

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MEETING OF THE JOINT OVERVIEW BOARD AND SCRUTINY BOARD

TUESDAY, 2ND DECEMBER 2008 AT 6.00 P.M.

PRESENT: Councillors P. M. McDonald (Chairman), D. L. Pardoe (Vice-Chairman), A. N. Blagg, Mrs. J. M. Boswell (during Minute Nos. 1/08 to 4/08), Mrs. M. Bunker, Miss D. H. Campbell JP, S. R. Colella, Dr. G. H. Lord, S. P. Shannon, C. B. Taylor, C. J. Tidmarsh and L. J. Turner

Invitees: Councillor P. J. Whittaker and Mr. J. Jordan (Democratic Services Manager, Worcestershire County Council)

Observers: Councillor Mrs. C. M. McDonald, Councillor E. J. Murray, Councillor C. R. Scurrall and Councillor C. J. K. Wilson

Officers: Mr. K. Dicks, Mr. T. Beirne, Mr. P. Street, Mr. H. Bennett, Mrs. C. Felton, Ms. J. Pickering, Ms. J. Pitman, Mrs. S. Sellers and Ms. D. McCarthy

1/08 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

No apologies for absence were received.

(At this point in the meeting it was explained that Councillor J. M. Boswell had been appointed as a Member of the Scrutiny Board.)

2/08 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

No declarations of interest or whipping arrangements were made.

3/08 **JOINT COUNTYWIDE FLOODING SCRUTINY REPORT**

The Chairman welcomed Mr. Jordan (Democratic Services Manager from Worcestershire County Council) to the meeting. It was explained that unfortunately, the Task Group Chairman, Councillor M. T. King from Wychavon District Council, was unable to attend.

Members considered the Joint Countywide Report on Flooding in detail. Several comments were made and questions were raised relating to a number of issues including: riparian ownership; enforcement and prosecution; recommendations coming out of the Pitt Review; flash flooding; drainage responsibility; flood defence measures; roles of County Council, District Council and Parish Councils; responsibilities of other agencies such as Severn Trent, Environment Agency and Highways Agency; inconsiderate motorists; emergency planning and sustainability; clearing and maintaining ditches and culverts; role of elected Members; and Gold Command.

The Chairman was particularly interested in the issues surrounding riparian ownership which ranged from householders being unaware they were riparian owners to certain locations where it seemed impossible to establish riparian ownership. It was understood that this was an area which had been difficult for the Task Group to address.

It was explained that the Task Group was conscious not to duplicate the 90 recommendations coming out of the Pitt Review. However, some had been identified and highlighted within the Scrutiny Report to provide a strategic overview and others were picked out to give a 'local flavour'.

It was stated that approximately £7.5m had been spent on remedial work by the County Council but there was a concern that there were many people who were still unable to move back into their own homes following the floods in 2007.

Issues relating to establishing Gold Commands were mentioned. It was understood that it was often difficult to predict the weather, however, it was agreed, that Gold Commands needed to be set up early as possible.

There was a brief discussion on the future role of Councillors and it was suggested that 'Gold' representatives should include an elected Member to enable them to provide community leadership and to help cascade information to local residents.

It was stated that advice was sought from the District Council before ditches or watercourses were cleared. However, it was pointed out that such work was not always necessarily the best solution as it could potentially cause flooding problems elsewhere. Therefore, it was important to ensure such work was co-ordinated. It was also confirmed that enforcement action could be taken by the District Council under the Local Government Act 2000.

Flood defence measures were discussed. With regards to sandbags, it was confirmed that the District Council was not legally responsible to provide sandbags. It was pointed out that sandbags slowed the flow of water rather than prevent water entering a building and there were also issues regarding the length of time sandbags could be used due to water contamination. It was stated that the advice generally given was that it was vital for householders to prepare for such an occurrence (for example taking up carpets, ensuring power points are higher and so on).

There was a concern regarding resource implications and officers stated that they were currently investigating sustainability in relation to drainage engineers in this Council and Redditch Borough Council.

It was mentioned that a flood leaflet had been produced containing relevant information, including an out of hours emergency number, which could be circulated to Members.

In relation to the problem with flood barriers for Upton not being stored locally, it was reported that the Environment Agency was looking into a permanent solution.

It was pointed out that there was a need for effective communication between all agencies and it was stated that it was hoped Worcestershire would be better prepared in the future. It was stated that the Task Group would reconvene for a review in 12 months time.

RESOLVED:

- (a) that the Executive Director – Partnerships and Projects be requested to consider the financial and other implications in relation to the recommendations and report back findings at the Scrutiny Board Meeting on 27th January 2009 and the Overview Board Meeting on 3rd February 2009;
- (b) that, subject to the outcome of (a) above, the Joint Countywide Report on flooding, including recommendations be approved in principle;
- (c) that the Executive Director – Partnerships and Projects be requested to circulate the leaflet produced relating to flooding; and
- (d) that during its review, the Task Group be requested to investigate the possibility of elected Members being appointed as ‘Gold’ representatives to assist them in providing Community Leadership.

RECOMMENDED that the Cabinet be requested to consider the following at its meeting due to be held on 4th February 2009:

- the Joint Countywide Report on flooding;
- the financial and other implications relating to the recommendations being put forward; and
- that the views of the Overview Board and Scrutiny Board be taken into consideration, including (d) above.

4/08 **BUDGET PRESENTATION**

The Head of Financial Services gave a presentation with updated information on the Medium Term Financial Plan (Revenue Budgets) for 2009/10 to 2011/12, including the proposed pressures and savings and the Capital Programme.

