

Bromsgrove District Council **Legal, Equalities & Democratic Services**



Overview and Scrutiny **Annual Report**

2019 - 2020



Bromsgrove
District Council
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OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT 2019-2020

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FOREWORD FROM THE CHAIRMAN

The Overview and Scrutiny Board is a key part of the Council's democratic structure, which plays a pivotal role in supporting the improvement of council run services and operations. The Cabinet and, accordingly, the Council, is dependent on the efficiency and objectivity of the Board. The Board is a non-partisan committee whose members – including those of the ruling party – feel empowered and are encouraged to be a critical friend to the Cabinet. As such, the Cabinet is confident that it can take on its recommendations and suggestions.

The Board has pre-scrutinised a diverse range of reports this municipal year including a new high quality and innovative project to be situated on the old Market Hall Site and a District Council Low Emission Vehicle Strategy. Members were particularly pleased to see exciting innovation and the development of an important and necessary strategy to encourage the wider use of electric vehicles.

Two task groups have been set up this year and will carry out reviews of the following in the forthcoming months:

- Library Services and;
- Prevention of Flooding

Both are in their early stages and I look forward to hearing the outcomes later in the next municipal year.

I have also had the pleasure of chairing the Bromsgrove Sporting Task Group, which put its final report and recommendations to the February meeting of the Board. This came out of a proposal put forward by former Councillor Chris Bloore and although slow to get off the ground I believe it showed how task groups can help support services provided in our community. Further details are provided later in this report.

Finally, I would like to give particular and personal thanks to my predecessor, Councillor Luke Mallett. My belief is that this Overview and Scrutiny Board is a beacon to others – this is of no accolade to me but is due to the talent and time Luke invested as its previous chair in creating a non-partisan, effective committee.

Councillor Michael Thompson

Chairman

INTRODUCTION

We are pleased to present the Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report which outlines our work during 2019-2020 (this covers the municipal year from May 2019 to April 2020) and provides general information on the overview and scrutiny processes at Bromsgrove District Council.

Overview and Scrutiny is a key part of the democratic decision making process in local Councils, where elected Councillors outside of the Cabinet can contribute to shaping Council policy, community well-being and accountability. This is done by reviewing Council services and policies, community issues and key decisions and making recommendations for improvement.

The four key principles of Overview and Scrutiny, as defined by the Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS), the lead charitable organisation supporting Overview and Scrutiny in the country, are:

- Provides a 'critical friend' challenge to executive policy makers and decision-makers.
- Enables the voice and concerns of the public to be heard.
- Is carried out by 'independent minded Members' who lead and own the scrutiny role.
- Drives improvement in public services

The Members of the Board consider these principles when selecting topics to investigate whether it is holding the executive to account, reviewing policies, policy development or scrutiny of external bodies.

MEMBERSHIP (The Board is made up of 11 Members)



**Councillor Michael Thompson
Chairman**



**Councillor Jo-Anne Till
Vice Chairman**



Councillor Andrew Beaumont



Councillor Steve Colella



Councillor Richard Deeming



Cllr Malcolm Glass



Councillor Charles Hotham



Councillor Robert Hunter



Councillor Adrian Kriss



Councillor Peter McDonald



Councillor Caroline Spencer

THE ROLE OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

Overview and Scrutiny is a key part of the Council's political structure and it plays a vital role in improving the services that people of the District use, whether as a resident, employed here or just visiting. It does not just look at the way the Council does things, it can look at anything which affects the lives of people within the District and it allows citizens to have a greater say in Council matters.

Overview and Scrutiny allows Councillors to review and scrutinise decisions, look at existing practices and make recommendations to help ensure the residents of Bromsgrove District receive excellent services. The aim is to ensure Overview and Scrutiny adds value to the Council's decision-making process and makes a positive contribution towards policy development.

