

**BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**MEETING OF THE SCRUTINY BOARD**

**TUESDAY, 27TH JANUARY 2009 AT 6.00 P.M.**

PRESENT: Councillors D. L. Pardoe (Chairman), S. P. Shannon (Vice-Chairman), Mrs. J. M. Boswell, Miss D. H. Campbell JP and C. J. Tidmarsh (during minute nos. 14/08 to 16/08)

Invitees: Councillor Mrs. M. A. Sherrey JP

Observers: Councillor C. R. Scurrall

Officers: Mr. T. Beirne, Mr. P. Street, Mr. M. Bell, Mrs. C. Felton and Ms. D. McCarthy

10/08 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

An apology for absence was received from Councillor C. B. Taylor.

11/08 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

No declarations of interest or whipping arrangements were received.

12/08 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the last meeting of the Scrutiny Board held on 25th November 2008 were received.

**RESOLVED** that the minutes be confirmed as a correct record.

13/08 **MINUTES OF THE JOINT MEETING**

The minutes of the last joint meeting of the Overview Board and Scrutiny Board held on 6th January 2009 were received.

**RESOLVED** that the minutes be noted.

14/08 **CABINET RESPONSE TO REFUSE AND RECYCLING - VFM REPORT**

As the Portfolio Holder for Waste Management and Recycling, Councillor Mrs. M. A. Sherrey presented the Cabinet's response to the findings and recommendations arising from the second scrutiny investigation of the Refuse and Recycling Task Group, which specifically related to Value for Money (VFM). As stated in the Report, the Portfolio Holder reiterated the importance of ensuring that the new co-mingled collection service was "first class" before alternative methods of service delivery were investigated.

There were no questions or comments directly relating to the Cabinet response, however, as the Head of Street Scene and Community, Mr. M. Bell, was present, Members took the opportunity to request an update in relation to the new chargeable green waste service.

Mr. Bell explained that, as expected, the uptake for the green waste had been low initially. However, this had since picked up and the total number of requests for the chargeable green waste service to date was 3445. It was reported that between 150 to 200 requests were being received on a daily basis and, if this pattern continued, it was anticipated that the uptake target would be reached shortly after commencing the new service.

The Board was informed that, as recommended, the feasibility of allowing additional wheelie bins on request for the green waste service would be investigated once the take up was known. It was stated that, in the meantime, officers were compiling a list of any such requests received.

The Chairman mentioned a complaint he had received from the public regarding the submission of a green waste collection request to the Customer Service Centre (CSC). Members were informed that there was a dedicated helpdesk dealing with the green waste collection requests at the CSC and officers were not aware of any complaints. However, officers suggested that Ms. D. Poole, Head of E-Government and Customer Services could be informed.

The charge and cost of the green waste service were also briefly discussed. It was once again explained that it was never the intention that the annual charge would cover the cost of the service. It was also confirmed that although the relative costs of the green waste service could be calculated, in April 2010 when it would be operated separately, officers would be able to provide precise figures showing the exact cost of the green waste service.

Members of the Board expressed their appreciation of the hard work of the refuse and recycling staff.

**RESOLVED:**

- (a) that the Cabinet's response to the Refuse and Recycling VFM Report be noted; and
- (b) that the Head of E-Government and Customer Services be requested to consider if any more can be done to assist customers visiting the CSC who wished to request the chargeable green waste service.

15/08 **JOINT COUNTYWIDE FLOODING REPORT - IMPLICATIONS**

As requested by Overview and Scrutiny Members, the Executive Director – Partnerships and Projects, Mr. P. Street, had compiled a report highlighting the financial and other implications in relation to those recommendations contained within the Joint Countywide Scrutiny Report on Flooding which specifically related to the District Council.

Members went through the recommendations contained within Appendix 1 one by one and there was a detailed discussion.

