

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

21ST OCTOBER 2019, AT 6.00 P.M.

PRESENT: Councillors M. Thompson (Chairman), J. Till (Vice-Chairman),
R. J. Deeming, S. P. Douglas, M. Glass, C.A. Hotham, R. J. Hunter,
A. D. Kriss and C. J. Spencer

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

Observers: Councillor G. Denaro and Mr. G. Anderson (BDHT)

38/19

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor A Beaumont.

Councillor M. Thompson as Chairman took the opportunity to explain to Members that he had resigned from the Labour Group and was now a Member of the Bromsgrove Alliance. For the time being Councillor Colella had stood down from the Overview and Scrutiny Board to allow Councillor Thompson to take his place and he hoped that everyone would be in agreement to him (Councillor Thompson) continuing as Chairman of the Board.

All Members were supportive of Councillor Thompson continuing in his role as Chairman of both the Overview and Scrutiny Board and the Finance and Budget Working Group.

Councillor Thompson also took the opportunity to advise Members that following this change Councillor Douglas would no longer be a Member of the Board. He thanked her for her hard work and involvement in the short time she had been on the Board.

39/19

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND WHIPPING ARRANGEMENTS

Councillor R. Hunter wished it to be noted that he worked for a registered housing provider, but did not believe that he had a pecuniary interest and officers confirmed that he would not need to leave the room in respect of Minute No 41/19.

40/19

MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny board held on 2nd September 2019 were submitted for Members' consideration.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board held on 2nd September be approved as an accurate record.

41/19

BDHT - CUSTOMER SERVICE REQUESTS

The Chairman welcomed Graeme Anderson, Director of Housing and Communities at BDHT to the meeting. Members were reminded that Mr Anderson had been invited to the meeting in order to share best practice in respect of customer service and in particular how BDHT dealt with and logged service requests.

Mr Anderson gave a short presentation (attached at Appendix 1) which covered the following areas:

- Background information on the work of BDHT.
- Customer Care Culture and how customer satisfaction was its primary measure and the need to empower the workforce.
- The Trust Equation – Credibility + Reliability + Emotion = Trust.
- Customer Care Systems in place together with Customer Relationship Management (CRM) and levels of priority and associated timescales. CRM performance was a key performance indicator and reported at Executive level.
- Customer Care Lessons – the importance of happy people was vital and the importance of process and procedure and knowing when to go outside of them. Put trust in your staff to do a great job and continual progression were key elements of this process.

Mr Anderson also provided information on the “My BDHT” customer portal, which was a self-serve system that customers could log into in order to for example, report ASB, repairs and review rent statements. It was important to remember that this was not the only way to access services and it was an additional service for those who wished to use electronic access, but BDHT were mindful that many of their customers did not have this access or preferred either direct contact or phone contact and these services would always be available for them. It was providing a variety of options to suit the needs of its customers. However, by having this service it freed up staff to deal with more high profile issues.

The Board was also advised that it was important to trust the frontline staff and give them the tools in order to make decisions, whilst ensuring that the right checks and balances were in place.

The Chairman explained that the Board were particular interested in how general enquiries were dealt with, such as repairs and how the Council could work with BDHT to improve the customer experience. It was often the case that customers made the assumption that the Council and BDHT was the same thing and it may be that there was also a way in which Members could work with BDHT. There was already a good

relationship between BDHT and the Council and it was important for this to continue to grow. It appeared that the main problem from the Council's side of things was service requested which currently were not logged on to a particular system and no specific timescale or process was in place to deal with them, as they were very much dependent on the service area each referred to.

Mr Anderson confirmed that they did allocate each request with a reference number; however this was more for officer use than the customer's. The customer would be asked for their address and date of birth and this was used to be able to recognise the request in future. BDHT's aim was for straightforward requests to deal with them with them straight away where possible. The more detailed requests would always receive a response saying someone would get back to them. The biggest issue and cause for annoyance amongst customers was when people said they would contact them and did not call back. Mr Anderson advised that each team held weekly meetings and any requests that were more complicated would be discussed at those meetings in order to speed up the decision making process. The Chairman suggested that it would be helpful if what the Council did tied in with the BDHT process. The Executive Director, Finance and Resources confirmed that at the Council there were some areas who had a good system in place which worked well, but there were others which needed improvement.