The detailed terms of reference and procedure rules for the Overview and Scrutiny Board can be found at Part 5 and Part 12 of the Council's Constitution. The Council's Constitution can be accessed by using the following link.

<http://svmoderngov:9072/ieListMeetings.aspx?CId=329&Year=0> (Please click on the latest date to access the most recent version of the Council's constitution).

Number of Meetings

The Overview and Scrutiny Board try to meet on a monthly basis, during the 2019-20 municipal year a total of 8 meetings were held. This is less than normal and was due to cancellation of the March and April 2020 meetings due to the Covid-19 restrictions which were put in place in March 2020. It is likely that in the forthcoming municipal year the Board will wish to hold additional meetings to take account of this.

Reports Considered by the Board

The Board continues to receive regular updates in order to monitor the progress of recommendations it has made, through the Recommendation Tracker. This contains both recommendations put forward by Task Groups and accepted by the Cabinet, together with recommendations put forward by the Board itself. In respect of Task Groups the Board does, where necessary, receive an update report 12 months following acceptance of its recommendations.

During the course of the year the Board received a number of reports and made a number of recommendations. There has been continued support from the relevant Portfolio Holders this year, with regular attendance from a number of them when a report which relates to their portfolio has been presented to the Board. This has given them an opportunity to hear first-hand the debate and ideas that the Board has put forward. On a number of occasions, whilst the Board has not made any recommendations in respect of an item, it has endorsed and supported recommendations which would be considered by Cabinet at its meeting.

BROMSGROVE MARKET – UPDATE – 10 JUNE 2019

Members received a presentation in respect of Bromsgrove Market and changes made to the market since in-house service delivery was re-introduced in June 2018. The Portfolio Holder also attended in order to get a full flavour of the discussion.

Members discussed the market and raised the following points:

- How did Bromsgrove market compare to other markets in the country?
- Were the occupancy levels comparable to other markets?
- The budgetary position of the market.
- A 'Love Your Market' campaign would be taking place in 2020 to help promote the market locally.
- Special events were planned to take place in the market area.

The Board requested that they receive a further update in respect of the Market in 12 months' time.

SELECT COMMITTEE FINDINGS AND GUIDANCE - 10 JUNE 2019

The new statutory guidance in respect of Overview and Scrutiny was published by the Department of Housing, Communities and Local Government in May 2019. On review of the document by the Board it was found that Overview and Scrutiny in Bromsgrove already complied with the majority of the points detailed within the guidance.

Due to a number of newly elected Members on the Overview and Scrutiny Board the Board decided that the guidance be reconsidered at a meeting later in 2019.

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY - SELECT COMMITTEE FINDINGS AND GOVERNMENT GUIDANCE – 2 DECEMBER 2019

The Select Committee Findings and Government Guidance were scrutinised in December 2019 and Members were satisfied that Bromsgrove District Council already undertook most of the recommendations.

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL LOW EMISSION VEHICLE STRATEGY - PRE-SCRUTINY - 8 JULY 2019

In July, a report was presented to the Board in respect of introducing an Ultra-Low Emissions Vehicle (ULEV) Strategy including a five year action plan. The policy was designed to assist in the development of the necessary infrastructure in light of the changeover to a wider use of electric vehicles. The strategy was welcomed by Members but it was recognised that the challenge for the Council would be to keep up to date with the relevant technology.

ENTERPRISE RESOURCES PLANNING SYSTEM - 8 JULY 2019

The Enterprise Resources Planning System (ERP) update was presented to Members at the meeting held on 8th July 2019. It was explained that the system would be used for both Financial Services and for Human Resources purposes and would be fully implemented within 18 months.

STAFF SURVEY UPDATE – 8 JULY 2019

An update in respect of the actions arising from the work of the Joint Staff Survey Task Group review was presented to Members at the July meeting of the Board.

The review was carried out due to concerns amongst Members that there had been a low rate of responses when the survey had been circulated previously. The Board proposed a number of recommendations which were undertaken by officers in an attempt to address issues raised by staff in the survey.

