



Overview and Scrutiny **Annual Report**

2020-2021



Bromsgrove
District Council

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OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT 2020-2021

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FOREWORD FROM THE CHAIRMAN

Welcome to Bromsgrove District Councils Overview and Scrutiny Board Annual Report for 2020/21.

The role of the Board is to cast a critical eye across the Council by scrutinising impartially and apolitically its operation and service provision for the benefit of residents.

Inevitably, the pandemic has had an impact on the Board's operation, meeting virtually which thanks to Officers has proved remarkably successful. However, the total number of meetings held this year has been curtailed.

Over the last year topics investigated, amongst others, have included:

- Examination of the Council's response to the Covid pandemic.
- The future of Burcot hostel.
- Burcot Lane site redevelopment.
- Bromsgrove market management.
- Housing strategy.
- Domestic abuse.

Three task groups have been undertaken and have reported:

- Impact of Review of Libraries in the District
- Review of Services to Prevent Flooding
- Equalities.

Running three task groups meant the suspension of one of the standing working groups, Corporate Performance. However, the Finance and Budget Working Group continued to meet. Many thanks to those who chaired and contributed to these task and working groups.

During the year, Amanda Scarce, the Board's long standing Democratic Services Officer retired, I would like to take this opportunity to thank her for many years of outstanding service to the Board and to welcome Jo Gresham as her replacement.

I would like to also thank all Board members for their work throughout the year and Officers of the council who have contributed to the Boards work.

Finally, I wish to express my gratitude to Councillor Michael Thompson, previous Board Chairman, for his contribution and hard work in making Overview and Scrutiny the success it has been in 2020/21.

Councillor Charles Hotham

Chairman

INTRODUCTION

We are pleased to present the Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report which outlines our work during 2020-2021 (this covers the municipal year from May 2020 to April 2021) 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 Charles Hotham
Chairman – January 2021



Councillor Jo-Anne Till
Vice-Chairman



Councillor Andrew Beaumont



Councillor Sue Baxter
January 2021



Councillor Steve Colella



Councillor Richard Deeming



Cllr Malcolm Glass
May 2020-January 2021



Councillor Rob Hunter



Councillor Adrian Kriss



Councillor Peter McDonald



Councillor Caroline Spencer



Councillor Michael Thompson

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.

[Link to the Constitution of Bromsgrove District Council](#)

(Please click on the latest date to access the most recent version of the Council's constitution).

Number of Meetings

During the municipal year 2020-2021 the Covid-19 pandemic had a significant impact on Council operations and has inevitably caused delays in some areas. In order to mitigate the impact on Council activities, the Government temporarily removed the legal requirement for local authorities to hold public meetings in person. This meant that Councils had powers to hold public meetings virtually by using video or telephone conferencing technology. The Regulations were made in Parliament on 2nd April 2020 and applied to meetings taking place before 7th May 2021. The Overview and Scrutiny Board tried to meet on a monthly basis, during the 2020-2021 municipal year a total of 9 meetings were held. These meetings were all held online due to Covid-19 and the associated lockdown.

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.

DISCRETIONARY BUSINESS RATES GRANT - 2ND JUNE 2020

The Financial Support Manager presented the policy to the Board and it was noted that the Government had prescribed some of the criteria for the allocation of the grant which was included in the policy.

During consideration of the item Members were particularly interested in understanding more fully the proportionality of the funding in respect of Bromsgrove Market and its regular traders including fixed market costs, market rental agreements and licenses and the regularity of trading and the number of pitches occupied.

As a result of the discussion of this item it was agreed by the Board that a recommendation be made to the Cabinet that reflected any funding awarded be based on the proportion of days of trading at the market.

The recommendation was considered and agreed by the Cabinet at their meeting held on 3rd June 2020.

