

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

29TH MARCH 2021, AT 6.00 P.M.

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

Observers: Cllr. K. May, Cllr. G. Denaro, Cllr. M. Sherrey and Cllr P. Thomas

Officers: Mr. K. Dicks, Ms. D Poole, Ms. B. Talbot, Mr. M. Bough, Mrs. J. Gresham and Ms K. Somers

82/20

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES

No apologies for absence were received.

83/20

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND WHIPPING ARRANGEMENTS

Councillor R. Hunter declared a non-pecuniary interest in respect of Item 6, Green Homes Funding, due to his employment with a not-for-profit housing organisation. It was decided that Councillor R. Hunter would not need to be exempt from the discussion (see item 6).

In respect of item 7 - Impact of Libraries Review Task Group - Final Report a general declaration was noted that any Council Member, either at County, District or Parish level where a library was situated would not need to be exempt from the discussion.

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

84/20

TO CONFIRM THE ACCURACY OF THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD HELD ON 15TH FEBRUARY 2021

The minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting held on 15th February 2021 were submitted for Members' consideration.

Councillors S. Baxter and S. Colella confirmed that they were present at the meeting and requested that an amendment to the minutes be made.

The Democratic Services Officer present undertook to make the amendment.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board held on 15th February 2021 be approved as an accurate record.

85/20

STAFF SURVEY

The Head of Transformation & Organisational Development and the Human Resources & Development Manager presented the item in respect of the Staff Survey and in doing so highlighted the following points for Members' consideration:

- The report had been provided in order to update Members in respect of the Staff Survey and in particular the impact the Covid-19 pandemic had had on the ways of working in all areas of the Council. The timeline for the Staff Survey had inevitably changed due to the pandemic however it was planned that the formal Staff Survey was planned to take place in the future. However, a confirmed date was yet to be determined.
- Although the main Staff Survey had not yet been carried out there had been other surveys undertaken including Working Arrangements Survey, a Communication Survey and a Wellbeing Survey in order to better understand how the staff were coping with working from home arrangements.
- The response to the Working Arrangements survey was encouraging and the response rate was measured at 79%. Members were advised that this was a snapshot in time and was carried out during the height of the first lockdown but that the results were mainly positive. The Human Resources & Development Manager reported that 89% of staff reported that they were clear and had a good understanding of what was expected of them whilst working from home and 44.5% reported that working from home had impacted their work life balance and well-being in a positive way, 40.9% reported it had impacted them in a positive and negative way and only 5.5% indicated that working from home had affected them in a negative way.
- The Caring for the Workforce Audit was carried out in line with the 6 Management Standards from the Health and Safety Executive. It was reported that a 64% return rate was recorded which was

considered a positive response in comparison to the previous Staff Survey which had only had a 54% return rate. Members were informed that the results were being analysed and in doing so would enable greater understanding of what was working well and not so well across all service areas.

Following the presentation of the report the Chairman invited the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Enabling to comment on the report and he explained that there had been a large amount of work carried out in the background to ensure that the changes implemented at a difficult time had not impacted the staff adversely. He further commented that the staff had reacted to the pandemic positively to a huge amount of change.

Members questioned officers regarding the outcomes of the surveys and during detailed discussion the following was highlighted:

- If staff had indicated that they had been negatively impacted by working from home were there any measures in place to mitigate the impact and was support provided if necessary? Officers indicated that it was recognised that there had needed to be some adjustments made in some cases and that all staff had different experiences of working from home and various challenges were faced. Members were assured that it was of paramount importance that all staff were kept safe and had the opportunity to make provisions or work from Council premises if necessary in order to undertake their work effectively during the pandemic and associated lockdown.
- That the results and responses to the survey were to be commended and showed a high level of engagement across the Council from staff.
- The figures provided by officers in the report were queried as they did not total 100%. Officers undertook to check the figures and report back to Members in due course.
- It seemed from the responses contained within the report that there was a high number of managers in relation to other staff that had provided responses to the Working from Home survey. Officers clarified that all managers across all services had access to IT equipment and therefore were able to complete the surveys however not all staff, particularly staff who were not currently working from home including frontline staff, had access to the survey and therefore a larger proportion of responses provided were from managers. In addition to this some Members queried whether these figures

