

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

13TH SEPTEMBER 2021, AT 6.00 P.M.

PRESENT: Councillors C.A. Hotham (Chairman), J. Till, S. J. Baxter, A. J. B. Beaumont, S. R. Colella, R. J. Deeming, M. Glass (substitute for Councillor Kriss), R. J. Hunter and C. J. Spencer

Observers: Councillor K. May – Portfolio Holder for Economic Development, the Town Centre and Strategic Partnerships

Officers: Mr. J. Howse, Mrs. R. Bamford, Mr. O. Paparega and Mrs. J Gresham.

15/21 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor P. McDonald and Councillor A. Kriss with Councillor M. Glass in attendance as named substitute.

16/21 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND WHIPPING ARRANGEMENTS**

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

17/21 **TO CONFIRM THE ACCURACY OF THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD HELD ON 6TH JULY 2021**

The minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting held on 6th July 2021 were submitted for Members' consideration.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board held on 6th July 2021 be approved as an accurate record.

18/21 **ADOPTION OF LAND BY BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL AND THE MANAGEMENT OF COMMUTED SUMS FOR OFF-SITE PROVISION**

The Head of Planning, Regeneration and Leisure Services presented the Adoption of land by Bromsgrove District Council and the Management of Commuted Sums for Off-Site Provision report.

Members were informed that when a new development was planned which included open space provision, that open space would need to be managed appropriately by a developer or other management body in perpetuity. It was explained that there were various types of open space provision on a new development including sports pitches, equipped and unequipped open spaces and off-site open spaces.

The Head of Planning, Regeneration and Leisure Services clarified to Members of the Board that it was not compulsory for developers to offer any open space for adoption by the Council, or any other management body, and that they could choose to manage it themselves. However, it was noted that if the land was adopted by the Council the developer would have to provide the cost of on-going maintenance to the Council in perpetuity, which in this case would be for 30 years.

During a detailed discussion the Board agreed that this report was necessary in order to maintain open spaces now and in the future. Councillor R. Hunter noted that, although the policy was a good one, it needed to go further in order to provide clarity on the objectives of the Council in relation to this matter.

There was a robust discussion regarding whether it would be possible to use Council Tax collected from houses on new developments in order to provide the upkeep of any new open spaces. The Executive Director of Resources explained that although this would seem like a possibility, Council Tax was not all allocated to Bromsgrove District Council and that County Council received a high percentage of the Council Tax collected. It was also noted that it would not be good for financial sustainability for a Local Authority to commit to such long-term funding on a potentially variable or non-recurring income.

After a detailed debate Councillor R. Hunter proposed the following recommendation:

‘that the wording within the ‘Objectives’ section of the policy be amended, and that the word ‘preference’ be included to read ‘***it is the preference and the intention of the Council***’.

In addition to this Councillor. R. Hunter wished to include an additional paragraph in the main Officer report as follows:

'Bromsgrove District Council believe that the optimal outcome for the residents and the wider community is for a local, democratically and publicly elected body to adopt the land.'

Although there was a general agreement from Members that these two recommendations would be useful in clarifying the Council's position in this matter, the Board were reminded that, it was within the Officer's gift to write their own report without it being amended and if an additional paragraph needed to be added it should be within the policy not the officer's report.

Therefore, the Board agreed that both recommendations, from Councillor R. Hunter be included in the 'Objectives' section of the policy.

Councillor J. Till suggested that it was important to reflect within the second recommendation that developers were not obliged to offer the land to the Council or any other party to manage. Therefore, it was agreed that 'if offered' be included at the end of the second recommendation.

On being put to the vote both recommendations were agreed.

The Chairman thanked Officers for a detailed presentation and noted that Councillor A. Kent had been invited to attend the Board meeting however, he had not been able to attend and had sent his apologies.

RECOMMENDED that

- a) that the wording within the 'Objectives' section of the policy be amended, and that the word 'preference' be included to read '***it is the preference and the intention of the Council*** and;
- b) that an additional paragraph be included in the policy at the beginning of the 'Objectives' section which states the following: 'Bromsgrove District Council believe that the optimal outcome for the residents and the wider community is for a local, democratically and publicly elected body to adopt the land, if offered'.