Following the presentation Members asked a number of questions and discussed the following areas in more detail:

- Concerns around the cladding on some properties – Mr Anderson confirmed that following the Grenfell tragedy all cladding and insulation was safety checked successfully. Although it was confirmed that BDHT did not own any high-rise buildings, the maximum was three storeys.
- Did BDHT employ its own gas and electrical staff – Mr Anderson confirmed that some work had previously been contracted out, but due to poor performance the vast majority of work was now in house, with very little being contracted out.
- The length of the waiting list and the make up of the properties in regards to size and what was most needed.
- The use and numbers of temporary accommodation. Mr Anderson explained that, as Members were aware, BDHT facilitated the homeless contract for the Council. The advantage of this was being able to where ever possible, use rolling stock for this purpose and when possible accommodate people without having to move them on several times. The hostel at Burcot Lane was currently still in use for emergency accommodation.
- How BDHT communicated with its customers. Mr Anderson explained that one to one was always a good way to communicate but it also needed to use electronic updates in order to reach a wider audience more cost effectively. Social media was also becoming a more effective way of reaching a wider

audience. It was acknowledged however that this was a challenge.

Members were reminded, by the Chairman, that the aim of the meeting was to discuss customer service and not the actually work of BDHT and how the Council could learn from the processes that BDHT had in place. It was agreed for service specific requests Members should contact Mr Anderson direct and his details would be circulated outside of the meeting.

Members went on to discussing the following:

- The positive actions that BDHT have taken to support its customers and provide a good service.
- The ratio of earnings to house prices and BDHT's commitment to build properties for social rent and the allocation system.
- Other social housing providers in the District – it was noted that BDHT was the largest but there were others.
- The Home Choice Plus system which allowed customers to monitor their application for housing from any of the organisations.
- Life time homes being available for people and whether this impacted on the number of family homes available. It was questioned whether people could be asked to move to a smaller property when their family grew up for example.

The Chairman thanked Mr Anderson for his time and useful presentation.

42/19

CUSTOMER SERVICES TEAM - CUSTOMER SERVICES REQUESTS

The Executive Director, Finance and Resources reminded Members that at the last meeting the Board had discussed general complaints and compliments, but had requested further information in respect of how the Council dealt with general issues/requests for services, for example a missed bin collection and how these were logged and dealt with. It was appreciated that this was an area for improvement, although some areas were good at responding to this type of enquiry.

Members were provided with some data from a survey which had been carried out which showed levels of customer satisfaction. It was also explained that complaints were dealt with through the Senior Management Team. It was explained that there were a number of issues within the Customer Service Team, which were currently being addressed and it was acknowledged that improvements needed to be made. Work had already begun to be carried out in respect of the culture issues brought up through the staff survey and these have also been picked up in the Council Plan. As Mr Anderson had suggested, in his presentation, happy staff made happy customers. It was therefore important for the Council to work on making the necessary improvements for all concerned.

The Executive Director, Finance and Resources also confirmed that the Council was working on improving the online self-serve offer to customers, which would have a positive impact on freeing up staff to deal with the more complicated enquiries. The Transformation Manager had been carrying out a piece of work with the team looking at its customer base and how best to deal with the varied queries that they received, by working through enquiries in order to establish how best to deal with them.

Members were provided with some data from a survey which had been carried out which showed levels of customer satisfaction. It was also explained that complaints were dealt with through the Senior Management Team. It was noted that work was currently being undertaken to improve customer service across the Council as there are inconsistencies in the way customers are dealt with. In addition, work had already begun to be carried out in respect of the culture issues brought up through the staff survey and these have also been picked up in the Council Plan. As Mr Anderson had suggested, in his presentation, happy staff made happy customers. It was therefore important for the Council to work on making the necessary improvements for all concerned.