REMOTE MEETING PROTOCOL & VIRTUAL MEETINGS - 2ND JUNE 2020

The Remote Meeting Protocol was established as a result of Covid-19 and the necessity for Council meetings to be held virtually whilst still allowing members of the public to attend and participate in some meetings.

A substantial amount of work was carried out prior to the commencement of virtual meetings by the Democratic Services team to understand the functionality of the technology and to ensure the logistics of holding a virtual meeting were understood.

Although Members were happy with the protocol, they felt it was important that it be monitored, and Members requested that the Remote Meeting Protocol be considered again later in the municipal year.

During the meeting of the Board held on 12th October 2021 the Remote Meeting Protocol was revisited. At this point Members had all received their new IT equipment and Microsoft Teams was being rolled out in readiness to use for virtual meetings going forward.

WORK PROGRAMME AND FUTURE PLANNING – 2ND JUNE 2020

The item in respect of the Work Programme and Future Planning was presented for Members in order for them to make any amendments, additions or look at any areas currently included in the Board Work Programme in more detail.

There were some suggestions made by Members around the possibility of including financial implications and decisions made during Covid-19 on the work programme. It was however suggested that this be included at a later date as the pandemic was still ongoing and a larger piece of work may need to be carried out as the position became more apparent in the coming months.

It was therefore agreed by Members 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 further prior to that meeting. (This item was further considered under the Recovery and Restoration Plan item in October 2020.)

IDENTIFYING RACIAL DISPARITIES WITHIN BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL'S OPERATIONS - TOPIC PROPOSAL – 6TH JUL 2020 and 6TH AUGUST 2020

The Chairman welcomed Councillor H. Rone-Clarke along with a representative from within the local community, who was invited to the meeting to speak on behalf of the Topic Proposal, which had been put forward by Councillor Rone-Clarke.

At the time of consideration of this item there were already two task groups in place. Members agreed that the matter was of such importance that it needed to go ahead as soon as possible.

In order to facilitate the extra task group, it was therefore agreed by the Board that the Corporate Performance Working Group would be suspended, and the task group established, and Councillor Peter McDonald appointed as Chairman.

Further consideration of the Task Group was made at the Board meeting held on 6th August 2020 where the Board were informed that eight Members were interested in participating in the Task Group and the membership was formally agreed.

Please note that it was agreed at the first meeting of the Task Group that the scope of needed to be a broader to include all those protected characteristics covered by the Equalities Act 2010. The scope was amended accordingly and renamed as the Equalities Task Group (see page 20).

BURCOT HOSTEL REPORT - PRE-SCRUTINY 6TH AUGUST 2020

During the presentation of this report the Board were informed that since the Covid-19 pandemic, Central Government had actively encouraged homelessness services not to place homeless households in facilities with shared living spaces and so, from this perspective, the Burcot Hostel was considered no longer fit for purpose.

During consideration of this item Officers confirmed that there were no families currently in Bed and Breakfast accommodation and that the Strategic Housing Team were putting a communication plan in place with Bromsgrove District Housing Trust, in order to provide signposting for people who required assistance, which would help to minimise the need for this in the future and to support those households in need.

An amendment to one of the recommendations contained in the report was agreed by the Board that £35k for the scheme be funded from the capital programme rather than from borrowing. The recommendation was considered and agreed by Cabinet at their meeting held on 6th August 2020.

BURCOT LANE SITE REDEVELOPMENT REPORT - PRE-SCRUTINY – 6TH AUGUST 2020

At the meeting held on 6th August 2020 the Burcot Lane Development report was pre-scrutinised prior to its consideration by Cabinet later that evening.

During consideration of this item, it was clarified that officers had liaised with a number of Local Authorities and had sought robust legal advice on how best to establish a housing company, which was the recommendation put forward by officers for agreement by Cabinet.

It was noted that the percentage of affordable houses from a planning perspective was 30%, which was the level that was considered and approved in the planning application.

