

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

29TH MARCH 2023, AT 6.00 P.M.

PRESENT: Councillors C.A. Hotham (Chairman), J. Till (Vice-Chairman), S. J. Baxter, A. J. B. Beaumont, A. D. Kriss, M. Middleton (substitute) and C. J. Spencer

Observers: Councillor M. A. Sherrey – Portfolio Holder for Environmental Services and Community Safety (on Microsoft Teams)

Officers: Mrs. S. Hanley, Mr. K. Hiron and Mr. M. Sliwinski.

84/2022

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors S. Colella, R. Deeming, and R. Hunter. Councillor M. Middleton attended the meeting as a substitute for Councillor R. Deeming.

85/2022

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND WHIPPING ARRANGEMENTS

There were no declarations of interest nor any whipping arrangements.

86/2022

TO CONFIRM THE ACCURACY OF THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD HELD ON 8TH FEBRUARY 2023

The minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting held on 8th February 2023 were submitted for Members' consideration.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting held on 8th February 2023 be approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chairman.

87/2022

PROVISION OF STREET NAME PLATES

[The meeting was adjourned between 6.03 and 6.13pm while technical issues with remote attendance software were rectified to enable participation by remote attendees]

A report on Street Name Plates (SNPs) provision within the District was presented by the Environmental Services Manager. It was clarified that the Council had responsibility for the repair and maintenance of Street Name Plates (SNPs) on adopted roads. This included replacement,

when necessary, either due to accidental damage, vandalism or normal wear and tear. On new developments, it was the developer's responsibility to erect SNPs initially to the Council's specification.

SNPs were usually positioned at the rear of the adopted footway and as near to street corners so they could be easily read by drivers and pedestrians alike and close to existing streetlamps where possible so they could be illuminated at night.

It was reported that the Council's contract with the existing approved manufacturer of street name plates was due to finish at the end of this financial year. A quotation exercise was due to be undertaken shortly to ascertain the manufacturer to be contracted for the next three years.

It was explained that SNPs were being ordered in bulk due to the saving on delivery costs that this option provided. Damage to SNPs was usually reported by the general public or Members. After a site inspection to determine what remedial works would be required, the damaged sign might be added to the order for the supply of a new SNP, with the manufacturer taking on average 6 weeks to complete the order after it had been raised. It was added that over the period of Covid lockdowns, there was a backlog of replacement works to SNPs. In addition, the Council's Minor Works' Team was understaffed during the past year. These factors had resulted in delays to installation and/or replacement of SNPs, which were reported as now being largely resolved.

Following the presentation of the report, the Portfolio Holder for Environmental Services and Community Safety addressed the Board to the effect that considerations of providing a good quality street signage should outweigh the need to wait on replacing signs until a bulk order could be raised. The quality of street signs in some parts of the District was also raised and it was noted that in some cases waiting times of 2-3 months for replacing signs had been reported.

The Environmental Services Manager was invited to respond and noted that minimum quality requirements could be put as a criterion in the next tender. It was noted, however, that quality of street signs in large part depended on the quality of metal that was supplied to the manufacturers in the first place. With regards to placing orders with suppliers for replacement street signs, it was explained that a certain number of replacement requests had to be accumulated before an order was issued to the manufacturer, as separate orders would prove to be uneconomical.

Following the presentation of the report, Members asked a number of questions to which responses were provided as follows:

- Members requested performance data to be provided on the service target times for replacing street signage, average response time to requests, longest waiting times, and current

level of backlog on replacement works. Officers undertook to provide Members with a briefing note containing this information.

