

Minutes of the Economy Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Bromsgrove District Council Offices

Thursday, 5 October 2023, 10.00 am

Present:

Cllr Matt Dormer (Chairman), Cllr Karen Hanks (Vice Chairman),
Cllr Mel Allcott, Cllr Ian Hardiman and Cllr Tony Muir

Also attended:

Cllr Karen May, Bromsgrove District Council
Gary Woodman, Interim Assistant Director of Economy
Dave Corbett, Lead Analyst (Performance)
Sarah McDonald, Senior Finance Business Partner
Kate Griffiths, Interim Democratic Governance and Scrutiny Manager
Deborah Dale, Community Engagement Officer

Available Papers

The members had before them:

- A. The Agenda papers (previously circulated);
- B. The Minutes of the Meeting held on 17 July 2023 (previously circulated).

(A Copy of document A will be attached to the signed Minutes).

51 Apologies and Welcome

Apologies were received from Councillor Martin Allen.

52 Declarations of Interest and of any Party Whip

None.

53 Public Participation

None.

54 Confirmation of the Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 17 July 2023 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

55 District Council Economic Challenges and how the County Council Could Help Bromsgrove District Council

The Chairman welcomed the Leader of Bromsgrove District Council, (BDC) Councillor Karen May to the meeting to discuss the District Council's economic challenges and ways in which the County Council could help.

The Leader set out the challenges as follows:

Road connectivity and congestion – Although the Leader welcomed the improvements to the A38 and A435 they felt these would not address future development needs. It was hoped that, with the cancellation of HS2 high speed rail beyond Birmingham, Government funding would be available for further improvements to the road network to take traffic away from the town centre. Strategic planning to find solutions was vital, and local neighbourhood plans needed to be maximised to address congestion along with using available transport data to monitor traffic movement and the impact housing developments, outside of the District, had on Bromsgrove's roads.

Education – Housing development outside of S106 and S278 developer funding put pressure on existing schools with no further provision in place to build more.

Bromsgrove College continued to provide health and beauty courses but there were no longer courses available in engineering, leading to a reduction of skills in these areas.

Housing – Despite housing development taking place in the District 2,500 people were still on the waiting list for social housing.

The cost of buying a house had increased by 5% and there was pressure on available land for development with 89% of the District being Green Belt land. The Chairman recognised the challenges of obtaining planning permission to develop on Green Belt land and Councillors had a role in overcoming planning obstacles.

It was also important that housing for Key Workers was available and developed.

Businesses - Despite the District having the highest number of start-up businesses in the County, many businesses continued to relocate to other areas and although Bromsgrove was located near to the motorway there was little opportunity for businesses to expand due to Area of Development Restraints being in place.

Effective mapping would help to identify where support for economic development was required.

High Street – There were difficulties filling the vacant shops in the high street but there was still a good night-time economy and a good range of independent business in Worcester Road.

Funding – The District was awarded £14 million of Government Levelling Up Funding to enable the Market Hall, which has been vacant since 2010, to become a cultural and commercial hub and bring new businesses and footfall into the town centre.

The District had also been allocated £2,805,712 for local investment through the Shared Prosperity Fund. The Panel requested information on the forward trajectory of the fund beyond 2025 and output data per District.

As the Worcestershire Local Enterprise Partnership (WLEP) still had a role to play in creating and delivering economic growth and jobs in the County it was important for local authorities to be part of discussions. The Panel asked for feedback on any changes to the format of the WLEP and its Membership.

The Interim Assistant Director of Economy agreed to bring this back information on the Shared Prosperity Fund to a future meeting and to keep the Panel up to date regarding the WLEP.

The Chairman of the Panel thanked the Leader and acknowledged she had an in-depth knowledge of her area.

56 Performance (Q1 April to June 2023) and In-Year Budget Monitoring

The Panel received performance data for Quarter 1 (April to June 2023) from the Lead Analyst (Performance).

The Panel was informed passenger numbers could be affected by industrial action although user numbers for Worcestershire Parkway Station were up. The Panel requested information on the impact Worcestershire Parkway Station had on neighbouring stations and data on passenger numbers.

The Panel expressed concern over the Worcestershire greenhouse gas emissions with corporate greenhouse gas emissions creeping up. The Chairman asked for these concerns to be fed back to the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Panel to see if there was any way the figures could be reduced and was advised that the Panel keep a watching brief on the figures.

The Panel received the budget monitoring information for Period 4 (2023/24). The Senior Finance Business Partner explained that the corporate budget position had been provided for the Panel for information only and was considered at Cabinet on 28 September.

Further information on the Capital Programme would be presented at the next Economy Overview and Scrutiny Panel meeting.

A Panel Member asked how much additional funding would have been available if the Council Tax had been increased to 4.99% rather than the actual increase of 4.94%.

The Senior Finance Business Partner agreed to provide this information for the Panel.

57 Work Programme

The Panel considered its current workplan and required the following:

- clarification of the scope of the Railway Strategy update due to be presented at the next meeting.
- New item to be added to the workplan on UK Shared Prosperity Fund – looking at forward trajectory of the fund beyond 2025 and output information per District.

The Overview and Scrutiny Performance Board (OSPB) had asked Panel Chairmen to invite Panel members to make suggestions for topics for the next Scrutiny Task Group. All suggestions would be considered at the next OSPB meeting on 19 October 2023.

The Economy Overview and Scrutiny Panel put forward: mobile connectivity in relation to health – looking at care agency implications/ enabling people to continue living in their homes etc.

The meeting ended at 11.35 am

Chairman