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL RECOVERY AND RESTORATION PLAN – 12TH OCTOBER 2020

In considering the Recovery and Restoration Plan it was explained to Members that this was the Council's response to the Covid-19 pandemic and associated lockdown and formed part of a countywide recovery plan.

It was confirmed that this Recovery and Restoration Plan was based around the Bromsgrove District Council Plan and its five Strategic Purposes. It was, however noted that the Council Plan had been drafted prior to Covid-19 and a refresh of the plan had been programmed for early 2021 to reflect the impact of the pandemic.

BROMSGROVE MARKET UPDATE - 23RD NOVEMBER 2020

The Bromsgrove Market is an area which the Board has shown an interest in in previous years and had requested regular updates in respect of its running, following a recommendation to bring the running of it back in house, which had been supported by the Cabinet. Whilst considering the Bromsgrove Market Update provided at the November meeting, there was particular interest from Members regarding the number of traders that had received financial support from Bromsgrove District Council in light of the pandemic and the timescales involved in the mobilisation of the market once an announcement of the easing of lockdown restrictions were announced.

Members were informed that there had been inevitable losses during the pandemic but that the Council were claiming for all available financial support and grants from Central Government in order to allow the market to continue to grow and flourish in the future.

HEAD OF PLANNING, REGENERATION AND LEISURE SERVICES TO RESPOND TO QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS IN RESPECT OF THE PROCESS AND POLICY FOR THIRD PARTY EVENTS MONDAY - 23RD NOVEMBER 2020

At a previous meeting of the Board, Members had expressed an interest in understanding the process and policy when dealing with third party events and the responsibilities of the organisers at these events. Members were also interested in the use of fireworks, both in domestic settings and at specific organised events and wanted to understand what, if any, procedures were in place so that residents could take precautions if necessary, prior to the event taking place.

During the presentation, it was highlighted that any road closures required for any such events, were posted by the Council even in the case of third-party events and risk assessments carried out as it was important that engagement with third party providers was carried out throughout all stages of the planning of the events.

DISTRICT LEVEL ECONOMIC RECOVERY FRAMEWORK - PRE-SCRUTINY - 23RD NOVEMBER 2020

The District Level Economic Recovery Framework set out the priorities for recovery in the District in light of the Covid-19 pandemic and outlined what plans were in place with key partners.

During consideration of this item Members were informed that there were three key priorities contained within the plan that would enable work to be done with local residents to ensure the existing workforce was equipped with the appropriate skills to satisfy the labour market in the District. It was also confirmed that grant funding information would be signposted for those who needed it through the usual channels including the Council website and social media.

It was confirmed to Members that the hope was that the plan would improve access and layout in the Town Centre and that a Business Support Officer and Engagement Support Officer were to be employed by North Worcestershire Economic Development and Regeneration, which would further add to the work that was already underway in respect of the regeneration of the Town Centre.

Members also discussed the current climate in respect of jobs and were informed that large companies were investing in the area and that it was hoped that this would provide employment opportunities for local people within in the District in the future.

HOUSING STRATEGY - PRE-SCRUTINY - 23RD NOVEMBER 2020

During the presentation of the new Housing Strategy, it was reported to the Board that it complimented the current countywide strategy, whilst taking a more localised approach and would be put out to public consultation for a 4-week period.

Some changes were suggested by Members regarding wording contained within the report, however officers explained that only certain changes could be made, as some areas were part of a countywide Strategic Housing Plan which had already been approved. Officers did agree to provide feedback to the relevant partners for consideration in future versions of the strategy.

DOMESTIC ABUSE POLICY - PRE-SCRUTINY - 23RD NOVEMBER 2020

The Council's new Domestic Abuse Policy was considered at the meeting held on 23rd November 2020. The policy set out the Council's commitment to addressing and preventing Domestic Abuse. It was noted that the strategy also served to satisfy the requirements set out in the Domestic Abuse Bill which would come into effect in April 2021.