Councillor G. Denaro, the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Enabling discussed with Members how he had spent a day “at the front line” in order to get a feel of what staff had to deal with. It was hoped that the new Enterprise Resource Planning System, which had recently been agreed, would be invaluable in giving frontline staff access to a wider network of information and therefore enable them to assist with dealing with issues much more quickly and efficiently.

Members went on to discuss a number of areas in more detail, including:

- The importance of getting back to the customer in a set timescale rather than leaving it open ended or saying as soon as possible.
- Whether there was a prompt for the staff to be able to ask the right questions in order to deal with specific enquiries.
- Whether the calls were being taken by the Hub or if it was this Council’s officers. It was confirmed that it was the Customer Service team and not the Hub..
- Whether the data was published and available to Members – it was noted that previously the Board received a six monthly report in respect of Compliments and Complaints, which allowed them to monitor the situation. The Executive Director, Finance and Resources advised that this was available on the Corporate Measures Dashboard, but not on the Council’s main website.
- A breakdown of the types of enquiries and whether these were by phone, online or in person would be useful.

The Chairman suggested that, as a new system was being developed and a restructure taking place, then it may be useful for the Board to monitor this and request that a further update be received in six months' time. The Executive Director, Finance and Resources agreed and also advised that the comments of Members would be taken on Board in respect of timescales for example when the Customer Pledge document was refreshed.

The use of a reference number for each issue/request was discussed as this was something which was also used at Worcestershire County Council. It was suggested that this would be useful for Members to also be able to assist with queries they received from residents, particularly where they had been contacted when a response had either not been received or was not satisfactory.

RESOLVED that the Overview and Scrutiny Board receive a further update in respect of Customer Service be received in six months time, together with data in respect of Compliments and Complaints.

43/19

REVIEW OF COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME - PRE SCRUTINY

The Executive Director, Finance and Resources presented the report and explained that it would be considered by Cabinet at its meeting on 23rd October. There were no plans to change the scheme this year; however in 2021/22 it was proposed that a full and detailed review be carried out. Background information was provided when Members' were advised that the scheme had commenced in 2013, and that for the first year the Council had provided up to 100% support, a reduction to 80% had then been in place and this was increased to 85% last year. It was noted that Worcestershire County Council (WCC) funded the majority of this and would be concerned if they and to increase it beyond 85% therefore any shortfall, would need to be met by this Council of the overall cost.

The Executive director, Finance and Resources explained that within the team delivering this service, a new structure would be put in place, with the report coming before Members in December, with a full review of the scheme and its administration being undertaken in 2021/22, which would come before Members in due course.

Following presentation of the report Members raised a number of queries including the following, which were discussed in more detail:

- Understanding how the rate was set – it was explained that as the Billing Authority, this Council consulted with all other parties, including WCC and the Policy and Fire Authorities.
- Whether 15% less that the total cost was consistent with other authorities. The Executive Director, Finance and Resources confirmed that a number did not use the global percentage but used other models to reduce their council tax cost.

- Concerns were raised that this was impacting on those members of the community how were already in a financially vulnerable position and whether consideration would be given to giving 100%. More information on that model would be useful for Members to consider. The Executive Director, Finance and Resources explained that the full cost of such a scheme would need to be funded by this Council and therefore full costing would need to be drawn up before this would be considered. It was also confirmed that WCC would need to be involved in any decision made in respect of this.
- Members agreed they would be interested to see a business case in respect of such a scheme. It was confirmed that this would not be possible for 2020/21 but could be worked on for 2021/22.
- It would also be useful to have within that report an idea of the schemes for other authorities.

RECOMMENDED that a business case be brought forward for 2021/22 to include 100% Council Tax support.

RESOLVED that the Council Tax Support Scheme for 2020/21 be noted.

44/19

QUARTERLY RECOMMENDATION TRACKER

Officers explained that this document presented to the Board at regular intervals and its aim was for the Board to be able to monitor recommendations which it had made, with updates from officers in respect of the implementation of those recommendations.