The Chairman invited Councillor K. May who was present in her role as Portfolio Holder for Economic Development, the Town Centre and Strategic Partnerships to introduce the Bromsgrove Centres Action Plan 2021-2022. During the introduction Councillor May explained that it had not been possible to recruit to the role of Town Centres Manager and therefore the Council had engaged an events management company, Blackberry Productions, to provide a full events programme in the District over the coming months. Members were assured that the recruitment process for the Bromsgrove Town Centres Manager role would continue and once completed, the long-term strategy would be for the new Bromsgrove Town Centres Manager to go back out to key local centres and consult with key local stakeholders

The Head of North Worcestershire Economic Development and Regeneration reported that a Business Support Advisor had been recruited in the interim to cover some of the work previously undertaken by the Bromsgrove Town Centres Manager. It was explained that this would include working with local businesses in order to help them to reopen after the pandemic in a safe and resilient way. It was planned that the Business Support Advisor would be available to assist with local businesses across all sectors. The Board was informed that, during the pandemic, consumer behaviours had changed, and online shopping had hugely increased. He confirmed to Members that work in this area would be particularly important over the coming months for the Business Support Advisor.

Councillor S. Baxter queried the plan in respect of the consultation that had already taken place within the local centres. Councillor Baxter stated that she was not aware of any engagement that had taken place in Wythall which was one of the largest centres in the District. It was felt that going back out to local centres was an important part of the Action Plan and needed to be carried out as soon as possible. The Head of Planning, Regeneration and Leisure stated that she would be happy to meet with Members to discuss future opportunities within the key local centres and undertook to arrange a meeting.

Some Members were concerned with the condition of a number of the empty shops in Bromsgrove Town Centre and of the pavement along the High Street. There was agreement that more needed to be done in this respect to attract local spend. It was suggested that pop-up shops could be established to help with this. Councillor K. May explained that these kinds of plans were constantly being explored. However, it was reported some private shop owners did not want their vacant properties used in this way.

The Head of North Worcestershire Economic Development and Regeneration stated that there was still confidence in Bromsgrove Town Centre, and this was apparent with the recent investment at the former St. John's Wine Rooms.

After lengthy debate Councillor S. Baxter proposed that a recommendation be made to Cabinet as follows:

'that the Cabinet resolves to adopt the Bromsgrove Town Management Strategy – 2021 Action Plan and at the earliest opportunity that the relevant officers revisit the Town Centres to update the plan and offer support'

On being put to the vote this recommendation was agreed.

RECOMMENDED that the Cabinet resolves to adopt the Bromsgrove Town Management Strategy – 2021 Action Plan and at the earliest opportunity that the relevant officers revisit the Town Centres to update the plan and offer support.

20/21

EQUALITIES TASK GROUP - CABINET RESPONSE

The Chairman introduced the Cabinet Response to the Equalities Task Group in Councillor. P. McDonald's absence. It was clarified that the response had been discussed at Cabinet and Council and the consideration of the report by the Board was mainly procedural and for completeness.

RESOLVED that the Cabinet Response to the Equalities Task Group be noted.

21/21

FLOODING TASK GROUP - CABINET RESPONSE

The Chairman invited Councillor R. Hunter to present the Cabinet response in respect of the Flooding Task Group.

It was explained that, as with the previous item, this report had been discussed extensively at both Cabinet and Council meetings held in July 2021. Councillor R. Hunter expressed his disappointment at the Cabinet response. In particular, that during the Task Group no mention had been made in respect of the maintenance plan that was currently being undertaken by North Worcestershire Water Management regarding Council owned assets and partners' assets which was due to be considered by Cabinet on its completion at the end of September.

The Chairman suggested that once the maintenance plan had been completed it would be useful for the Flooding Task Group to reconvene and scrutinise the plan prior to its consideration at Cabinet. It was agreed that this would take place and the Democratic Services Officer present explained that, once the plan was available, she would facilitate the process for the Task Group to reconvene.

Councillor K. May wished to clarify that the report had not been commissioned by the Cabinet and that the piece of work was being undertaken by North Worcestershire Water Management separately.

