chairman of the Finance and Budget Working Group, Councillor L. C. R. Mallett, provided an update on the work of the group. At the latest meeting Members had considered the allocation of costs for a range of shared services. Based on the information provided a decision had been taken to scrutinise three areas in further detail:

- ICT services
- Land charges
- Transformation
- Shared management costs

Discussions had also been held about staffing costs and the extent to which the division of management costs between the Councils sharing services was appropriate.

31/17

MEASURES DASHBOARD WORKING GROUP - UPDATE

Officers informed the Board that a meeting of this Working Group had not taken place since the last update. However, some progress had been made in respect of Members accessing the Measures Dashboard via their iPads and a trial was currently being undertaken. Further volunteers were sought in order to ensure that this trial was viable before it was rolled out to all Members.

Councillor Spencer confirmed that she had volunteered and after initial problems she was meeting with IT on 23rd August when these problems would be rectified. Councillor Allen-Jones confirmed that he had found it difficult to bring his iPad in at a convenient time, but would make arrangements with officers for this to now take place. Councillor Glass confirmed he was happy to join the trial and Councillor Thompson asked for further information outside of the meeting before agreeing to participate in the trial.

32/17

TASK GROUP UPDATES

The Board received updates in respect of ongoing Task Groups and Short Sharp Reviews.

- a) CCTV Short Sharp Review

The Chairman of the CCTV Short Sharp Review, Councillor Colella, confirmed the Group had unfortunately not been able to convene since the last meeting of the Board, but was due to meeting on 13th September when its investigation would continue.

b) Social Media Task Group

In the absence of the Chairman, Councillor R. J. Laight, Councillor M. Thompson provided an update on the work of the Group. At its most recent meeting it had interviewed the Communications Manager and discussed a number of areas and potential recommendations which the Group could put forward. These included training on the use of social media for Members, the use of social media to promote various Council meetings and a review of the Social Media policy for both staff and Members.

33/17

WCC HEALTH OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Officers confirmed that as Councillor Webb, the Council's representative on the Worcestershire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee had been unable to attend the last meeting the minutes were attached for information only.

34/17

CABINET WORK PROGRAMME

Members were asked to consider whether there were any items on the Cabinet Work Programme which they wished to consider for pre-scrutiny. Officers confirmed that the Industrial Unis Investment Outline Business Case was already on the Work Programme and would be picked up at the next meeting of the Board and Members showed an interest in also have sight of the Centres Strategy.

Officers reminded Members that due to the timing of the Board's meetings it might not be possible to have sight of the full report and that a presentation summarising its content might be an appropriate alternative. This was something which Officers would give consideration to when setting the Calendar of Meetings for 2018/19 with a view to, wherever possible, setting the Board meeting for the Monday prior to Cabinet.

Following further discussion it was agreed that the Commercialisation and Financial Strategy would be considered through the Finance and Budget Working Group, with its comments being fed back to the Board.

35/17

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD WORK PROGRAMME

Members were reminded that the next meeting of the Board would take place on 18th September. Questions were raised as to why the Parking Enforcement item had been delayed until September and concerns were expressed that it was marked as a verbal presentation. Officers confirmed that this would be a briefing paper to be presented by the

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relevant officers, who had been provided with the minutes from the meeting where this had previously been discussed in order to address the concerns raised. Following receipt of that information Members would then be asked to make a decision as to whether they wished to take any further action and investigate the matter further through a task group. The Board had agreed to receive this at its September meeting due to the number of detailed items which had been on the Work Programme for this meeting, which had been arranged specifically to allow pre-scrutiny of those items.

Officers confirmed that the Work Programme would be updated as detailed within the body of these minutes.

The meeting closed at 8.30 p.m.

Chairman