During the discussions the following points were made:

- Officer training relating to emergency planning (which would include flooding) was being organised and any costs could be met within the existing training budget, if required.
- Flood risk properties could be identified in two ways: (i) via a database listing properties (by postcode) that had already experienced flooding; and (ii) by undertaking flood risk assessments.
- 'Hublets' were established following the floods in July 2007. They were short-term mini hubs set up locally so that local residents were able to access information specifically relating to flooding issues.
- The Emergency Planning Officer was the Executive Director – Partnerships and Projects and the training room at the Council House doubled as the emergency planning room.
- The Emergency Plan, when activated, operated through any emergency, not just flooding.
- It was confirmed that the out-of-hours emergency number could be found in the Together Bromsgrove Council magazine.
- It was anticipated there would be new responsibilities for local authorities following the Pitt Review and new legislation. A draft Floods and Water Bill was expected to be published in the Spring of 2009.
- There were many complex issues surrounding riparian ownership which might be very difficult to overcome.
- There were potentially large financial costs associated with certain recommendations.
- In relation to having suitably qualified drainage officers, other Districts in Worcestershire faced similar difficulties to Bromsgrove and the possibilities of shared services or joint working countywide was an option that would need to be investigated.
- The importance of understanding the legal and financial implications associated with serving enforcement orders on landowners; the Council carrying out the required maintenance and re-charging the land owner(s); and the option of taking legal action to try and recover the debt. The preferred option for officers was to offer advice, guidance and support to riparian owners and enforcement would need to be a last resort due to the associated implications.
- With regard to the recommendation which mentioned having a list of vulnerable people to enable them to be warned if there was a risk of flooding, it was hoped that such a list could be obtained from the Fire and Rescue Service; however, it was possible that due to national security, such a list would not be available.
- Parish Lengthsmen could be part funded by the County Council.
- The recommendations contained within the Joint Countywide Scrutiny Report on Flooding, particularly those relating to Parish Councils, would need to be considered at a Parish Council Forum Meeting.

The Board was informed that a watercourses officer group had been established to ensure the recommendations from the earlier Watercourses Task Group were being progressed. It was suggested that this same officer group could be requested to revise its terms of reference and composition to implement any Cabinet approved recommendations contained within the Joint Countywide Scrutiny Flooding Report.

Mr. Street briefly mentioned that in relation to the recommendations which had come out of the previous Watercourses Task Group investigation, officers had addressed some more effectively than others due to lack of resources. It was pointed out that even the County Council, which had greater resources to deal with such issues, had also found it difficult to address problems relating to watercourses and flooding.

**RESOLVED:**

- (a) that Members note the financial, legal and operational implications associated to those recommendations relating to the District Council contained within the Joint Countywide Scrutiny Flooding Report; and
- (b) that the Board approve the Joint Countywide Scrutiny Report on Flooding and the recommendations contained within it.

**RECOMMENDED:**

- (a) that the Cabinet be requested to approve the recommendations contained within the Joint Countywide Scrutiny Report on Flooding;
- (b) that, in addition, the Cabinet consider and approve the following:
  - (i) that consideration be given to the use of a text messaging service as an additional communication tool to enable the Council to send relevant information/updates to the public in the event of a flood;
  - (ii) that, when next updating any appropriate publication relating to advice on flooding (e.g. 'flooding matters' leaflet or website), the public be reminded that a battery powered radio would be required to enable them to hear radio updates on flooding should utility supplies need to be switched off;
  - (iii) that, although the importance of involving the Parish Councils was understood, Cabinet be requested to consider non-parished areas and the requirement for a single point of contact for those areas;
  - (iv) that the Modern Councillor Programme Steering Group be requested to discuss including emergency planning briefings within the Modern Councillor Programme to ensure all Members had a full understanding of the emergency planning process;
  - (v) that, with regards to the recommendation relating to an inventory of local equipment held by local farmers which could be used in alleviating flooding and drainage problems, this be widened to include local plant hire stores; and
- (c) that the Cabinet request the officers who form the current watercourses officer group to revise its terms of reference and composition in order to address the implications for the District of any Cabinet approved recommendations contained within the Joint Countywide Scrutiny Flooding Report.

16/08 **WORK PROGRAMME**

The Board considered all the items included within its Work Programme.

Members were reminded that if they wished to add any further topics to the Work Programme for the Board to investigate, they could complete a scrutiny proposal form.

**RESOLVED** that the Scrutiny Board's Work Programme be noted and updated as necessary.

The meeting closed at 7.40 p.m.

Chairman