Some members expressed their disappointment that none of the recommendations from the Task Group had been accepted by the Cabinet, as this type of investigation was time consuming from a Member and Officer perspective.

RESOLVED that the Cabinet Response to the Flooding Task Group be noted.

22/21

TASK GROUP UPDATES - TERMS OF REFERENCE

During consideration of the item, it was noted that there was one proposed change to the Terms of Reference for the Finance and Budget Scrutiny Working Group and one proposed change to the Terms of Reference for the Corporate Performance Working Group.

These were as follows:

Finance and Budget Scrutiny Working Group

- Named substitute Members may be invited to join the Working Group, however it should be chaired by a permanent Member of the Overview and Scrutiny Board

Corporate Performance Working Group

- Named substitute Members may be invited to join the Working Group, however it should be chaired by a permanent Member of the Overview and Scrutiny Board, and:
- The Working Group will meet on a quarterly basis throughout the municipal year.

The changes were proposed by Councillor C. Hotham and seconded by Councillor J. Till. On being put to the vote the proposals were agreed.

RESOLVED that the changes to the Terms of Reference of the Finance and Budget Scrutiny Working Group and Corporate Performance Working Group as detailed in the preamble above be agreed.

23/21

FINANCE AND BUDGET WORKING GROUP - UPDATE

Councillor C. Hotham presented the Finance and Budget Working Group Update for Members' consideration.

He reported that a meeting had taken place on 2nd September 2021 and at that meeting the following items were discussed:

- The Enterprise Resource System
- The Aged Debtors Summary
- The Financial Outturn Report
- Covid-19 Grants

Members were informed that the Aged Debtors Summary was being managed appropriately. In addition to this, Councillor Hotham confirmed that approximately £37m in Government grants had been received during the Covid-19 pandemic and associated lockdown. Due to the strict guidelines regarding these grants, which were set out by Central Government, approximately £34.5m had been distributed to those businesses who fulfilled the strict criteria. Councillor Hotham explained that a further £1.4m had been received from Government, however it was noted that the funding was time limited and again, was subject to prescriptive and strict guidelines.

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

24/21

WORCESTERSHIRE HEALTH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - UPDATE

Councillor J. Till presented the Worcestershire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC) update to the Board and explained that she had attended the last meeting in July 2021. During that meeting there had been discussion regarding the recovery from Covid-19 which was progressing well. Councillor Till also stated that the minutes from each HOSC meeting were available on the Worcestershire County Council

website. The Democratic Services Officer present undertook to circulate the relevant minutes to the Board.

It was reported that, at the last meeting of the Board on 6th July 2021, Councillor J. Till had indicated that she wished to step down as HOSC representative for the remainder of the municipal year.

Councillor S. Baxter volunteered for the role and her nomination was proposed by Councillor C. Hotham and seconded by Councillor J Till.

On being put to the vote Councillor S. Baxter's appointment was agreed.

RESOLVED that

- a) the HOSC update be noted and;
- b) Councillor. S Baxter be appointed as Worcestershire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC) representative for the remainder of the municipal year.

25/21

CABINET WORK PROGRAMME

Members considered the most recent Cabinet Work Programme and in doing so the following items were added to the Board's work Programme in order to pre-scrutinise at the next meeting.

The items identified were as follows:

- Bromsgrove District Council's Duty to Co-operate Statement with Solihull
- Bromsgrove District Council's Approach to the Draft Black Country Plan
- Financial Update Regarding Leisure Services

The Chairman noted that due to the addition of the above items the meeting may be longer than usual, and Members accepted that this might be the case.

RESOLVED that the Cabinet Work Programme – 1st October 2021 to 31st January 2022 be noted and items added subject to the preamble above.

26/21

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Overview and Scrutiny Board's Work Programme was presented for consideration by Members. In addition to the items that had been identified during the previous item it was agreed that the Fireworks – Notice of Motion would be postponed until later in the municipal year.

RESOLVED that the Overview and Scrutiny Board's Work Programme be noted, and any additional items be added.

The meeting closed at 7.45 p.m.

Chairman