

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

18TH OCTOBER 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, R. J. Hunter, A. D. Kriss and P. M. McDonald

In Attendance: Councillor G. Denaro – Portfolio Holder for Finance and Enabling

Officers: Mr. J. Howse, Ms. D. Poole and Mrs B. Talbot

Democratic Services Officer: Mrs. J. Gresham

27/21

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor H. Jones and Councillor C. Spencer with Councillor M. Glass in attendance as named substitute.

The Chairman explained that he needed to leave the meeting at 6.45pm due to another engagement and that the Vice-Chairman would chair the meeting in his absence, if necessary.

28/21

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND WHIPPING ARRANGEMENTS

There were no declarations of interest nor of any Party Whip.

29/21

TO CONFIRM THE ACCURACY OF THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD HELD ON 13TH SEPTEMBER 2021

The minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting held on 13th September 2021 were submitted for Members' consideration.

Councillor R. Hunter requested that change be made to the previous minutes regarding the recommendation made in respect of the Bromsgrove Town Centre Management Strategy – 2021 Action Plan. He stated that it was his understanding that the recommendation was made 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 with Ward Members and other interested parties to update the plan and offer support'.

This amendment was supported by the Board and the Democratic Services Officer present undertook to make the amendment.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting held on 13th September 2021 be approved.

30/21

STAFF SURVEY

The Head of Business Transformation, Organisational Development and Digital Strategy introduced the update regarding the Staff Survey and informed Members that there had been delays experienced in administering the Staff Survey due to the Covid-19 pandemic and associated restrictions. However, planning was well underway for the next Staff Survey which was due to take place later in 2021.

The Human Resources & Development Manager provided further information to the Board and highlighted the following for Members' attention:

- Although some delays had been experienced for the full Staff Survey there had been a number of smaller surveys carried out over the course of 2021 in order to maintain regular contact with staff. Information on these smaller staff Surveys were considered during a Board meeting held in March 2021.
- The majority of the questions to be included in the next full Staff Survey would be the same as were included in previous surveys in order to provide consistency during the analysis. Members were advised that some questions would be included following discussions with CMT in order to provide some organisational specific focus.
- The Staff Survey would be administered and analysed by an external provider through the Local Government Association (LGA) and that the data collected would be undertaken at a level that ensured confidentiality however still allowed meaningful information to be gathered. It was envisaged that the information would be available early in 2022.
- Communications would be sent out during November to encourage staff to take part in the survey. Those members of staff

who did not readily have access to IT equipment would be provided with alternative ways to complete the survey.

Following the presentation Members were invited to ask any questions arising from the report. In doing so Members were interested in understanding how many staff would be surveyed. It was stated that all 850 members of Council staff would be invited to complete the survey.

In respect of the survey questions, some Members were concerned that by including additional questions might compromise the outcome of the results. The Human Resources & Development Manager assured Members of the Board that, although there would be some service specific questions, there would be little room for modification of the questions by CMT and that the external provider would analyse the results to ensure impartiality when analysing the responses. Members were keen to see a copy of the final questions and officers undertook to provide them once they were available.

Members were also interested in the cost of the Staff Survey and whether this would be shared across both Councils. Officers were unsure as to the final cost of the survey as it was not yet known whether the analysis undertaken would need to be significant or more high level. However, Members were assured by the Executive Director of Resources that a budget had been set to undertake surveys and that this would not be exceeded.

Some Members required further reassurance that this was the case and also that the Cabinet were fully aware of the expected costs of the survey. With this in mind, the following recommendation was made by the Board:

'the Cabinet are fully informed of the higher and lower cost of the Staff Survey.'

On being put to the vote the recommendation was agreed.

There was detailed discussion regarding whether it would be possible to split the responses received by Council so that a clearer picture could be established regarding those members of staff who worked solely at Bromsgrove District Council. It was thought by some members of the Board that despite Bromsgrove and Redditch Councils being separate, they operated under a shared service agreement and therefore it was important to fully understand how this affected staff rather than separating the data. Officers confirmed that it was not possible to split

the data as it could potentially compromise the confidentiality of the responses and make staff reluctant to take part. However, the following recommendation was made:

'that Cabinet seriously consider ways in which future Staff Surveys are split'

On being put to the vote the recommendation was lost.

RECOMMENDED that the Cabinet are fully informed of the higher and lower cost of the Staff Survey.

31/21

BUDGET FRAMEWORK REPORT

The Executive Director of Resources was welcomed to meeting in order to present the Budget Framework report. In doing so the following was highlighted for Members' attention:

- Due to a complex Budget for 2022, the prioritisation of resources and unprecedented levels of uncertainty, it was reported that the report provided an updated member engagement plan for the 2022/3 Budget and Medium-Term Financial Plan. The updated plan was being proposed as a result of previous requests from members of increased reasonable engagement from all Members when considering future budgets.
- Workshops would be offered to all Members in order to help them better understand Local Government finance and any potential changes to funding in the future. It was also hoped that these workshops would produce quality conversations with all Members in respect of future budget setting. This initiative was welcomed by most Members as an opportunity for increased reasonable engagement in the budget setting process.

The Chairman explained that this report seemed to outline a huge step forward in Budget setting for the future and looked forward to being able to contribute to the process in the coming years.

RESOLVED that the Budget Framework be noted.

32/21

LIBRARIES TASK GROUP - CABINET RESPONSE

At this point Councillor C. Hotham, left the meeting and Councillor J. Till chaired the remainder of the meeting in her role as Vice-Chairman.

Councillor S. Colella presented the Cabinet Response to the Libraries Task Group in his role as Chairman of the Task Group.

