

## **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT BOARD**

Tuesday 29<sup>th</sup> April, 2014 at 6.00 p.m.  
in Committee Room 3 at the Council House, Priory Road, Dudley

### **PRESENT:**

Councillor Ridney (Chair)  
Councillor Tyler (Vice-Chair)  
Councillors A Ahmed, Blood, Boleyn, Caunt, Hale, Islam, James, Kettle and Marrey.

### **OFFICERS:**

R Sims, Assistant Director (Housing Strategy and Private Sector - Lead Officer to the Board), P Tart (Director of Corporate Resources) and S Griffiths (Democratic Services Manager - Directorate of Corporate Resources)

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### 23 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor Ridney declared a non-pecuniary interest in Agenda Item No. 8 (Membership of the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee) in view of her husband being a co-opted member of that Scrutiny Committee.

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### 24 **MINUTES**

#### RESOLVED

- (1) That the minutes of the meeting held on 26<sup>th</sup> February, 2014, be approved as a correct record and signed.
- (2) That a verbal progress report on the situation concerning New Bradley Hall be given to the Board in six months time.

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### 25 **REVIEW OF COMMUNITY FORUMS**

The Board considered a report of the Director of Corporate Resources on the findings of a review of the operation of the Council's Community Forums and associated proposals.

The report concluded that the Community Forums had generally improved the opportunities for engagement between the Council and communities, through locally elected ward members.

It was acknowledged that some Community Forum meetings had been more successful than others and that good practice needed to be shared. A longer-term evaluation of Community Forums would need to be undertaken in the wider context of the developing vision of Dudley MBC as a Community Council and in the context of budget reductions, transformation of services, changing community expectations and broader work on community engagement. The identification of priorities and an improvement agenda for each individual Community Forum will help in measuring the success of the Forums in the future.

The Board considered the proposals set out in the report and commented as follows:

- That the venues used for meetings be reviewed to remove those which have been less successful and look more widely at venues which might attract a broader attendance (subject to cost). Officers were also asked to reconsider assistance to people with hearing difficulties as microphone systems/hearing loops were no longer provided.
- That the current Community Forum boundaries be maintained, subject to ongoing review, along with the frequency of meetings (five times a year) and times (6.30pm to 8.30 pm).
- That improvements be made to the Community Forum web page to provide an inbox for topic suggestions and that officers ensure that improved publicity is displayed at the meeting venues.
- That the successful online 'Facebook' Forum, undertaken at the start of each round of Community Forums, be continued. Officers were asked to consider a mechanism for feeding issues raised online into the agenda for meetings of the relevant Community Forum.
- That the use of Twitter be encouraged at Community Forum meetings.
- That meeting agendas feature a specific topic to be advertised in advance alongside the existing open agenda items. Members indicated that a notice period would be required for suggested topics and the Chairs might wish to invite suggestions for future discussion topics at the end of each Forum meeting.
- That the pilot participatory techniques initially undertaken at the Amblecote, Cradley and Wollescote, Lye and Stourbridge North be noted.
- That the principle of better managing the relationship with other statutory organisations inputting into Community Forum meetings be accepted in principle to avoid duplication and that options for occasional joint meetings be explored where the local community wishes (eg: with Police and Communities Together (PACT) meetings). Reference was also made to the reorganisation of PACT meetings and various local issues concerning the operation of these meetings across the Borough.

