

**BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL**  
**MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD**

**2ND JUNE 2020, AT 6.00 P.M.**

PRESENT: Councillors M. Thompson (Chairman), J. Till (Vice-Chairman),  
A. J. B. Beaumont, C.A. Hotham, R. J. Hunter, A. D. Kriss,  
P. M. McDonald and C. J. Spencer

Observers: Councillor K. May and Councillor G. Denaro

Officers: Ms. J. Pickering, Mr D Riley, Ms. A. Scarce, Mr P. Bailey and  
J Gresham

1/20 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES**

Apologies were received from Cllr. R. Deeming, Cllr. M. Glass and Cllr. S. Colella with Cllr. S. Baxter attending as his substitute.

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2/20 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND WHIPPING ARRANGEMENTS**

Councillor S. Baxter declared a pecuniary interest in respect to Item 12 due to her position with a charitable organisation. Councillor J. Till declared a pecuniary interest in respect to Item 12 due to her position with at a Citizens Advice Bureau. It was decided that Councillor S. Baxter and Councillor J. Till would not need to be exempt from the discussion (see item 4).

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

3/20 **TO CONFIRM THE ACCURACY OF THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD HELD ON 10TH FEBRUARY 2020**

The minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board held on 10th February 2020 were submitted for Members' consideration.

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board held on 10th February 2020 be approved as a true record.

4/20

### **DISCRETIONARY BUSINESS RATES GRANT**

The Chairman welcomed the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Enabling, the Executive Director, Finance and Resources and the Financial Support Manager to the meeting.

The Executive Director, Finance and Resources summarised the report and in particularly noted the following:

- Government initiated this scheme as they recognised that some business were not able to access initial funding.
- The policy to be presented to Overview and Scrutiny, and Cabinet was a Full Council decision which would be made by Urgent Decision due to the tight timescale put in place by Central Government.
- The funding was based on three eligibility criteria and priority of businesses outlined in Government guidelines.
- The funding was limited to £1,013,500.

At this point in the meeting Councillors S. Baxter and J. Till declared an interest in regards to this item. Councillor S. Baxter declared a pecuniary interest due to being a Trustee at a charitable organisation. Councillor J. Till declared a pecuniary interest due to her Council Outside Bodies appointment at the Citizens Advice Bureau. It was decided that Councillor S. Baxter and Councillor J. Till would not need to be exempt from the discussion.

The Financial Support Manager presented the policy to the Board and noted that the Government had prescribed some criteria for the allocation of the grant which was included in the policy. Other than that, the Council had broad discretion to develop the scheme itself. Applications would be assessed in priority order as outlined by Government guidelines. The Council scheme would be advertised on social media channels, websites and through Members.

The following was also noted:

- The anticipated opening of the scheme would be early June 2020 for 14 days.
- If there were any funds that had not been allocated at the end of that period, then the scheme would be reopened.

Members queried with officers whether any businesses that had been awarded any previous small business grants were also entitled to apply for the Discretionary Business Rates Grant. It was confirmed by the Financial Support Manager that if a business had received funding from the Supporting Small Business Fund or the Retail, Hospitality and Leisure funding they were not entitled to apply. It was clarified further that this was a directive from Government and not a Council decision. This would enable the businesses that missed out on the first round of funding to perhaps receive some sort of award through this fund.

Members discussed the market traders element of the policy and were keen to clarify the proportionality of the funding and that would be awarded to a 'one day a week regular' trader at Bromsgrove Market compared to one who was a 'three day a week regular' trader.

There was a detailed discussion regarding the criteria used in the policy around market traders including the fixed market costs, market rental agreements and licenses and the regularity of trading and the number of pitches occupied. Officers confirmed that as the market was operated by the Council, the Market Manager had been consulted about this part of the policy.

Members queried the timeline of applications and how the funding round would operate. Officers explained that there would only be one funding round and applications would be assessed in priority order. If after that funding round there were still funds available the funding round would be re-opened.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Enabling thanked the Executive Director Finance and Resources and the team for their hard work on a complex scheme.