included responses from Redditch Borough Council along with Bromsgrove District Council. It was confirmed that it was difficult to extrapolate the figures for just Bromsgrove District Council as many of the staff worked across both Councils as part of the Shared Service arrangement. Some Members were interested whether it would be possible to identify a member of staff who had highlighted any significant issues within their survey response. Officers advised that as the surveys carried out were confidential it was not appropriate to ask for specific members of staff to confirm their name and location of work as asking for this kind of data might have an impact on the number of responses returned. Members enquired whether it would be possible for future surveys to separate the two Councils responses and officers confirmed that currently it was not possible. Some Members were confident that responses provided were clear and offered a good overview for all staff that working from home who were employed across both Councils.

- Access to IT – Members were interested whether the staff response regarding IT equipment and the capability to work effectively had been highlighted in a significant way in survey responses received. It was also queried as to whether the success of the new IT rollout had been measured in any way. Officers confirmed that there had been no particular issues highlighted and most staff felt that the technology provided was adequately supported. In fact, the response from the survey was that 76.3% of staff reported that they felt supported from a technology perspective. It was highlighted for Members' attention that there may have been intermittent issues with home broadband but that these were not issues that could be controlled by the Council. Officers confirmed that hardware equipment was rolled out very quickly to all those who needed to have access in order to work effectively from home. In addition to this hardware rollout, it was confirmed that the systems e.g., Skype was also available from the very beginning of the lockdown and therefore the Council meetings were able to be resumed in as short a time as possible.
- It might be helpful to carry out a 'temperature check' since the initial survey was carried out in order to continue to understand how staff were feeling and Members were advised that this was being planned in addition to further Working from Home surveys.

After a detailed discussion, Councillor K. May extended her thanks to the officers that had worked so hard during the pandemic in order to ensure that Council services were carried out with as little disruption as possible in such difficult circumstances.

RESOLVED that the Staff Survey report be noted.

86/20

MILEAGE - NOTICE OF MOTION

The Chairman invited Councillor P. McDonald to introduce the item regarding the Mileage Notice of Motion which had been referred from Full Council for consideration by the Board. During his presentation he indicated that he was unhappy with the figures that had been provided within the report and reported that they differed from figures that had been provided to him previously.

The Human Resources & Development Manager confirmed that the figures contained in the report had been provided from the Payroll system and undertook to clarify the data that had been provided. It was highlighted to Members that mileage costs had decreased during the pandemic, but that mileage was still being claimed due to the nature of some of the services and by staff who were unable to solely work from home.

The Chairman invited Councillor G. Denaro in his role as Portfolio Holder for Finance and Enabling to comment on the report and he expressed that he had been pleased that the costs for mileage had decreased but was concerned in respect of the information that Councillor P. McDonald had previously received, which needed to be confirmed prior to any further discussion.

It was questioned whether the figures that had been provided to the Board by Officers as part of the main report were a combination of both Bromsgrove District and Redditch Borough Councils' mileage claims. Members decided, after detailed discussion, that in order to fully understand the discrepancies between the two sets of figures that the item be deferred to a future meeting for Members' further consideration. It was requested that in addition to an update of the figures that further context, detail and a breakdown be provided regarding the mileage policy.

RESOLVED that the Mileage – Notice of Motion item be deferred to a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board early in the new municipal year for further consideration.

87/20

GREEN HOMES FUNDING

The Housing Development & Enabling Manager presented the Green Homes Funding report and in so doing informed Members that the report contained information regarding Phase 2 of the Green Homes Funding allocation which consisted of £476,900 worth of funding. It was reported that the Phase one allocation was currently being processed. The criteria for both phases were virtually the same with the exception that homes with an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) rating of D, E, F and G would also be included. Members were informed that the maximum household income in order to meet the criteria was £30,000 and the allocation for funding could be up to £10,000.

Some Members queried whether there had been a reduction to the Green Homes Funding as per a Central Government announcement made earlier that day. However, Officers were unsure and undertook to find out if there had been any changes and circulate any information to Members.