The next survey was due to be circulated in September, 2019 and an update would be provided to Members at a future meeting. This deadline was moved to later on in 2020 in order to embed some organisational culture change work that was being undertaken across the organisation. The Portfolio Holder was in attendance in order to report back to the Cabinet meeting.

COUNCIL PLAN - PRE SCRUTINY – 2 SEPTEMBER 2019

With the election of new Members for 2019/2023 and a new Leader of the Council, Officers had seen the opportunity to update and refresh the Council Plan including

the Council's Vision, Strategic Purposes and Priorities for 2019/2023. A full review and consultation on the Council Plan would be carried out in 2020.

The previous six Strategic Purposes have been reduced to five and there was now a 'green thread' that runs through the entire plan.

Members of the Board made some recommendations regarding the wording within some of the plan which were taken to Cabinet on 4th September; these recommendations were unfortunately, not approved by Cabinet.

CUSTOMER COMPLAINTS PROTOCOL – 2 SEPTEMBER 2019

Members requested a presentation in regards to the Customer Complaints Protocol at the Council. This had been requested as Members were aware that customers had contacted the Council and had not received a suitable or satisfactory response. Members were keen to understand the process and the timeframes of responses.

The presentation highlighted that the Customer Services Team was working on achieving a more consistent approach to the complaints process.

BDHT - CUSTOMER SERVICE REQUESTS – 21 OCTOBER 2019

Following on from the previous item, a representative from Bromsgrove District Housing Trust (BDHT) was invited to share best practice in respect of customer service and in particular how BDHT dealt with and logged service requests..

Members discussed Customer Care Culture, levels of priority and associated timescales and information regarding on "My BDHT" customer portal, a self-serve system that customers could log into to report ASB, repairs and review rent statements.

In addition to these items the representative from BDHT explained how general enquiries were dealt with, such as repairs. Members were invited to contact the representative from BDHT with any specific issues that had been raised with them by residents in their wards.

BUSINESS RATES RELIEF - SHORT SHARP REVIEW FINAL REPORT – 2 SEPTEMBER 2019

The Business Rates Relief Short Sharp Review report was presented to Members. It was concluded that that it had been a really positive Task Group. It was recommended by the Board that that the Section 151 Officer uses her delegated powers to use the 2018/19 balance for business scheme and reflects this in the allocation for subsequent years. This recommendation was agreed by Cabinet.

CUSTOMER SERVICES TEAM - CUSTOMER SERVICES REQUESTS – 21 OCTOBER 2019

The Executive Director, Finance and Resources presented on how the Council's complaints and compliments were processed. At this meeting it was confirmed that the Council was working on improving the online self-serve offer to customers. Officers carried out a piece of work that looked at how best to deal with the varied queries the Council had to deal with. This was focussed on getting back to the customer in a set timescale

A new system, the Enterprise Resource Planning System (ERP) which was presented to the Board in July 2019 was still under development and therefore it was decided that this item would be monitored and a further update be provided to Members in six months' time.

REVIEW OF COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME - PRE SCRUTINY – 21 OCTOBER 2019

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. It was with this in mind that the Executive Director, Finance and Resources presented the report to the Board. Concerns by Members were raised that proposed changes might impact on members of the community already in a financially vulnerable position. The Board recommended that a business case be brought forward for 2021/22 to include 100% Council Tax support. The Executive Director, Finance and Resources explained that this recommendation could not be taken into account for the year 20/21 but could be considered for 21/22.

SCRUTINY OF THE COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP – 13 NOVEMBER 2019

The Overview and Scrutiny Board have a statutory duty to scrutinise the Community Safety Partnership on an annual basis.