- Officers had been asked to investigate signage at Saint Godwald's Crescent, as this was not a through road, but a sign indicating this was currently provided only at one end of the road junction. Officer present undertook to contact Officers to request that a second sign be provided at Saint Godwald's Crescent.
- The repair of street signs was undertaken by the Council in-house and it took Officers on average one week to repair the sign following a request being submitted. When the sign was damaged and a new sign had to be ordered, the request took around six weeks on average as orders were placed in batches.
- When street signs had raised lettering on press metal signs, the Council could undertake repairs to paintwork and lettering in-house. This was not possible with the more recent design of street signs where lettering was on a flat surface.
- Members commented that when reporting a damaged street name plate, they had to follow up cases directly with Officers as there was currently no feedback system provided as to when the street sign was likely to be ordered and fitted, and no notification as to when works were completed to allow residents to be kept informed. It was reported as a response that Members would soon be able to access the new Environmental Services Portal, where Members would be able to log in and track progress of all their logged requests.
- With regards to using local suppliers, if Members were aware of any specialised manufacturers of street signs in the local area, they encouraged to forward details to Officers so such manufacturers could be considered.
- There was no nation-wide standard around the style of street signage, however, there were design standards concerning lettering and colour of a street sign that had to be adhered to. It was noted that the Council had a standard style as varying styles of street signs from a standard set would lead to increased costs.
- Some Members expressed concern that the upcoming retender of the contract for manufacturing and provision of street name plates to the District could result in a lower quality of signs than currently provided. An Officer responded that the current tender specification defined the quality standard of materials required for signage in the District.
- It was noted that it was not financially viable for the Council to produce its own signs or provide this as a service to other authorities.

Members discussed the annual budget currently allocated for replacement of street name plates and most Members felt that the current budget of £3,900 per year was too low to provide appropriate coverage of replacement and that the budget should be increased on the basis that at least two new signs per Ward would need to be installed per year.

A motion was proposed by Councillor S. Baxter and seconded by Councillor C. Hotham that it be recommended to Cabinet that it consider a report on Street Name Plates including data on the number of signs replaced each year and the newly tendered price per sign (including delivery), and that it be recommended that Cabinet agree to the annual budget for Street Name Plates (SNPs) to be increased to a level suggested as appropriate by Officers.

On being put to the vote, the motion was carried.

RECOMMENDED that

- 1) a report on Provision of Street Name Plates be presented to Cabinet.
- 2) the budget allocated for provision of Street Name Plates be reviewed by Cabinet and increased as per Officer recommendation of the aforementioned report.

88/2022

ELECTRIC VEHICLE CHARGING UPDATE

[At the discretion of the Chairman, item 6 on the agenda – Electric Vehicle Charging Update – was considered before item 5 – Fly Tipping and Environmental Enforcement Update]

An update on the provision of electric vehicle charging points within the District was provided. It was explained that the Council was looking to increase the number of charging points within the District providing 'off-street' charging facilities for residents with no access to their own charge point. To enable this the Council had undertaken an expressions of interest consultation through the Crown Commercial Framework, followed by a full tender exercise. Four detailed responses were received which were being evaluated before the contract could be awarded.

The Environment Services Manager reported that perspective contractors were provided with a selection of locations (as listed in the report to the Board) some of which did not have chargers and others which only had one charging point. It was deemed appropriate to provide the contractor with a number of locations to initially investigate and propose for charging point installation. The rationale was that once the Council had engaged with a contractor, additional locations could be discussed at a later stage.

It was observed that some Wards in the District were currently not on the list for charging point installation. In Rubery South Ward, it was reported that the County Council allowed for installation of a charging point at the Co-Op Food supermarket, but works had been delayed. There was also a further charging point planned for Hagley West Ward at Webb's Garden Centre.

It was reported that the responses received as part of the expressions of interest exercise showed that numerous companies were prepared to self-fund the installation of chargers and look after any necessary maintenance and replacement in the future, which would remove the need for the Council to pump prime the project and go through the grant application process.

Members discussed whether public lamp posts could be considered as charging point locations. The Environmental Services Manager responded that this option was investigated, however, there was a safety issue and cost implication where the lamp posts had been installed on the far end of a pavement away from the road. Such charging points would need to be operated on a three-phase electric supply (i.e. three-wire AC power circuit) and appropriately metered. It was noted that few companies were currently offering to install such charging points. As the pathways and pavements belonged to the County Council as the responsible authority, any companies approaching Bromsgrove District Council on this issue were referred to the County Council.

Some Members queried whether Council land that had not been utilised by the Council but was used without permission by private individuals could be considered for EV charging point locations. The Environmental Services Manager commented that new sites could be added to the list of locations as this was a list of initial locations that would be proposed to the contractor.

Members discussed the wider cost implications of electric vehicles and the viability of installing charging points in the context of ongoing rises in the cost of electricity and future implications given new emerging technologies such as hydrogen fuel.

RESOLVED that the update be noted.

89/2022

FLY TIPPING AND ENVIRONMENTAL ENFORCEMENT UPDATE

A briefing note on fly tipping and environmental enforcement was provided to Members.