It was agreed that there would be a recommendation made by the Board that reflected funding be awarded based on the proportion of days of trading at the market.

**RECOMMENDED** that in respect of the market traders the grant be paid based on days of trading and be irrespective of number of pitches occupied.

The Senior Democratic Services Officer introduced the Remote Meeting Protocol to the Board and highlighted the following areas:

- It was vital that attendance at the meeting was made in good time in order to check IT.
- External attendees and presenters were still able to attend and participate in the meeting.
- Etiquette during the meeting including surroundings, other electronic devices and dress code.
- Voting protocols including roll calls, seconds and proposers.
- What to do if technical issues arose.

The Senior Democratic Officer clarified to Members the process that was undertaken in order to get the virtual meetings up and running. It was explained that the Democratic Services team had watched other Councils and understood the possible pitfalls and adopted a protocol that hopefully addressed these prior to commencing virtual meetings.

Members queried some of the processes and officers explained that the reason 'mock' meetings had been carried out was to understand the functionality of Skype prior to the live virtual meetings. It was also explained to Members that there would always be at least two members of the Democratic Services team in attendance – one to facilitate the meeting and one to ensure smooth running of the technical issues and participants.

Councillor S. Baxter expressed that the Planning meeting she had attended on the previous evening had gone very well. This had also been expressed by one of the public speakers who had also been in attendance. She stated that the Remote Meeting Protocol that had been produced was really good and queried if there was a planned review in the future in order to reflect the inevitable changes to future meetings. The Senior Democratic Officer confirmed that the protocol would be regularly reviewed and that it would be put on the Board Work Programme for discussion in three months' time. Councillor Baxter also stated that it was very apparent the amount of work that Democratic Services had done in the background for the Planning meeting, in particular the testing of Skype with Members and the managing of technical issues which had arisen on the night.

The Chairman commented on the possibilities that conducting meetings in a virtual setting could open up and that it would allow greater accessibility for residents to Council meetings. He also expressed that this would be a good opportunity to publicise meetings. The Senior Democratic Officer

said that she would be very happy to contact the Communications Team in order to initiate a piece of work promoting the work of Democratic Services and public Council meetings.

Councillor. R. Hunter commented that it would be a really positive outcome of the pandemic that the Council meetings would become more accessible going forward. A representative from IT Services stated that pre-Lockdown devices were installed in some Committee Rooms in order to start the streaming of meetings via YouTube in the future. The current situation had therefore brought this matter to the forefront and it was hoped that this would continue when Members returned to holding meetings at Parkside.

**RESOLVED** that the Remote Meeting Protocol be noted.

6/20

### **ANNUAL REPORT 2019-2020**

The Chairman thanked Democratic Services Officers for their work alongside him on the Annual Report 2019-2020. It was agreed that this report would be presented at the next Full Council meeting.

**RESOLVED** that the Annual Report 2019-2020 be noted.

7/20

### **WORK PROGRAMME AND FUTURE PLANNING**

The Senior Democratic Officer presented the Overview and Scrutiny Board Work Programme and asked whether Members wished to make any amendments, additions or look at any areas in more detail.

Councillor C. Spencer enquired about whether the Staff Survey and Stress Risk Assessment had been completed as planned. The Executive Director, Finance and Resources stated that she would need to check with the Human Resources Manager for an update.

It was also confirmed that the Remote Meeting Protocol would be added to the Work Programme for the meeting due to take place in three months' time.

Councillor R Hunter queried whether it was appropriate to scrutinise the Council's response to the pandemic, including financial implications and decisions made during the Lockdown. He also asked whether there were any lessons learnt for the future. The Chairman expressed that it might not be an appropriate time at present but thought that it would be useful if officers compiled a summary of changes to Council practice from

Lockdown onwards. Councillor P. McDonald requested that there be a delay to this kind of work in order not to pre-empt a larger piece of scrutiny work that may need to be completed in the future around the impact of decisions that the Council made during the pandemic on businesses in the District and their employees.

