

Public Document Pack

Overview and Scrutiny Board
11th July 2024

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

11TH JULY 2024, AT 5.00 P.M.

PRESENT: Councillors P. M. McDonald (Chairman), S. T. Nock (Vice-Chairman), A. Bailes, R. Bailes, A. M. Dale, E. M. S. Gray, B. Kumar, S. A. Robinson and H. D. N. Rone-Clarke

Observers:

Councillor K. J. May – Leader of the Council

Councillor S. J. Baxter – Deputy Leader of the Council (on Microsoft Teams)

Councillor C. A. Hotham

Councillor M. Marshall

Officers: Mrs. S. Hanley, Mr P. Carpenter, Mr. S. Carroll (on Microsoft Teams), Mrs. R. Green, Mrs. J. Bayley-Hill and Mr. M. Sliwinski

12/24

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors R. J. Hunter and J. D. Stanley.

13/24

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND WHIPPING ARRANGEMENTS

There were no declarations of interest nor of whipping arrangements.

14/24

TO CONSIDER, AND IF CONSIDERED APPROPRIATE, TO PASS THE FOLLOWING RESOLUTION TO EXCLUDE THE PUBLIC FROM THE MEETING DURING THE CONSIDERATION OF ITEM(S) OF BUSINESS CONTAINING EXEMPT INFORMATION:

RESOLVED: that under Section 100 I of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended, the public be excluded from the meeting during the consideration of the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Part I of scheme 12A to the Act, as amended, the relevant paragraph of that part, in each case, being as set out below and that it is in the public interest to do so:-

Item No Paragraph

4 3

15/24

LEVELLING UP UPDATE ON WINDSOR STREET CONTRACT AND

MARKET HALL DEVELOPMENT - PRE-SCRUTINY

An update was provided on the Levelling Up Projects at Windsor Street, at Market Hall site, and the Public Realm works.

It was reported that challenges had been experienced with delivery of the three Levelling Up projects in Bromsgrove with a number of external factors having influenced the expected delivery timescales and costs of these projects. It was reported that at present the combined projects overspend was projected at £1.769 million. It was expected that the cost and value engineering would result in this overspend figure reducing to circa £1 million.

In order for the projects to proceed the Council would need to look to finance this gap and it was explained that this could be achieved either through debt financing or by making an application for the funding available through the now defunct Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership (GBSLEP), which currently held £2.45 million of funds yet to be devolved to the Council through the winding up process. The funds available from the former GBSLEP could only be accessed once it was clear what level of finance the Council required to cover the overspend.

An outline of the progress with the tender process for the Windsor Street project was provided. It was stated that MDA were appointed as project managers for the demolition and clearance of the Windsor Street site. The Planning Application submitted by the Council for the demolition of existing buildings and associated site remediation, removal of existing redundant services and utilities had been approved on 4th June 2024. MDA had undertaken a tender process for the demolition works and following this City Demolition were appointed. It was expected that demolition of the site commences in August 2024 and be completed before the end of the calendar year.

It was noted that issues were being experienced with a spike in vandalism at the Windsor Street which required the Police, the security company and minor works team to attend site daily. This was resulting in call out and boarding costs of circa £400 a day to keep the site safe (prevent vandalism and breaking into the site). It was clarified that dealing with security of the site would become the responsibility of the demolition contractors once the site demolition had started.

Members were advised that the Council had applied for Brownfields Clearance Funding for the Windsor Street site project to support with the additional costs anticipated as a result of interventions requested from the Environment Agency (EA). The outcome of this bid would be known at the end of summer.

For Public Realm part of Levelling Up projects, it was reported that Worcestershire County Council were responsible for the design and delivery given their statutory responsibilities. It was noted that

Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was in place between Bromsgrove District and Worcestershire County Councils to ensure both parties were fully sighted on detail of the projects, the funding conditionality and timescales in respect of payments for the project.

For Market Hall site project, it was noted that the Council appointed Kier in April 2024 to deliver the Pre-Construction Service Agreement (PCSA) and submit a cost plan for the Council to review before entering into the main works contract.

It was noted that for Market Hall project the use of steel instead of concrete was now recommended by Kier due to lower cost and availability in the supply chain. A 10-week extension to the PCSA was being recommended in the report submitted before Members to enable Value Engineering (VE) to be undertaken, with Kier due to submit their forecast final cost account by the end of August 2024 and completed design to be available in September 2024. If changes proposed required an additional planning application, consultation would need to continue in parallel with the planning process with local traders and the Ward Councillor for the area.

