

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MEETING OF THE SCRUTINY BOARD

TUESDAY, 24TH NOVEMBER 2009 AT 6.00 P.M.

PRESENT: Councillors D. L. Pardoe (Chairman), C. B. Taylor (Vice-Chairman),
A. N. Blagg, R. J. Deeming, S. R. Peters, C. R. Scurrall and
C. J. Tidmarsh

Observers: Councillor R. Hollingworth (present from Minute No. 39/09 to
43/09), S. R. Colella (present from Minute No. 39/09 to 47/09) and P. J.
Whittaker

Officers: Mr. P. Street, Mrs. S. Sellers, Mr. A. Coel, Mr. M. Carr and
Mrs. A. Scarce

39/09 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

There were no apologies for absence.

40/09 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND WHIPPING ARRANGEMENTS**

No declarations of interest or whipping arrangements were received.

41/09 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting of the Scrutiny Board held on 27th October 2009
were submitted.

RESOLVED that the minutes be approved as a correct record.

42/09 **REPORT ON HOT FOOD TAKEAWAYS**

The topic of hot food takeaways had initially been considered by the Scrutiny
Board at its meeting on 19th May 2009. Following an in depth investigation
the Board was now asked to consider the findings and recommendations
contained within the report, 'Scrutiny Board Investigation into the Impact of Hot
Food Takeaways on Communities and the Environment'.

Members thanked officers for their time and support in putting the report
together and stressed the need for action to be taken as soon as possible in
the implementation of the recommendations made.

The Chairman invited the Leader to speak. He congratulated the Scrutiny
Board on producing a very clear report.

RESOLVED that the Board approve the Scrutiny Investigation into the Impact of Hot Food Takeaways on Communities and the Environment report and the recommendations contained in it.

RECOMMENDED that the Cabinet be requested to approve the recommendations contained within the report produced by the Scrutiny Board titled 'Scrutiny Board Investigation into the Impact of Hot Food Takeaways on Communities and the Environment'.

43/09 **FOLLOW UP REPORT FROM QUARTERLY RECOMMENDATION TRACKER**

At the meeting of the Scrutiny Board on 27th October 2009, Members had requested that officers provide additional information in respect of three items on the Recommendation Tracker. The Board considered and noted the report which covered the following items:

- Taxi drivers keeping their engines running
- Distribution of information to residents about refuse and recycling collections.

It was reported to the meeting that unfortunately Mr. M. Bell, Head of Street Scene and Community, who had been due to attend to speak about distribution of information about waste collection and the NVQ training for refuse staff was not present. Members had received some information in the report about the first of these items but consideration of the NVQ scheme would need to be deferred.

Members were reminded that the Licensing Department continued to remind taxi drivers and operators not to keep their engines running, via renewal letters and newsletters. However, the Council had no jurisdiction to enforce this requirement and that it was a Police matter and only they were able to prosecute, as previously reported to the Scrutiny Board. Members commented that it would be helpful to liaise with the Police to make them aware that this was a concern that had been considered by the Board and to remind them of their legal powers to take action. Officers advised that this would be best approached by officers through discussion.

It was reported by Members that some residents in those areas not previously included in the distribution of 'Together Bromsgrove' were now in receipt of it. It was also noted by Members that the postcards with Christmas collection details and reminders of future changes to the refuse and recycling collections were also being received in these areas.

RESOLVED:

- (a) that the Scrutiny Board note the information provided in the report;
- (b) that the item on the NVQ Training Programme for refuse and recycling staff be deferred until the Scrutiny Board meeting on 26th January 2010 and the Head of Street Scene and Community be asked to attend;

- (c) that officers through contact with the police raise the issue of engines being left running;
- (d) that the Chairman of the Licensing Committee be asked to write to all taxi proprietors reminding them not to leave their engines running when stationary, in accordance with the relevant legislation.

44/09 **CHOICE BASED LETTING SCHEME**

The Board considered a report from the Strategic Housing Manager which gave an update on the successful operation of the Home Choice Plus, Choice Based Lettings Scheme over the last 12 months. Members were asked to consider the recommendations which were to be presented to Cabinet on 2nd December 2009.

Members were given background information on the Choice Based Letting Scheme by the Strategic Housing Manager. He explained how the introduction of the scheme enabled the allocation policy to be consistent, how tenancies were more sustainable and previously difficult to let properties were let more easily. The scheme provided applicants with transparency regarding their individual priority ranking when bidding for vacant properties along with an understanding of the total number of applicants also expressing an interest in that property.

Members discussed the scheme at length and covered the following issues:

- The operation of the new on-line scheme and access to it
- The “banding” system
- The bidding process and allocation of houses
- The demand for specific types of properties and the number that become available
- Under occupation of properties throughout the district
- Issues surrounding there being greater demand for tenancies than supply

When discussing the postal survey figures in the report, concern was raised by Members in respect of the 33% of applicants who had said they needed help to bid on properties. The Strategic Housing Manager advised that an action plan had been put in place to address this in the future. Those respondents that had provided names and addresses had been contacted in order to provide them with assistance. The Strategic Housing Manager confirmed that Bromsgrove District Housing Trust (BDHT) maintained a list of all those applicants who were unable to access the system for whatever reason, and were able to bid for properties on their behalf. It was also confirmed that part of the action plan was to train different organisations, such as the TRUNK and Age Concern, on accessing the scheme in order to assist those who were unable to do so for themselves. BDHT also had a mobile “office” which travelled around the district and the staff that facilitate this would also be trained to use the system. Members asked if it was possible for them to receive similar training in order to assist residents within their own Wards. The Strategic Housing Manager confirmed that this would not only be possible but also be very helpful in promoting the scheme.