There was a detailed discussion regarding the lifting of restrictions and conducting social distancing for businesses up and running on the High Street.

It was agreed that an item regarding Covid-19 be placed on the Work Programme for the October 2020 meeting with the caveat that the item may change or develop prior to that meeting.

**RESOLVED** that subject to the pre-amble above the Overview and Scrutiny Board's Work Programme be noted.

a. **Overview and Scrutiny Board Work Programme**

This was discussed in the previous item.

b. **Cabinet Work Programme**

This was discussed in the previous item.

8/20

**TASK GROUP - UPDATE AND FUTURE MEETINGS**

Councillor R. Hunter confirmed that he thought it would be a good idea to continue with the Review of Flooding Task Group and that it was a perfect opportunity to carry out the meetings online and agreed with Councillor C. Spencer that it really needed to get underway in order to be completed prior to peak flooding time later in the year.

The Terms of Reference for the Flooding Task Group were agreed by Members, however Councillor R. Hunter requested that Members be contacted again to see if there was any further interest in joining the Task Group.

Officers confirmed that meetings for both the Review of the Libraries Service and Review of Flooding Task Groups would take place as soon as possible.

9/20

## **FINANCE AND BUDGET WORKING GROUP - UPDATE AND FUTURE MEETINGS**

Councillor M. Thompson confirmed that there had not been a meeting of the Finance and Budget Working Group since the last meeting. It was confirmed that the Executive Director Finance and Resources and officers would schedule the next meeting as soon as possible.

10/20

## **WORCESTERSHIRE HEALTH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - UPDATE**

Councillor J. Till, the Council's representative on the Worcestershire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC) confirmed that an all-day meeting took place on 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2020 which she attended. Councillor J. Till reported that there were presentations made by the following organisations: -

- West Midlands Ambulance
- Discharge Pathways
- Worcestershire Acute Hospital Trust
- Public Health England
- Worcester Health Watch

Officers reported that Councillor S. Colella had asked, by email in his absence, that Councillor J. Till ask HOSC the following questions: - .

1. What are the full and detailed reasons why Bromsgrove Covid-19 death rates are highest in Worcestershire and c15th in the UK?
2. Could it be confirmed that at the start of the epidemic Worcestershire hospitals were given additional funds depending on the numbers of deaths with a mention of Covid-19 on the death certificates and towards the end funding was based on the reverse i.e. deaths without Covid-19 being recorded and what was this reversal in funding?

Councillor J. Till agreed that she would ask the questions and report back to the Board.

11/20

## **CORPORATE PERFORMANCE WORKING GROUP - UPDATE**

The Chairman confirmed that there had not been a meeting of Corporate Performance Working Group since the last meeting.

Officers confirmed that this group would resume with the same membership and a virtual meeting would take place as soon as possible.

12/20

**TO CONSIDER ANY OTHER BUSINESS, DETAILS OF WHICH HAVE BEEN NOTIFIED TO THE HEAD OF LEGAL, EQUALITIES AND DEMOCRATIC SERVICES PRIOR TO THE COMMENCEMENT OF THE MEETING AND WHICH THE CHAIRMAN, BY REASON OF SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES, CONSIDERS TO BE OF SO URGENT A NATURE THAT IT CANNOT WAIT UNTIL THE NEXT MEETING.**

Cllr. A. Kriss enquired as to whether the Enterprise Resources Planning system (ERP) had been delayed and whether it was possible to visit the Monitoring Centre in order to see the new Closed Circuit TV system that had been installed.

The Executive Director, Finance and Resources confirmed that the ERP system was on track and training had taken place online. However, it was added that there may be an impact given the current situation. She also advised that visiting the Monitoring Centre would not be ideal at present and requested a delay to any planned visits in order to protect the Lifeline and CCTV employees. The Executive Director Finance and Resources undertook to contact the Head of Service for Community Safety and Monitoring Centre Manager for clarification.

The meeting closed at 7.28 p.m.

Chairman