During consideration of the item, he expressed that it was a disappointing response from the Cabinet, particularly in light of the hard work and effort that Members and Officers had put in during the investigation. He explained that all of the recommendations were rejected by the Cabinet, some on the basis that libraries were a Worcestershire County Council (WCC) or that some of the recommendations made were statutory duties undertaken by WCC and were already carried out during consultation processes. It was expressed by some Members that the response from Cabinet was not helpful when approaching the scrutiny process and that partnership working at County and District was important. It was reiterated that by Members of the Board that a possible solution to some of the Task Group recommendations might have been a letter or email sent to WCC requesting that they consider the possibility of undertaking the recommendations themselves, or perhaps some of the District Councillors who were also County Councillors might raise awareness at future WCC meetings.

Some Members also expressed that the response from Cabinet was brief and negative in tone and did not seem to have considered the ethos of the Task Group and the circumstances under which the Task Group investigation was carried out. As part of the investigation, Members had been reassured by WCC that, although there would be some changes experienced as part of the new strategy, the impact would not be at the detriment of Bromsgrove's Libraries. It was felt that this finding alone made the investigation worthwhile as it would alleviate anxieties from local residents across the District. Members were informed that the response had been supplied in a standard Democratic Services template that could be amended for future responses.

After a detailed debate regarding the resubmission of the Task Group findings to Cabinet it was proposed that the Task Group be reconvened with a view to presenting slightly amended recommendations for Cabinet's consideration. In addition to this it was noted that it would be useful to invite the Leader of the Council and the Portfolio Holder to a meeting of the group in order for them to be provided with the rationale of the investigation prior to its reconsideration at Cabinet. The Democratic Services Officer present undertook to make arrangements to recommence the process. Councillor S. Baxter expressed that she would be happy to sit on the Task Group and it was agreed that she would be included in any future meetings.

RESOLVED that the Libraries Task Group be reconvened in order to resubmit their report to Cabinet.

33/21

FINANCE AND BUDGET WORKING GROUP - UPDATE

In the absence of the Chairman a written statement in respect of the Finance and Budget Scrutiny Working Group was read out on his behalf by Councillor J. Till.

‘A meeting was due to take place on 14th October 2021. The main agenda item was the final budget outturn for 2021-2021. Unfortunately, this was still to be finalised and so was withdrawn. The only other item due to be considered was the Budget Framework report which was moved to this evening’s meeting. The Working Group therefore did not meet.’

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

34/21

CORPORATE PERFORMANCE WORKING GROUP - UPDATE

Members were reminded that, at their last meeting, the Board had agreed the changes to the Terms of Reference of the Corporate Performance Working Group. The main change that was agreed was that substitute Members of the main Board would now be permitted to sit on the Corporate Performance Working Group at future meetings. It was also agreed that the Chairman of the Working Group would be required to be a Member of the main Overview and Scrutiny Board.

Nominations for the Chairman of the group were requested and Councillor J. Till proposed that she be elected chairman for the remainder of the municipal year. This nomination was seconded and on being put to the vote this was agreed.

The Democratic Services Officer present undertook to send out communications to the members of the Board and any named substitutes to establish interest in becoming members of the Working Group.

RESOLVED that Councillor J. Till be appointed Chairman of the Corporate Performance Working Group for the remainder of the municipal year.

35/21

TASK GROUP UPDATES

It was confirmed that, as agreed earlier in the meeting, the Libraries Task Group would be reconvened.

There were no further Task Group Updates.

RESOLVED that the Task Group Update be noted.

36/21

WORCESTERSHIRE HEALTH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - UPDATE

Councillor S. Baxter presented the update in respect of the Worcestershire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC) and reported that the Committee had met twice since the last meeting of the Board.

It was explained to Members that the first meeting that was held on 21st September 2021 and was predominantly concerned with discussions around Mental Health provision in the County. Members were informed that there had been challenges to Mental Health Services during the Covid-19 pandemic and associated lockdown however it was confirmed that services were still available for Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), Adult Mental Health Services and Older Adult Mental Health Services.

In addition to this item, HOSC Members were presented with an update on Maternity Services in the County and the results of an inspection by the Care Quality Commission were shared with the Committee.

The second meeting of HOSC took place on 18th October 2021. This meeting was primarily concerned with Community ambulances and Primary Care (GP) Access within the County. Members were informed that there were concerns around the flow of ambulances around the County and the delays experienced in handover times. It was reported that although the services were continuing it had not always been possible to get a face-to-face appointment with a GP during the Covid-19 pandemic and there was a growing demand from patients for these to recommence more frequently.

Councillor S. Baxter also noted that there was work being undertaken in respect of Integrated Cares Systems and in particular place-based systems within local areas that involved a more local implementation approach. It was stated that the discussions were ongoing and that public consultations would be carried out in the future.

RESOLVED that the Worcestershire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee Update be noted.

37/21

CABINET WORK PROGRAMME

The Democratic Services Officer present informed the Board that the following item which was due to be considered by the Board on 22nd November had been postponed.

- Declaration of Land Surplus to Requirement – Marsh Way, Catshill South, Peshurst Road, Sideslow and Foxglove Way

It was confirmed that the item would be monitored and would appear on the Overview and Scrutiny Board's Work Programme prior to its consideration at Cabinet.

RESOLVED that the Cabinet Work Programme be noted.

38/21

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD WORK PROGRAMME

Members requested that an item in respect of CCTV be included on the Boards' Work Programme for consideration at a future meeting.

RESOLVED that the Overview and Scrutiny Board Work Programme be noted.

The meeting closed at 7.27 p.m.

Chairman