Members were all in agreement that this was an important policy for the Council and welcomed its implementation.

WEST MERCIA POLICE ROAD SAFETY TEAM – PRESENTATION 11TH JANUARY 2021

Councillor R. Hunter had requested the presentation from the West Mercia Police Road Safety Team be added to the Board's Work Programme and a presentation had been arranged for March 2020 however the presentation was delayed due to Covid-19.

During the presentation Members were informed that the West Mercia Police Road Safety Team were responsible for road safety campaigns, education and traffic management consultations and that education, engineering and enforcement were the main approaches adopted by the team when dealing with road safety issues. There was information presented regarding the initiatives that were available to communities regarding road safety and that the team were always happy to be contacted by Members in order to improve road safety in the District.

Members were grateful to the officers for attending and providing a comprehensive presentation on the work they carried out, which had given them a better understanding of the role of the Team.

NOTICE OF MOTIONS - REQUEST TO INVESTIGATE 11TH JANUARY 2021

Councillor R. Hunter introduced the item in respect of his Notice of Motion which had been referred to the Board, from Full Council. He explained that the purpose of the motion was to highlight the distress that the use of fireworks could cause to vulnerable people and animals and for Members to be able to find out what practical steps might be made by the Council to mitigate the impact on residents.

Members agreed that further information should be provided from a relevant source in order to understand the current legislation that was already in place in respect of the use of fireworks and what powers and measures if any, the Council had in this area. Further information was provided by officers at the Board meeting held on 26th April 2021.

Councillor P. McDonald presented an item in respect of his Notice of Motion which had also been referred to the Board from Full Council. It was clarified to Members that the investigation into the amount of mileage expenses that had been claimed during previous years and during (Covid-19) was the area which he felt should be considered in more detail. Members again agreed that further information should be provided from a relevant source and both items were included on the Board Work Programme for consideration at the meeting held on March 29th 2021.

MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN 2021/22 TO 2024/25 (INCLUDING THE CAPITAL PROGRAMME) - PRE-SCRUTINY - 15TH FEBRUARY 2021

During consideration of the Medium-Term Financial Plan various areas of the Budget were explained to Members for clarification.

It was reported that the £5 increase in Council Tax would help the Council to have a robust financial position for future years. However, in light of the Covid-19 pandemic and associated lockdown coupled with the pressure caused by the pay increase of 2.75% rather than the expected 1% it was confirmed that there was a sizable gap within the Council's budget which needed to be addressed. It was hoped that funding from Central Government that still needed to be confirmed would provide some surety going forward.

As a result of the discussions during this item it was requested that the Fleet Replacement and Mileage Claims be included in the Board's Work Programme for consideration in the municipal year 2021-2022.

COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME – 15TH FEBRUARY 2021

The Council Tax Support Scheme was considered in February 2021 and Members were informed that the scheme was reviewed on an annual basis.

The amended scheme had been subject to public consultation in October 2020. It was explained that the new banded scheme worked in a more integrated way with Universal Credit and make the process simpler for the customer. In addition to this hardship provisions would be retained and there would be an increase in level of support for vulnerable residents.

It was requested that the scheme be revisited in the next financial year to see if it was operating as expected. Members were advised that the item could be included on the Board's Work Programme for pre-scrutiny prior to it being considered at a Cabinet meeting during the new municipal year.

STAFF SURVEY – 29TH MARCH 2021

The report regarding the Staff Survey was considered by Members in order to understand the impact the Covid-19 pandemic had on the ways of working in all areas of the Council. Although the timelines of the Staff Survey had inevitably changed there had been several surveys issued including a Working Arrangements Survey, a Communication Survey, and a Well-Being Survey.

Officers reported that the responses to the surveys was encouraging and mainly positive.