The recommendations as printed in the report were endorsed by the Board.

RECOMMENDED that:

- 1) The Cabinet approve the appointment of City Demolition for the demolition of existing buildings and associated site remediation, removal of existing redundant services and utilities; and
- 2) The Cabinet approve a 10 week extension in the Market Hall Pre Construction Service Agreement (PCSA) in order to fully validate costs.

(During the consideration of this item, Members discussed matters that necessitated the disclosure of exempt information. It was therefore agreed to move to exclude the press and public prior to any debate of exempt matters on the grounds that information would be revealed which related to the financial and business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information)).

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL PLAN - PRE-SCRUTINY

The Policy Manager presented the proposed Council Plan, providing overview of each of the sections. It was reported that the development of the Council Plan had taken place over a number of months and had begun with some sessions supported by the Local Government Association (LGA). Once key priorities had been identified, there were two further workshops held with Cabinet Members and the Corporate Management Team (CMT) to progress further the key priorities that had previously been identified.

The final Council Plan provided an overarching vision for the District with the four new priorities as follows:

1. Economic Development
2. Housing
3. Environment
4. Infrastructure

It was noted that operationally, the Council Plan informed the service business planning process and helped to determine the Medium Term Financial Plan. The priorities and objectives contained within the Plan would be monitored using specific measures in order to ascertain the success and any areas of improvement.

Following the presentation, there were a number of points raised by Members:

- Members commended the Council Plan and noted that it reflected the whole of the District. Some Members suggested that the 'Monitoring, Review & Reporting' section should include performance data against key measures covered in the Plan. It was responded that performance data on the measures covered in the Council Plan was provided regularly through Quarterly Finance and Performance Monitoring Reports that were presented to Cabinet and scrutinised by Finance and Budget Working Group (sub-committee of Overview and Scrutiny Board). The finance and performance monitoring were combined within a single report and the next step was to improve the format of the monitoring reports to make them more accessible to residents.
- Number of registered births in Bromsgrove – It was explained that data for the number of births in Bromsgrove was taken by registered home address at the time of birth (on UK birth certificate). Therefore, people born in a hospital outside Bromsgrove who had Bromsgrove as registered address were classed as Bromsgrove residents for the purposes of population data.
- It was highlighted that increasing the employment rate in Bromsgrove required good transport links to be provided between the outlying areas of the District and key population centres such as Bromsgrove Town, Birmingham and Worcester. It was commented by Members that some areas such as Alvechurch had managed to obtain extra bus services, however, bus routes were designed by Worcestershire County Council (WCC) and West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) within West Midlands and the Council needed to work with these bodies on matters concerning bus services.

- Concerns were raised about the fulfilment of the Local Plan's affordable housing contributions in some house building projects in the District. Longbridge site was cited where it was reported that the affordable housing contribution could be reduced from 40 to 30 per cent because the houses were built in stages due to cost.
- The issues of hidden and unidentified pockets of deprivation in the District was discussed. It was noted that the English indices of deprivation and other national deprivation data did not always reveal hidden poverty, sometimes among residents in areas classed as more affluent. An issue of fuel poverty among residents who lived in larger properties and could no longer afford to heat their homes was highlighted by a Member.
- A Member asked regarding the infrastructure requirement as part of the new Local Plan for the District. It was noted that this would be detailed within the Local Plan as a separate document from this Council Plan and that the new Local Plan would be produced for the period from 2031 which was outside the timescale for this Council Plan.

The recommendation as printed in the report was endorsed.

RECOMMENDED that The Council Plan attached at Appendix 1 be approved.

17/24

CABINET WORK PROGRAMME

The Cabinet Work Programme was presented for Members' consideration.

During the discussion, it was requested that a Cabinet report due to appear on the Cabinet Work Programme concerning disabled facilities grant - recommissioning of the Independent Living Service be added to the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme. This was agreed by the Board.

RESOLVED that, subject to the preamble above, the Cabinet Work Programme be noted.

18/24

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD WORK PROGRAMME

Members discussed the possibility of setting up a Task Group to investigate the issue of Housing. It was noted that a report on Affordable Housing would be presented to the next meeting, which would include answers to Members' questions, including on definitions of the term affordable housing. It was noted that the Board would need to agree the terms of reference for the task group prior to it commencing. It was also noted that a Housing Needs Study document for the District was

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available, which could help Members with assisting whether a task group investigation was required and, if so, which areas to investigate.

RESOLVED that the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme be updated as per the pre-amble above.

The meeting closed at 7.34 p.m.

Chairman