It was explained that the Budget linked to the Council’s Priorities, as agreed earlier in the year, and officers had also consulted a small cross section of the public which was called a ‘Budget Jury’.

Several questions were raised during and after the presentation with ensuing discussions. Items raised included: car parking charges; neighbourhood wardens; town centre redevelopment; community transport; CCTV; Street Scene vehicle replacement; chargeable green waste service; collection of Business Rates; spatial project savings; Monitoring Officer investigations; Equality and Diversity Forum bids; Customer Service Centre (CSC); Assistant’s Chief Executive’s team, including Improvement Manager; Basement Project and Foyer Scheme; consultants; and smoke free post.

There was a particular concern regarding the car parking charges. It was understood that the budget proposals suggested car parking charges would not be increased in 2009/10 and 2010/11. However, it was believed that having smaller annual increases at approximately the rate of inflation (2.5%) would be a better option than no increase followed by a high increase in future years. It was also noted that the same view was put forward by the Budget Jury.

With regard to car parking, questions were also raised regarding whether neighbouring areas, such as Kidderminster, had also seen a drop in car parking receipts.

It was explained that it was proposed that Neighbourhood Wardens would be increased by one rather than two posts in the proposed budget.

There was a brief discussion relating to the community transport bid and it was stated that this related to a recommendation put forward by the Public Transport (Buses) Task Group after consulting the Equality and Diversity Forum.

It was noted that there was funding within the Capital Programme to replace CCTV equipment. This led to a brief discussion on the effectiveness of CCTV in other areas and the possibility of removing CCTV equipment in Worcester City. It was believed that in Bromsgrove District, there was evidence to suggest that there had been a significant reduction in anti-social behaviour. However, it was suggested that West Mercia Police benefited from CCTV and therefore could be requested to make a financial contribution.

With regard to Street Scene Vehicle Replacement Programme, there was some concern that it included the green waste collections which would be a chargeable service from 2009/10. Therefore, it was believed that these should be separated as the new annual charge should cover the future cost of the service.

There was some confusion in relation to percentage of funds that were required for green waste, residual and recycling and it was requested that this be clarified. In relation to information on the chargeable green waste service next year, the Board was informed that the Head of Street Scene and Community had called a meeting for the following day to ensure all households in the District received the necessary information. It was suggested that such information should be given to the Parish Councils direct.

It was understood that the Council Tax level had been calculated to be 4.45% increase per annum and it was questioned whether it might be appropriate to raise this to 4.95%.

It was pointed out that the Spatial Project savings had been realised and built into the base budget and therefore had not been included as additional savings.

Officers confirmed that although there were issues with the Dolphin Centre in relation to transferring to a Trust, savings had been made via staff realignment and income from the new fitness suite and it was anticipated that further savings could be made over a 5 year period.

The Chairman questioned the new bids 'Disability Group and Finding a Voice', 'Self Advocacy' and 'Fun Farm Day'. Members were informed that these bids originated from the Equality and Diversity Forum and that the 'Fun Farm Day' bid had since been withdrawn. It was suggested by the Chairman that the County Council could be requested to assist with the relatively small amount of funds required.

It was confirmed that although Worcestershire County Council had withdrawn staffing from the Customer Service Centre, due to 90% of queries relating to the District Council, the funding had been reinvested into the Worcestershire Hub.

There was some confusion between the Basement Project and the Foyer Scheme and it was explained that the Basement Project generally dealt with the prevention of youth homelessness whereas the Foyer Scheme worked with a select group of young people who had been made homeless.

The Executive Director – Partnerships and Projects explained that in relation to the Museum, there were financial implications attached to all closure options.

Questions were raised regarding the new bid for Consultants relating to examination in public (EIP) for 2009/10. The Executive Director – Partnerships and Projects understood Members' concerns and agreed that the typical daily fee of approximately £1000 was very high. However, it was explained that the EIP funds relating to the use of consultants were for plans such as the Core Strategy and the town centre. The relevant legislation dictated that for a plan had to have the necessary Development Plan Document (DPD) status, it must go through an EIP. Nevertheless, officers agreed to investigate this further and report back to the Board.

Finally, the Head of Financial Services was thanked for her informative presentation.

RESOLVED:

- (a) that the Head of Street Scene and Community be requested to provide further information on the percentage of funding required for residual, green waste and recycling elements of the service;
- (b) that the Head of Street Scene and Community be requested to ensure information on the chargeable green waste service is given to the Parish Councils as well as all households within the District;
- (c) that the Executive Director – Partnerships and Projects be requested to investigate further the reasons for the £100K bid for 2009/10 for Consultants in relation to EIP (Examination in Public); and
- (d) that the presentation and report be noted.

RECOMMENDED:

- (a) that a rise in car parking charges, at approximately the rate of inflation, be included in all years for the Medium Term Financial Plan for 2009/10 to 2011/2012 (as supported by the Budget Jury);
- (b) that Worcestershire County Council be approached for funding towards the new bids 'Disability Group and Finding a Voice' and 'Self Advocacy';
- (c) that the £25K bid in 2009/10 to fund an improvement manager for 6 months be withdrawn;
- (d) that West Mercia Police be requested to consider making a financial contribution towards the replacement of CCTV equipment; and
- (e) that the Cabinet consider ensuring all funding relating to the chargeable green waste collections is separate to the funding required for the refuse and recycling collection service.

5/08

RECOMMENDATION TRACKER REVIEW

Consideration was given to the report relating to reviewing the existing arrangements in place to monitor Cabinet approved recommendations from Overview and Scrutiny investigations.

RESOLVED that the Overview and Scrutiny recommendations continue to be monitored by the relevant Board using the existing format on a quarterly basis.

The meeting closed at 8.35 p.m.

Chairman