RESOLVED:

- (a) that the report on the operation of the Choice Based Letting Scheme be noted;
- (b) that the successful operation of the scheme be noted;
- (c) that the Strategic Housing Manager provide Members with the total number of bids made on the 517 properties advertised;
- (d) that the Member Development Training Group be asked to include training on the Choice Based Letting Scheme as soon as practicable.

45/09 **REPORT ON LICENSING OF MOBILE HOT FOOD OUTLETS**

At the Scrutiny Board meeting on 27th October 2009, Members had asked officers to provide further information on the licensing of Mobile Hot Food Outlets in the District and how these would be affected by the introduction of the new policy on street trading. Members were reminded that this report was for information only and that the Street Trading Consent Policy had been approved by Members of the Licensing Committee on 7th September 2009. The Council would be asked to approve the proposed fee structure and the scheme of delegation at its meeting on 20th January 2010.

Members discussed the policy at length and covered the following points:

- The procedure for current traders
- The types of traders covered by the policy
- The amount of the fees
- How the policy would be enforced
- The operation of the appeals process for any traders refused a licence

In light of the number of concerns voiced, Members then discussed whether there was a need for them to scrutinise the policy further. Officers suggest that it might be preferable to allow the policy a period of time to get up and running before scrutinising it. Members agreed that after allowing a period of 6 months or so to allow the policy to “settle in”, it would be a suitable subject of interest to include on the work programme of the Scrutiny Board for investigation.

RESOLVED:

- (a) that the report be noted;
- (b) that the Street Trading Consent Policy be noted as a future item to be included in the Scrutiny Board Work Programme.

46/09 **JOINT COUNTYWIDE FLOODING - VERBAL UPDATE**

Members were advised that there was not, as yet, any further information on the Joint Countywide Flooding Report. However, Mr. P. Street, Executive Director (Partnerships and Projects) advised that a letter was to be sent to Worcestershire County Council to ask when this would be reviewed.

Following the recent floods throughout the country, particular concerns were raised by Members in respect of the bridges in the county and the frequency

that these received structural checks. Members were advised that major bridges had recently been checked.

Mr. Street and the Chairman had recently attended a further meeting of the Watercourses and Flood Group. Members were informed that they would, in due course, receive letters requesting information on areas within their ward which were considered high risk of flooding. The information would be used to form part of the Strategic Flood Risk Plans, which needed to be completed by March 2011. Wyre Forest had piloted this new initiative and would assist and share their expertise in the production of Bromsgrove's Plan which would include areas which were vulnerable, identify key areas, the risks and a plan of action. Members also shared their concern that the knowledge and expertise of the Drainage Engineer for the area needed to be captured in some form and Mr. Street shared this concern and confirmed that issue was being considered.

Members were concerned that residents would be alarmed to find that their properties were in a high risk of flooding area and asked how this was to be approached. Mr. Street advised that any property which had been the subject of flooding in the last five years was classed as high risk. It was most likely therefore those residents would already be aware that their property fell within this scope.

47/09 **REPORT ON IMPROVING RESIDENTS' SATISFACTION TASK GROUP**

Members were reminded that at the meeting of the Scrutiny Board on 27th October 2009, the Improving Residents' Satisfaction Task Group had been established following a scrutiny proposal from Councillor S. Colella. Councillor Colella had also been appointed as Chairman of the Task Group at that meeting.

Members were advised that enquiries had been received from eight Members in respect of membership of the Task Group, and five completed membership forms had been received. The Scoping Checklist was discussed by Members in detail and Members were reminded that they were able to amend or add to the Terms of Reference if they so wished.

The Chairman invited Councillor Colella to speak as Chairman of the Task Group and he advised that due to the time constraints the first meeting of the Task Group had been provisional booked for 30th November 2009, when the Assistant Chief Executive would attend to provide officer support and to ensure an effective investigation was undertaken. A further meeting was not anticipated until after the Christmas break.

RESOLVED:

- (a) that Councillors D. Hancox, Mrs, J. M. L. A. Griffiths, Ms H. J. Jones, C. J. Tidmarsh and C. R. Scurrill be appointed members of the Task Group;
- (b) that the terms of reference of the Improving Residents' Satisfaction Task Group are agreed;

- (c) that the Task Group take four months, from the date of the first meeting, to carry out its investigations;
- (d) that the Task Group commence its investigation as soon as possible.

Under Council Procedure Rule 17.5 Councillor Peters requested that it be recorded that he had abstained from the vote on item (b) above.

48/09 **WORK PROGRAMME**

Members were asked to consider the Work Programme and to identify any evidence they wished to receive in respect of the topics. They were reminded that, at the Scrutiny Board meeting on 26th January 2010, they would receive a presentation from the Executive Director (Partnerships and Projects) on the Corporate Safeguarding Policy (Children and Vulnerable Adults). Members also requested that at the meeting on 26th January 2010 a presentation be given by the Council's climate change officer in relation to the item on the work programme "Meeting the Challenges of Climate Change".

RESOLVED that the work programme be noted.

The meeting closed at 7.40 p.m.

Chairman