Members were informed that staff had been given appropriate provision to carry out their roles from home and could still work from Council buildings safely, if necessary. Although Members were pleased to hear that there seemed to be a high level of engagement across the Council there was some discussion regarding the larger numbers of managers who had completed the survey compared to the rest of the staff. It was explained that as managers all had access to IT equipment this allowed them to complete the surveys online. It was clarified that some of the frontline staff were unable to complete the survey as they did not have access to IT equipment.

It was decided that further information be provided to Members as some of the data provided included Redditch Borough Council staff and therefore did not necessarily provide a clear picture of Bromsgrove. Although some Members were happy with an overview of both Councils it was decided that the item be considered again in the new municipal year in order for Officers to provide further information.

MILEAGE - NOTICE OF MOTION – 29TH MARCH 2021

The Notice of Motion in respect of Mileage had been referred to the Overview and Scrutiny Board from Full Council. 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.

During consideration of this item some concerns were raised that the data provided differed from previous figures provided in respect of mileage claimed and included information for both Bromsgrove District and Redditch Borough Council. It was agreed by Members that the item be deferred to the first meeting in the new municipal year in order for officers to collect more information.

GREEN HOMES FUNDING – 29th MARCH 2021

The Green Homes Funding report contained information regarding Phase 2 of the Green Homes Funding allocation. It was confirmed to Members during consideration of the report 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.

Members were advised that Park Homes that had already been identified by officers were to be prioritised and that a period of consultation had taken place and 40 applications had been made during the first phase of the funding and that numbers were expected to be the same for Phase 2.

This report was considered at the Cabinet meeting held on 31st March 2021.

COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP - PRESENTATION – 26TH APRIL 2021

The Community Safety Manager presented the item in respect of the Community Safety Partnership. It was explained that consideration of the Partnership is a statutory function of the Board and is considered once during each municipal year.

During a detailed presentation, the Board were informed of a number of initiatives currently being undertaken by the Partnership including a Listening Service, Youth Outreach Programmes and a Young Citizen's Challenge Programme.

The priorities of the Partnership were highlighted for Member's attention and it was explained that the priorities for 2021-2024 included violence and abuse, theft and acquisitive crime, ASB, damage and nuisance and protecting vulnerable communities.

The Covid-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the number of recorded offences in North Worcestershire and on the delivery of programmes. However, many had been adapted to ensure that delivery could take place online and some were able to take place face-to-face in a Covid safe environment.

The annual consideration of the Community Safety Partnership has been scheduled to take place in January 2022.

MOTION – FIREWORKS - 26TH APRIL 2021

Further to the consideration of this item on 11th January 2021 the Cultural Services and Parks Manager presented a report regarding Councillor R. Hunter's Motion regarding the use of Fireworks on 26th April 2021.

It was reported to Members that due to the Covid-19 pandemic it was still uncertain as to whether public events would take place in the District and it was dependent on the easing of lockdown restrictions. Work was still being carried out with other agencies and the Council's Communications Team in order to mitigate any impact on residents and animals in respect of fireworks if Council run events were to go ahead in 2021.

Members were keen to monitor the progress of the procurement of low-impact/low-noise fireworks by the Council and officers undertook to provide a further update to the Board later in the municipal year once further information was available.

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD RECOMMENDATION TRACKER -26TH APRIL 2021

This item is regularly brought to the Board to provide an update regarding any recommendations made over previous municipal years. It provides an easy to track overview of the recommendations and their status.

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 was Councillor Jo-Anne Till who provided the Board with regular updates on what was discussed at these meetings. Where appropriate the minutes and further information 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:

- The Covid-19 Vaccination Programme
- Restoration Plan for the NHS post Covid
- 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 a 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. In the first year of its implementation the Measures Dashboard Working Group was re-named the Corporate Performance Working Group.

The terms of reference for each Working Group were agreed by the Board and regularly reviewed to ensure the work that was being carried out remained relevant. Historically this review has formed part of the April meeting of the Board when it considers the annual report and looks back over the work carried out and discusses any improvements that could be made in the coming year to ensure the Board runs effectively and efficiently.