At this meeting the Members were presented with the focus and priorities of the Partnership and the current structure and the plan for 2017-20, which was coming to its conclusion. Members were interested in what funding that had been received for CCTV in the District. Also discussed were key projects such as Nominate a Neighbour Scheme and the Bromsgrove and Redditch School Respect Programme.

RECYCLING, DOG MESS AND LITTER - A CAMPAIGN (PRESENTATION) – 2 DECEMBER 2019

This had been an area which Members were keen to find out more about, following discussions that had taken place at the Board's Training/Work Programme planning event at the beginning of the new municipal, so at the December 2019 meeting a

presentation was given by the Environmental Services Manager along with the Portfolio Holder in connection with the initiatives that are being undertaken to help recycling, dog fouling incidents and litter problems in the District.

There was particular focus on communications to residents including leaflets, tagging for bins and social media campaigns and the need for consistent messaging and enforcement.

HOMELESSNESS GRANT AND FLEXIBLE HOMELESSNESS SUPPORT GRANT AWARDS - PRE-SCRUTINY – 13 JANUARY 2020

The Strategic Housing Manager was welcomed to the meeting in January 2020 to discuss Homelessness funding options that were available in the District. The three funding streams available were the Homelessness Grant Allocation, Flexible Homelessness and the Homelessness Reduction Act New Burdens Funding. The Overview and Scrutiny Board recommended that the following statement be made “that homelessness and rough sleeping are an issue in the District and hope that the Homelessness Grant and Flexible Homelessness Support Grant Awards would help to eradicate homelessness and rough sleeping in the District. The Board was also concerned with the way that homelessness and rough sleepers were only counted on “one night a year” and put forward a recommendation in respect of this. This recommendation was taken to Cabinet however it was discussed that, regardless of whether the count was done on annually or more frequently, numbers of rough sleepers could change on a daily basis.

NORTH WORCESTERSHIRE ECONOMIC GROWTH STRATEGY - PRE-SCRUTINY – 13 JANUARY 2020

The Head of Economic Development and Regeneration - North Worcestershire presented to the Board in regard to the North Worcestershire Economic Growth Strategy report and the key strategic priorities. The Portfolio Holder attended in order to report back to Cabinet and to understand the reasons for any recommendations made by the Board.

It was discussed that there were challenges within the District regarding the disparity between supply and demand of land which had resulted in businesses that would like to move to the area but there was no land available for them to re-locate to in the District. Members felt it was imperative that a priority should be the connectivity between the railway station and Bromsgrove Town Centre in any future plans. There was some concern from the Board that the strategy was very much focussed on Wyre Forest and Redditch and that Bromsgrove may benefit from its own strategy.

MARKET HALL SITE - MEANWHILE USE - PRE-SCRUTINY – 13 JANUARY 2020

This presentation was regarding the Market Hall Site Meanwhile Use. Three options were considered by the Board however option 1 – Bird Box high quality was approved with the caveat that Cabinet reconsider the temporary nature of the project and make it a permanent feature on the Market Hall site. This caveat was presented at Cabinet however was not agreed going forward.

BROMSGROVE SPORTING TASK GROUP - 10 FEBRUARY 2020

The Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Board introduced the draft report and discussed the recommendations. A representative from Bromsgrove Sporting was also present at this meeting. The report and recommendations in the report were to be considered by Cabinet at its meeting on 1st April 2020. However, due to the Covid-19 pandemic this meeting did not go ahead and the recommendations would be considered at the next convenient Cabinet meeting.

STAFF SURVEY UPDATE - 10 FEBRUARY 2020

The Board had previously received an update regarding the Staff Survey in July 2019 and had asked that they receive an update in 6-months' time. The report was presented by the Head of Transformation who updated that the Staff Survey had been delayed until summer 2020 in order to incorporate the culture change programme that was currently being undertaken by the organisation.

Members were advised that the Corporate Dashboard could be accessed by Members should they wish to look at up to date figures. It was clarified by officers that, as well as using data to analyse attendance, staff retention and sickness, a more holistic view was also taken in respect of how staff were feeling and that data did not necessarily give the full picture. It was hoped that the results of the next survey would be available and presented to the Board, following analysis, in October 2020.