At this point in the meeting there was a slight pause due to loss of connection for the live streamer. The Chairman was immediately informed, and the debate was paused until connection was re-established.

Members were interested in how much discretion there was in respect of the allocation of funding and whether there were any specific locations within the District that would be likely to receive funding. It was confirmed that initially the homes that would be prioritised were Park Homes and these had already been identified by Officers. It was agreed that Officers would provide some clarification on the number of houses that could potentially benefit from Green Homes Funding in the District.

Councillor R. Hunter stated that he understood there was a deadline on 15th April 2021 to agree the funding by Cabinet however, he was keen that the Climate Change Working Group be involved in consideration of allocations alongside the Portfolio Holder for Environmental Services.

During a lengthy discussion, the following was highlighted by Members:

- Due to the tight deadlines and prescriptive requirements of the Green Homes funding there would be no time to consult with the Climate Change Working Group prior to the report

being considered at the Cabinet meeting due to be held on 31st March 2021.

- That the Climate Change Working Group was an appropriate place to consider the allocation of the funding and would be an opportunity for the Working Group to carry out some detailed work in respect of this area. However, it was felt by some Members that the Board was the appropriate place to scrutinise such an important area and further involvement by other Working Groups may make the process protracted and cumbersome. The Board was informed that they would be kept informed of the outcomes of any decisions by Cabinet in due course.
- How much funding had been allocated during Phase 1a of Green Homes Funding and what was the process to apply for funding? Officers informed Members that during the consultation period there had been 174 letters sent out to residents which had resulted in 40 applications being made which were currently being assessed for eligibility. It was thought that there would be a similar uptake for the second phase of the funding.

Following detailed debate, Councillor R. Hunter proposed the following:

That delegated authority is granted to the Head of Community & Housing Services in consultation with Portfolio Holders for Housing and Climate Change and the Climate Change Working Group to administer the funding received in line with the grant conditions.

On being put to the vote this recommendation was lost.

RESOLVED that the Green Homes Funding report be noted.

88/20

IMPACT OF LIBRARIES REVIEW TASK GROUP - FINAL REPORT

Councillor S. Colella introduced the Impact of Libraries Review Task Group Final Report for Members' consideration. He thanked Members and Officers from Bromsgrove District Council and Worcestershire County Council for their involvement in the Task Group during such a difficult period and was pleased with the recommendations that had been proposed as a result of the investigation. He highlighted in particular that the Cabinet Member for Communities at Worcestershire County Council, Councillor L. Hodgson, had thanked members for

scrutinising the Library Strategy and that Bromsgrove had been the only Council in Worcestershire to do so.

After the discussion, the Chairman extended his best wishes on behalf of the Board to Councillor L. Hodgson who had recently been unwell.

Councillor K. May was invited to comment on the report in her capacity of Portfolio Holder for Strategic Partnerships. She informed the Board that much like the Wigan Deal, which had been considered as part of the investigation, Members were looking at a similar asset-based approach to library services going forward and that Members would be provided further information on this in due course.

Councillor P. Thomas, Portfolio Holder for Leisure, Cultural Services and Community Safety commented that Libraries were a very, useful resource within the District and thanked Members and Officers for a comprehensive report.

RECOMMENDED that the report and recommendations detailed within it be considered by Cabinet at its meeting on 2nd June 2021.

89/20

IMPACT OF FLOODING TASK GROUP - FINAL REPORT

Councillor R. Hunter introduced the Impact of Flooding Task Group Final Report for Members' consideration and expressed that this was an important and interesting investigation particularly in light of Climate Change and the potential of more frequent extreme weather events affecting the District in the future. He thanked officers and Members for their hard-work and was pleased that there had been some bold and ambitious recommendations made as a result of the investigation.

Following presentation of the report Members raised that North Worcestershire Water Management (NWWM) currently promoted themselves effectively on social media and Members should be encouraged to perhaps share their work through their own communication channels. In addition to this it was felt by some Members that having a timetable available on the relevant websites might restrict the schedule of works and make it less flexible in cases where the works could not be carried out due to time, staffing and weather constraints. This was clarified by Councillor M Sherrey, Portfolio Holder for Environmental Services who explained that some staff who would normally work in these areas had been redeployed during the pandemic due to illness. This issue had now been resolved and it was hoped that the service would resume as normal in the very near future. Councillor

R. Hunter explained that the recommendation regarding the publication of the gully and road sweeping had been included to provide residents with greater transparency with the hope that this would alleviate concerns by local residents that works were to be carried out on a regular basis.