It was confirmed that those items which were marked as green were completed and would be removed from the Tracker following the meeting. Members discussed the following items in more detail:

- Bromsgrove Sporting Football Club Task Group – it was confirmed that the Group hoped to have its report and recommendations ready for submission to the Board at its January meeting.
- Development at Burcot Lane Business Case – Councillor G. Denaro advised Members that this was currently with Homes England and was beginning to move forward after a number of delays, all Members had recently been emailed with an updated.
- Road Safety Around Schools Task Group – Members asked that in respect of recommendation 3 Members be provided with the contact details as stated. Particularly as since the recommendation was agreed there was a number of new Members who would not have received this.
- Road Safety Around Schools Task Group – the use of zig zag lines which were currently not enforceable in Bromsgrove. It was understood that Worcestershire County Council (WCC) had put these in place without the appropriate legal process being carried out. Members suggested that it would be helpful for them to have a list of those that were not enforceable and for WCC to

be lobbied to resolve this matter. Members also debated whether the cost of the mobile CCTV would be cost effective.

RESOLVED that the Recommendation Tracker be noted and updated by officers as detailed in the preamble above.

45/19

FINANCE AND BUDGET WORKING GROUP - UPDATE

Councillor M. Thompson as Chairman of the Working Group advised that it had held a training and work programme planning session, which had been most helpful. It now had a number of meetings booked in until the end of the year in order to consider a number of reports, including fees and charges.

46/19

TASK GROUP UPDATES

Bromsgrove Sporting Football Club Task Group

Councillor Thompson, as Chairman of the Task Group, advised Members that the Group had held 2 meetings since the last update and have interviewed representatives from Bromsgrove Sporting. There were a number of potential recommendations from the Task Group's investigation to date and the Executive Director, Finance and Resources had been tasked with carrying out a piece of work with the interim Head of Leisure Services and reporting back to the Task Group at its meeting planned for 12th December. It was therefore hoped that the Task Group's final report would come before the Board's January meeting.

47/19

WORCESTERSHIRE HEALTH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - UPDATE

Councillor J. Till, the Council's representative on the Worcestershire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC) explained that, unfortunately, she had been unable to attend its most recent meeting, which had discussed dental services throughout the County. Officers therefore confirmed that they would circulate the minutes of the meeting to Members for information.

48/19

CABINET WORK PROGRAMME

It was noted that a number of items on the Cabinet Leader's Work Programme were already included in the Board's Work Programme. It was further noted that a number of these had, yet again, slipped back, which was proving problematic for the Board to set its own work programme.

There were a number of financial reports, which would be considered by the Finance and Budget Working Group, including Fees and Charges.

RESOLVED that the Cabinet Leader's Work Programme 1st November 2019 to 29th February 2020 be noted.

49/19

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD WORK PROGRAMME

Officers highlighted to Members that there were a number of items, which should have been considered at this meeting, but as previously explained under the Cabinet Leader's Work Programme item, these had slipped and therefore had a knock on effect on the Board's Work Programme.

The Work Programme would be amended accordingly and concerns were raised with Councillor Denaro that the constant movement of items had a detrimental impact on the work of the Board. A number of items would again have to be moved from the December meeting in order to accommodate items from the Cabinet Leader's Work Programme.

Officers reminded Members that an extra meeting had been planned for November, which would be devoted to the scrutiny of the Crime and Disorder Partnership. This was a statutory requirement and in order for Members to get the best out of the subject they were asked to let officers know of any particular areas they wished to discuss in detail. As requested officers had also asked the Community Safety Manager to invite partners to attend that meeting, however Members were reminded that their role was to scrutinise the work of the Partnership as a whole and not individual partner organisations. As there were a number of new Members on the Board officers agreed to provide copies of the last report considered by the Board together with minutes of the meeting in order for them to understand better the subject that they were scrutinising.

RESOLVED that subject to the preamble above, the Overview and Scrutiny Board's Work Programme be noted.

Appendix 1

The meeting closed at 7.40 p.m.

Chairman