It was decided at this meeting that the role of Staff Champion, currently held by Councillor Colella be re-instated. It was also determined that a demonstration on the content and workings of the Corporate Dashboard would be given to Members at a meeting in the near future.

WORCESTERSHIRE HEALTH OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE (HOSC)

The Council's representative on this Committee must be a Member of the Overview and Scrutiny Board and is required to provide the Board with regular updates on the work being carried out.

The Board's representative for the municipal year 2019/2020 was voted as Councillor Jo-Anne Till and provided the Board with regular updates on what was discussed at these meetings. Where appropriate the minutes from a relevant meeting have also been provided for Members' consideration.

During the year Councillor Till highlighted the following areas and responded to questions from Members:

- West Midlands Ambulance Service. The Director of Clinical Commissioning and Service Development provided an update in respect of the service
- An update had been provided on the subject of Worcestershire Acute Hospital Services, specifically for patients who had had strokes
- The proposed merger of the Worcestershire and Herefordshire NHS Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs). Consultation was being undertaken in respect of the potential to merge the CCGs
- Bowel Cancer Screening
- Education on smoking whilst pregnant and carbon monoxide consumption in infants
- Worcestershire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust.

WORKING GROUPS – UPDATE

Background to Working Groups

Following the review of the work of the Board at the April 2016 meeting, a number of areas of improvement were discussed. One of these was its role in scrutinising the budget and the other the role of performance monitoring. It was agreed that for 2016/17 the Board would set up Finance and Budget Working Group and a Measures Dashboard Working Group. This would enable a dedicated group of Members to consider these areas in both more detail and a more timely manner, which would in turn allow them to feed through any recommendations to Cabinet more promptly.

The terms of reference for each Working Group were agreed by the Board. As this was the first time such Groups had been set up, those terms of reference also included details of a quorum and stated that Members must be members of the Overview and Scrutiny Board, together with how recommendations could be made and would be fed back into the main Board.

Finance & Budget Working Group

Membership: Councillors Michael Thompson (Chairman), Councillors S. R. Colella, S. P. Douglas, C. A. Hotham, A. D. Kriss and J. Till

This Group met on seven occasions this year and the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Enabling has attended the majority of meetings, together with the Executive Director, Finance and Resources.

Heads of Service were also invited in order to provide further information on their service areas, particularly in respect of Fees and Charges.

The list below contains some of the reports which the Working Group has considered and an idea of the work that has been carried out:

- Medium Term Financial Plan and Quarterly Monitoring Reports
- Year End Financial Outturn – Capital and Revenue, and Reserves
- Budget Framework Report
- Fees and Charges
- Capital and Revenue Programmes
- Budget Settlement Update Report regarding the Development of Bromsgrove Heat Network
- District Library Service Review

Once again, by being able to consider a number of reports in more detail and prior to their consideration at Cabinet has allowed Members of the Board via the Working Group to play an integral part in the budget setting process.

Corporate Performance Working Group

Membership: Councillors Malcolm Glass (Chairman), Councillors A. J. B. Beaumont and C. J. Spencer

Three Councillors were suggested as members of this group and Members agreed that Councillor M. Glass should be the Chairman of the group. There have been postponements in convening this Group during the municipal year due to the delays in approval of various items including Council Plan strategic purposes, priorities and measures. It is hoped that in the new Municipal Year this group will take a more active role in the work of the Board and consider the data provided on the Council's Corporate Dashboard in more detail.

TASK GROUP INVESTIGATIONS & SHORT, SHARP REVIEWS CARRIED OUT

The detailed final reports of all these investigations can be found on the Council's website within the Overview and Scrutiny section.