- That officer attendance be kept to a minimum but the need for additional specialist officer attendance be accepted where a particular item is on the agenda. Members expressed the view that officers attending should be able to answer queries at the meeting and that, in particular, proper levels of professional advice/support should be available to Members in considering grant applications.
- That meeting paperwork and action notes be less formal than at present.
- That ongoing training and support continue to be provided to lead and other officers and Forum Chairs/Vice-Chairs, as appropriate. Reference was made to the process for advising Chairs/Vice-Chairs on the outcomes/responses to items raised at the Forum meetings.
- That Chairs and lead officers establish priorities and an improvement agenda for individual forums at the start of the municipal year.
- That grant application forms and funding guidelines needed to be amended further. Members raised various issues concerning the Community Forum grants process, including:
  - the need for all necessary documents and financial information to be submitted and verified;
  - all information should be circulated to Members (by e-mail);
  - clear deadlines should be set for the submission of grant application forms (at least 14 days before the Forum meeting) with sufficient flexibility in cases of urgency;
  - Applications to the Forums should be considered as a 'last' rather than 'first' resort and community organisations/groups should be signposted to other funding streams with guidance from Dudley Council for Voluntary Services where possible;
  - Applications made to all 10 Community Forums should be considered on a proportional basis taking account of the number of wards in each area. It was recognised that that some degree of uniformity was needed in making recommendations to each Forum;
  - Further consideration should be given to the policy of allocating Community Forum funding to support mainstream Council Directorate activity;
  - Further consideration be given to the implications of the guidelines relating to applications from 'parent' organisations, with an acknowledgement that all Community Forums have the discretion to consider each and every application on its merits;
  - Some concerns were recorded about different approaches taken by Community Forums, whilst recognising that the corporate guidelines should not restrict local flexibility.

Subject to the above points, where further consideration was required, the Board accepted the report. Officers would implement any necessary changes to administrative processes and recommendations would be made to the annual meeting of the Council concerning the establishment of the Community Forums for the 2014/15 municipal year. In view of the detailed issues raised concerning Community Forum grants, it was suggested that a dedicated meeting of Chairs/Vice-Chairs and Lead Officers be arranged in June to discuss the way forward.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the proposals set out in the report, and as referred to above, be approved and that recommendations concerning the establishment of Community Forums for 2014/15 be submitted to the annual meeting of the Council on 5<sup>th</sup> June, 2014 as appropriate.
- (2) That a dedicated meeting of the Community Forum Chairs/Vice-Chairs and Lead Officers be arranged in June, 2014 to discuss the way forward concerning Community Forum grants taking account of the various detailed issues identified by the Board.

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HEALTH SCRUTINY COMMITTEE REVIEW OF TOBACCO CONTROL

A report of the Lead Officer to the Health Scrutiny Committee was submitted on key findings, observations and draft recommendations arising from the tobacco control review.

In endorsing the report, the Board commented on the illicit tobacco trade and ongoing research in relation to e-cigarettes. An action plan had been produced based on the recommendations contained in the Appendix to the report submitted.

RESOLVED

- (1) That the report of the Health Scrutiny Committee be noted.
- (2) That the Committee's recommendations and corresponding action plan be endorsed and referred to the Cabinet and appropriate external agencies.

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27

DEVELOPMENT OF THE ANNUAL SCRUTINY PROGRAMME 2014/15

The Board considered a report of the Lead Officer and the Director of Corporate Resources on the development of the Annual Scrutiny Programme for 2014/15.

The Board gave initial consideration to items to be rolled-forward from the 2013/14 programme and details of a number of suggested topic areas for potential inclusion in the Programme for 2014/15.

Further views would be sought and a report would be submitted to the next meeting of the Board. The proposed scrutiny topics would be reported to the first cycle of Scrutiny Committee meetings in the new municipal year to be followed by appropriate development sessions to support Members appointed to each Scrutiny Committee in 2014/15.

The Council's overview and scrutiny arrangements would continue to be the subject of an annual review process.

RESOLVED

That the preliminary consideration of items for inclusion in the Annual Scrutiny Programme for 2014/15 be noted and that a further report be submitted to the next meeting of the Board.

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28

MEMBERSHIP OF THE CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Further to Minute No. 20 of the meeting of the Board held on 26<sup>th</sup> February, 2014, consideration was given to the composition and membership of the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee. Particular reference was made to the appointment of co-opted members and the need to reflect the wider remit of the Scrutiny Committee in any future arrangements.

Reference was made to the existing provisions in the Council's Constitution and the statutory regulations still in force concerning the appointment of co-opted members for education issues.

RESOLVED

- (1) That a further report on a review of the composition and membership of the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee be submitted to the next meeting of the Board.
- (2) That pending consideration of the report referred to in (1) above, the existing co-opted members appointed to the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee remain unchanged and that an appropriate recommendation be submitted to the annual meeting of the Council on 5<sup>th</sup> June, 2014.

The meeting ended at 7.45 p.m.

CHAIR