

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MEETING OF THE JOINT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

TUESDAY, 1ST DECEMBER 2009 AT 6.00 P.M.

PRESENT: Councillors S. R. Colella (Chairman), D. L. Pardoe (Vice-Chairman), Mrs. M. Bunker, R. J. Deeming, Mrs. R. L. Dent, Mrs. J. M. L. A. Griffiths, Mrs. J. D. Luck, S. R. Peters, C. R. Scurrall, Mrs. C. J. Spencer, C. B. Taylor, C. J. Tidmarsh and L. J. Turner

Observers: Councillor B. Lewis

Officers: Mr. P. Street, Mrs. C. Felton, Ms. J. Pickering, Mrs. S. Sellers, Mr. M. Carr and Ms. A. Scarce

6/09 **APOLOGIES**

Councillor Mrs. C. J. Spencer gave apologies for having to retire from the meeting early. No other apologies were received.

7/09 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

No declarations of interest or whipping arrangements were received.

8/09 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting held on 9th June 2009 were submitted.

RESOLVED that the minutes be approved as a correct record.

9/09 **JOINT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD WORK PROGRAMME 2009-2010**

The Board considered a report of the Head of Legal, Equalities and Democratic Services to present the new Joint Overview & Scrutiny Board (JOSB) Work Programme 2009-2010.

RESOLVED that the Board:

- (a) note the Overview and Scrutiny work planning process for 2009-2010;
- (b) agree the JOSB Work Programme for 2009-2010 (as set out in Appendix 3); and
- (c) agree for two further meetings of the JOSB be held on 10th February 2010 and on 9th March 2010.

10/09 **UPDATE OF THE MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN 2010/11-2012/13**

The Board received a report and presentation by the Head of Financial Services which reviewed the position of the Medium Term Financial Plan 2010/11 – 2012/13 and invited the Board to make recommendations to Cabinet in relation to the Budget.

The Head of Financial Services outlined the general assumptions made in the Medium Term Financial Plan 2010/11 – 2012/13. These were a reduction in the Formula Grant from Central Government of 5% (£252k) from 2010/2012 (approximately 15% reduction over a 3 year period), a General Inflation rate of 2.5%, an increase in the cost of utility bill payments in excess of 5%, interest of investments down to between 1.75% - 2.75%, vacancy management costs of 4%, a Council Tax increment increase at 2.5% (lower than the previously anticipated 4.45%) and a general staff salary increase of between 0-1%.

The Head of Financial Services also outlined the key unavoidable budget pressures: Dolphin Centre Car Park Refunds (£20k), Concessionary Travel Passes (£50k), Audit Inspection Fees (£30k), the loss of income from the Market Hall (£16k), and over 60s swimming facilities (£12k). In addition, Members attention was drawn to the significant departmental budget bids for 2010/11-2012/13: Strategic Planning – Flooding (£15k), the Age Well Scheme (£10k), Discretionary Housing Payments (£5k), funding for the Local Strategic Partnership (£25k), and the Mosaic system (£8k).

The Head of Financial Services also drew attention to the planned Key Savings/Income: management restructure as a part of shared services with Redditch (which was already in the base budget) (£246k), communal waste (which was already in the base budget) (£200k), increased car parking income (£133k), Dolphin Centre service changes (£100k).

The Board also received details of the proposed Capital Programme 2010/11-2012/13; which included depot site alarm system (£25k), funding for DFG's (£90k), the Pavilion roof enhancements (£55k), Cemetery maintenance (under review) (£95k).

The next stages of the budget setting process were outlined. These included the review of identified high and unavoidable budget pressures, the continued assessment of savings / efficiencies / joint working arrangements, a further report to Cabinet on 2nd December 2010 and a Member Briefing on 14th January 2010. The final budget for 2010/11 – 2012/3 Council Tax was due to be approved by full Council on 20th January 2010.

Members of the Board questioned the Head of Financial Services on various aspects of the Medium Term Financial Plan. She explained that only the “high” bids would be considered in the final budget, that the “medium” and “low” bids were inspirational and that if Members of the Board were so minded, they had the opportunity to recommend reprioritisation to the Cabinet before the final budget was approved.

She was asked what penalties may be imposed by Central Government if the budget did not balance; she responded that she would report back to Members of the Board with details of any possible penalties.

Members also queried Royal Mail charges as Royal Mail had levied additional postal charges and asked if a contract with an alternative postal service provider had been considered. The Head of Financial Services responded that it was not clear that this would deliver any savings but that she would investigate whether a lower priced competitor was available. It was suggested that the Council might lobby the LGA to see if it was possible to negotiate jointly for a nation wide contract with an alternative postal service provider at lower costs than through Royal Mail.

In response to questions about the high (significant) bids, the Board was informed that the housing payment of £5k would attract additional match funding from the Government and that the Mosaic system (a bid of £8k) was a software marketing tool that classified all consumers in the United Kingdom and profiled UK consumers in terms of demographics, socio-economics, lifestyles, culture and behaviour. It was explained that this would help to improve areas of weakness in the Council's Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) rating, as it was proposed that the Mosaic system be employed to improve customer knowledge of residents across the District.

The Head of Financial Services was also asked about sponsorship of roundabouts and she agreed there was a need to find more sponsorship for roundabouts to raise revenue.

RESOLVED that the Board note:

- (a) the pressures as identified in Appendix A of the report;
- (b) the unavoidable pressures identified at Appendix B of the report;
- (c) the savings identified at Appendix C of the report; and
- (d) the new bids for the Capital Programme as included at Appendix D of the report.

11/09 **TREASURY STRATEGY**

Members of the Board considered a report of the Head of Financial Services on the current Treasury Management arrangements in place to ensure the security and effectiveness of Council investments.

RESOLVED that the current arrangements for Treasury Management activities within the Council be noted.

12/09 **SCRUTINY OF CRIME AND DISORDER**

Members of Board considered a report of the Head of Legal, Equalities and Democratic Services which briefed Members of the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Board on the statutory provisions for the scrutiny of crime and disorder. The Scrutiny Officer briefed the Members of the Board on the key elements arising from the Police and Justice Act 2006, the associated crime and disorder scrutiny regulations arising in 2009 and outlined some of the

options available to the Board on how this might work in practice. It was proposed that the Chairman of the Board meet with the Portfolio Holder for Community Safety and the Chairman of the Community Safety Partnership to discuss the various options and report back to the Board with a proposal for a working arrangement and protocol.

There was some discussion on how the scrutiny of crime and disorder partnerships might work, how many meetings would be suitable to hold each year, what kinds of issues might be worthwhile considering and if the scrutiny process could feasibly add value to the existing process. It was clarified that the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership was known locally as the Bromsgrove Community Safety Partnership. There was some consensus that the Board should consider the annual performance of the Community Safety Partnership against its stated targets. It was noted that the Board had agreed two extra meetings on 10th February 2010 and 9th March 2010 to consider crime and disorder scrutiny matters.

RESOLVED:

- (a) that the requirements and role for the scrutiny of crime and disorder be noted;
- (b) that the Chairman of the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Board be requested to meet with the Portfolio Holder for Community and Customer Engagement and Community Safety and relevant officers, including a representative from the Community Safety Partnership, to discuss the approach and timetable for the scrutiny of crime and disorder in line with statutory requirements; and
- (c) that any proposed protocol resulting from the outcome of the meeting referred to in 2.2 of the report be submitted to the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Board and the Community Safety Partnership for formal approval.

The meeting closed at 7.50 p.m.

Chairman