Bromsgrove Sporting Task Group

Membership: Councillors M. Thompson, S. Douglas, C. Hotham and R. Hunter

This task group met five times during this municipal year with the Members as stated above. The group had not met in 2018/19 as it had proved difficult to identify a date when all Members were available. When the Group met in September 2019 it was decided that the task group would bring its final report and recommendations to the February 2020 meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board. As part of the process, representatives from Bromsgrove Sporting were interviewed and a piece of work that was being carried out by the Executive Director, Finance and Resources and the interim Head of Leisure services that would feed into the task group.

Business Rates Relief Short Sharp Review

Membership: Councillors S. R. Colella, M. Glass and M. Thompson

Councillor Thompson reported that the Business Rates Relief Short Sharp Review met twice during this municipal year and outcomes and findings of the review were presented to the Board in September 2019, for consideration. The review was established following the referral of a Motion from Council on the subject funding received by the Council for business rates relief for businesses in order to navigate the costs of the rise in business rates. The recommendation put forward by the Group was accepted by Cabinet.

Topic Proposal – Worcestershire County Council Local Transport Plan

This topic proposal was presented by Councillor Colella and detailed the Worcestershire Local Transport Plan and the effect of the Worcestershire County Council Local Transport Plan upon the Bromsgrove District. A Task Group was not established in regards to this Topic Proposal, but the topic would remain on the Board's Work Programme.

Topic Proposal – Impact of Library Service Changes Topic Proposal and Task Group

Councillor S. Colella presented a topic proposal which detailed the Impact of Library Service Changes before the end of the consultation period at Worcestershire County Council. The aim of the task group would be to review the outcome of the consultation and the implications for Library services across the district of Bromsgrove. A Task Group was established and that Councillor Colella appointed as Chairman of the Group. The first meeting took place on 11th March 2020.

The membership of the group would be as follows:

Councillors S. Colella (Chairman) A. Kriss, P. McDonald, J. King, S. Douglas and M. Middleton

Topic Proposal - Flooding Review

Councillor Robert Hunter presented a topic proposal in respect of a Review of Services to Prevent Flooding. He explained that due to the recent flooding in the District residents had become increasingly concerned. The task group was established and Members canvassed to establish membership. Councillor R. Hunter was appointed as Chairman. Following the Covid-19 pandemic there was unfortunately a delay in the taking this further, but it was anticipated that the setting up of the Task Group would take place as soon as practicably possible.

PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

Unfortunately due to the Covid-19 pandemic the Board were unable to meet in March or April. It was however hoped that when the Board do next meet they will consider the work of the previous year and look at any areas where improvements can be made moving forward.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Overview and Scrutiny Board Meetings

Overview and Scrutiny Board meetings are open to the public. To find out more visit our website at <http://www.bromsgrove.gov.uk/council/the-council/overview-and-scrutiny.aspx> or telephone 01527 881288 and ask to speak to the Democratic Services Officer.

Public Involvement

If you would like to have your say on issues being considered by Overview and Scrutiny or to suggest a topic for consideration you can email scrutiny@bromsgrove.gov.uk or complete the form on the Council's website at <http://www.bromsgrove.gov.uk/council/the-council/overview-and-scrutiny/public-participation.aspx>

Giving Evidence

Members of the public or organisations with a special interest or knowledge about a particular topic being considered by Overview and Scrutiny can put forward evidence to a Committee or appear as a witness to give evidence for an investigation. If you think you or your organisation might be able to participate in an issue currently under review, please contact us.

If you have a personal issue with a Council service you may find it more useful to contact your local ward Councillor who can help you decide the best way to take it forward.

Contact Overview and Scrutiny

If you would like to find out more about any aspect of the Overview and Scrutiny Board then you can email scrutiny@bromsgrove.gov.uk or telephone 01527 881288 and ask to speak to the Democratic Services Officer.

Overview and Scrutiny

Legal, Equalities and Democratic Services

Bromsgrove District Council

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