Finance & Budget Working Group

Membership: Councillors Michael Thompson (Chairman June 2020 – January 2021), Councillors S. R. Colella, S. P. Douglas, C. A. Hotham (Chairman February 2021 – May 2021), A. D. Kriss and J. Till

This Group met on five 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 and the Head of Finance and Customer Services.

Heads of Service were also invited on a number of occasions 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 gives an insight into the work that has been carried out:

- Medium Term Financial Plan Budget 2021-22
- Covid-19 Finance Report
- Budget Bids and Savings
- Fees and Charges
- Council Tax Support Scheme
- Revenue Monitoring Outturn 2020/21

Once again, by being able to consider a number of reports in more detail and prior to their consideration at Cabinet, this has allowed Members of the Board via the Working Group to play an integral part in the budget setting process. It is hoped that this will continue, and the process further streamlined in the coming year.

Corporate Performance Working Group

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

As discussed earlier in this report, this group was suspended for most of the 2020/2021 municipal year. Initially, there were delays in meeting due to Covid-19 and associated lockdown. However, during consideration of the item Identifying Racial Disparities Within Bromsgrove District Council's Operations Topic Proposal in July 2020 it was agreed that the group would be suspended.

It is anticipated that the Corporate Performance Working Group will be reinstated for the municipal year 2021-2022.

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.

Equalities Task Group

Membership: Councillors P. McDonald, A.B Beaumont, M. Glass, H. Jones, A. Kriss, H. Rone-Clarke, C. Spencer and J. Till

This task group met eight times during this municipal year with the Members as stated above and held discussions with a number of key witnesses. During the investigation the following areas were discussed:

- Council's Equalities Strategy
- Human Resources Processes and Policies
- Community Engagement

The group made five recommendations in total which were all agreed at a meeting of the main Board on 15th February 2021. The final report will be considered at the Cabinet meeting due to be held in July 2021.

Impact of Review of Libraries in the District Task Group

Membership: Councillors S. R. Colella, S. Douglas, J. King, A. Kriss, M. Middleton and C. Spencer

The Task Group met five times during this municipal year with the membership stated above. During the investigation Members interviewed Officers from Worcestershire County Council (WCC) and Lucy Hodgson. During the investigation Members were interested in the new strategy that had been implemented by WCC and what, if any, effects it might have on libraries in the District.

The Overview and Scrutiny Board considered the report at their March 2021 meeting and the final report will be considered at a Cabinet meeting due to be held in September 2021.

Review of Services to Prevent Flooding Task Group

Membership: Councillors R. Hunter, A.B. Beaumont, S. R. Colella, H. Rone-Clarke and C. Spencer

The Task Group met six times during this municipal year and carried out a number of interviews with key witnesses including North Worcestershire Water Management, WCC and Severn Trent Water in addition to meeting with officers from the Council.

Members were interested in understanding the responsibilities of each agency and how this could be communicated to residents effectively in the future. In addition to this, staffing levels and future flood risk management were investigated thoroughly by Members and several recommendations were made for consideration by the Board and Cabinet.

The Overview and Scrutiny Board considered the report at their March 2021 meeting and the final report will be considered at a Cabinet meeting due to be held in July 2021.

PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

In April 2021 the High Court considered a case brought by Hertfordshire County Council, Lawyers in Local Government (LLG) and the Association of Democratic Services Officers (ADSO) which challenged the requirement the return to holding committee meetings in person. The High Court ruled that primary legislation was required to enable formal committee meetings to be held virtually in England and therefore Councils had to return to convening these meetings in person from 7th May 2021 onwards.

However, these rules do not apply to informal meetings of Task Groups and Working Groups and Members may wish to continue to hold remote or hybrid meetings of these groups to provide colleagues with greater flexibility to participate in the scrutiny process 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

Parkside, Market Street, Bromsgrove B61 8DA

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