The Chairman addressed the Board and summarised the main points of the briefing note as follows:

- Incidence of fly-tipping in the District had been decreasing and the number of recorded to date in 2022-23 had been the lowest recorded in the last eight years. It was noted, however, that incidents differed with respect to quantity of waste dumped and the lower incidence did not necessarily mean that the total volume of waste fly tipped was smaller.
- The cost of environmental crime incurred by the Council had been reducing over the last 8 years. Nevertheless, the Council still had to spend almost £100,000 per year in tackling environmental crime.

- The Council had increased over the last two years the use of warning signs and had invested in more advanced camera systems to improve evidence gathering capabilities. This had been successful in reducing fly-tipping but there had also been an increase in the number of locations where fly-tipping was occurring, possibly as signage had diverted fly-tippers to non-regular locations.
- Demand for fly-tipping monitoring had been greater than the resource available to the Council and there were two cases of fly-tipping captured on CCTV footage that were currently followed up as active cases. There was one instance of encrypted monitoring equipment stolen from site despite being installed covertly.
- The Environmental Service had been considering the use of fully covert surveillance without signage and was represented on the Council's RIPA (Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000) group that was overseeing the use of covert surveillance in compliance with national legislation. The evidence that had been collected by the Service at a number of 'hot spot' locations for fly-tipping would be used to support application to be made under the RIPA legislation.
- The initiative by West Mercia Police of promoting the use of smart water kits for identifying fly tipping of tyres had not produced any results to date, despite a number of garages across Bromsgrove and neighbouring authorities signing up to the scheme. This would continue to be monitored throughout 2023.
- In terms of fly-tipping enforcement, there were currently two Fixed Penalty Notices issued and awaiting payment, and one Community Protection Warning that was being considered for escalation to a Community Protection Notice for non-compliance. It was highlighted that prosecution through the courts for fly-tipping was a lengthy and difficult process.

Following the address by the Chairman, Members made a number of comments and requested that following actions be undertaken by Officers:

- that national legislation be reviewed with respect to the maximum distance allowed for placement of CCTV warning signs away from the camera (without necessitating the use of RIPA legislation).
- that an item on fly-tipping and environmental enforcement be included on the Overview and Scrutiny Board agenda on a bi-annual basis.

RESOLVED that the update be noted.

90/2022

CABINET WORK PROGRAMME

The Cabinet Work Programme was presented for Members' consideration.

RESOLVED that the contents of the Cabinet Work Programme be noted.

91/2022

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Board considered the work programme for the remainder of 2022-23 municipal year. It was agreed that due to the pre-election period the meeting of the Board due to take place on 17th April 2023 be cancelled and that outstanding items on the work programme for that date, the Overview and Scrutiny Board Annual Report 2022-23, and the Board's recommendation tracker, be considered at the first meeting of the Board in the new municipal year.

The Chairman concluded the meeting by offering special thanks to Councillors R. Deeming and C. Spencer for their exceptional service to the Council. The Chairman noted that this would be the last meeting of Overview and Scrutiny Board and last year of service for both Councillors.

Councillor C. Spencer had served as a Bromsgrove District Councillor for twenty consecutive years from 2003-04 municipal year. Councillor Spencer represented Slideslow Ward. She served as the Chairman of the Council from 2015 to 2019.

Councillor R. Deeming had served as a Bromsgrove District Councillor for thirty-two years, having first joined the Council in 1987-88 municipal year. Councillor Deeming represented Cofton Hackett Ward. Among Chairmanship positions held over the years, Councillor Deeming had most recently served as the Chairman of the Licensing Committee in the current municipal year (2022-23).

Members of the Board expressed their gratitude to Councillors R. Deeming and C. Spencer for their stunning contribution to residents of Cofton and Slideslow respectively, and to Bromsgrove District as a whole.

The Chairman also took the opportunity to thank Councillors A. Kriss, M. Middleton, and the Vice-Chairman, Councillor J. Till, who were not standing for re-election, for their hard work and contribution to the Council. All Members of the Board were thanked for their hard work in this municipal year. Members also extended their thanks to Officers for their work in supporting the Board throughout 2022-23.

RESOLVED that the Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2022-23 be considered as an agenda item at the first meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board in 2023-24 municipal year.

The meeting closed at 7.20 p.m.

Overview and Scrutiny Board
29th March 2023

Chairman