Councillor J. Till proposed an amendment in respect of Recommendation 5(c) that *'consider'* be inserted into the recommendation in order to provide more flexibility within the recommendation should the Council not wish to adopt the land in all cases. Councillor R. Hunter expressed that caution needed to be applied in the area of adoption of land however it was felt that the inclusion of *'subject to S106 funding'* within the recommendation already provided enough of a caveat should the Council not be able to adopt the land.

It was noted by some Members that this was a very complex area and that the management charges and ownership of land in new developments was, in some cases, a cause for concern for local residents.

Another concern from some Members was the extra cost of the employment of two extra officers which was included as a recommendation within the report. However, it was noted that although there would be costs involved it was proposed that a business case be undertaken as part of the recommendation in order to fully understand all costs involved and the potential for recharges to be made if work was undertaken for other Authorities.

After lengthy debate the alternative recommendation was clarified and proposed again by Councillor J. Till as follows:

'the Council will consider, subject to S106 funding, adopting land featuring watercourses and SuDS features on new developments.'

On being put to the vote the recommendation was carried.

RECOMMENDED that

a) Recommendation 5 (c) be amended to:

'the Council will consider, subject to S106 funding, adopting land featuring watercourses and SuDS features on new developments.'

- b) that the report and all other recommendations (noting the amendment of 5(c)) detailed within it be considered by Cabinet at its meeting on 2nd June 2021.

90/20

FINANCE AND BUDGET WORKING GROUP - UPDATE

The Chairman introduced the Finance and Budget Working Group update and informed Members that there had been no meeting of the group since the last meeting of the Board. He confirmed that there would be no further meetings until the new municipal year.

Councillor S. Colella queried whether there were any updates regarding the Budget position as at the end of Quarter 3. Councillor G. Denaro, as Portfolio Holder for Finance and Enabling confirmed that a report was to be considered at the next Cabinet meeting due to be held on 31st March 2021.

RESOLVED that the Finance and Budget Working Group update be noted.

91/20

WORCESTERSHIRE HEALTH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - UPDATE

Councillor J. Till presented the update from the Worcestershire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC) and advised Members that updates regarding Covid-19 data had been circulated prior to the meeting in order to keep them as relevant as possible as they presented a snapshot in time rather than data that remained static. She also confirmed that the minutes from the previous meeting of HOSC had been circulated to the Board.

It was noted that there would be no further meetings of HOSC until the new municipal year.

RESOLVED that the verbal update in respect of the Worcestershire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee be noted.

92/20

CABINET WORK PROGRAMME

The Cabinet Work programme dated 1st April 2021 to 31st July 2021 was considered by the Board.

Members requested that the following items be included in the Board's Work Programme for future meetings:

- Declaration of Land Surplus to Requirement - Marsh Way, Catshill South, Penshurst Road, Sideslow and Foxglove Way, Norton.
- Bromsgrove Town Centre Regeneration - Land at the Former Market Hall Site.

In addition to the items detailed above Councillor G. Denaro highlighted to Members that any reports in respect of Finance would be included in the Cabinet Work Programme once further planning work had been undertaken with the new Executive Director for Finance.

RESOLVED that the Cabinet Work Programme be noted and that the Overview and Scrutiny Board's Work Programme for 2020-21, be updated to include any items that had been discussed and agreed during the course of the meeting.

93/20

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD WORK PROGRAMME

During consideration of this item Members confirmed the following items be included in the Board's Work Programme for future meetings:

- Update on the Open Spaces report (considered by Full Council in January 2020) – including how other Councils dealt with the management charges in new developments.
- Air Quality Around Schools.

RESOLVED that the Overview and Scrutiny Board's Work Programme be noted and be updated to include any items that had been discussed and agreed during the course of the meeting.

The meeting closed at 7.54 p.m.

Chairman

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