

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

PARISH COUNCILS' FORUM

Tuesday, 8th January 2008, at 6.30 p.m.

PRESENT: Councillor R. Hollingworth (Chairman)

Parish	Representative(s)
Barnt Green	Mrs. J. M. Jagger (Chairman) Mr. D. A. Gilburn Mr. R. Westbury (Executive Officer)
Belbroughton	Mr. J. M. Bradley (Chairman) Mrs. C. Limm (Clerk)
Clent	Mrs. P. Harris (Clerk)
Cofton Hackett	Mr. B. Bridgewater Mr. K. Duncan Mr. B. Hodgson (Clerk)
Dodford with Grafton	Mrs. C. Limm (Clerk)
Hunnington	Mr. P. J. Peeney (Chairman) Mrs. R. Mullett (Clerk)
Lickey and Blackwell	Mr. K. Woolford
Lickey End	Mr. C. W. Bateman
Romsley	Mr. I. A. Hodgetts (Chairman)
Stoke	Mrs. T. Roll (Chairman) Mr. K. Strawbridge Mr. P. Callaway (Clerk)
Wythall	Mrs. S. J. Baxter (Chairman, and also representing CALC)

Also in attendance: Mr. P. Street, Mr. G. Rocke, Ms. S. Mould, Ms. R. McAndrews and Mr. A. C. Stephens

1. **APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor R. Hollingworth and the following Parish representatives:-

Parish	Representative
Alvechurch	Mrs. Y. Goode (Clerk)
Lickey and Blackwell	Mrs. J. Casey (Clerk)
Romsley	Mrs. P. L. Taylor (Clerk)
Dodford with Grafton	Mr. V. Dawson (Chairman)
Clent	Mr. E. Sheppard (Chairman)
Beoley / Wythall	Miss P. Harrison (Clerk)
Bromsgrove Area Committee of CALC	Mr. R. Levett

2. **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting of the Parish Councils' Forum held on 25th September 2007 were submitted.

There were no matters arising and it was **AGREED** that the minutes be approved as a correct record.

3. **LIFELINE SERVICE - PRESENTATION BY MS. R. McANDREWS, CCTV AND LIFELINE MANAGER**

At the invitation of the Chairman, Ms. R. McAndrews, the Council's CCTV and Lifeline Manager, addressed the Forum and gave a brief presentation in respect of the Lifeline Services provided by the District Council. She outlined how the service was operated and described the benefits of the service to its customers.

After the presentation, Ms. McAndrews answered a number of questions raised by the Forum. The Chairman then thanked her for her interesting and informative presentation.

4. **ELECTIONS AND ELECTORAL MATTERS - INTRODUCTION TO MS. S. MOULD, ELECTORAL SERVICES MANAGER**

The Chairman introduced Ms. S. Mould to the Forum who had recently been appointed to the post of Electoral Services Manager and who would, therefore, also be involved with the parish councils' elections.

At the invitation of the Chairman, Ms. Mould addressed the Forum with a view to establishing contact with the parish councils and especially the Clerks to the parish councils. She stated that she may be contacted to respond to any questions or issues relating to parish council elections.

5. **IMPROVING EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PARISH COUNCILS' FORUM**

The Chairman referred to this item on the agenda and stated that he had been speaking to Mrs. S. J. Baxter, in her capacity as a representative of the Area Committee of the County Association of Local Councils (CALC), with a view to improving the working relationship between the District Council and the parish councils.

He reported that he was undertaking to arrange a seminar, presented by Mr. D. Cropp from Worcestershire CALC, and Ms. M. Bryan from Worcestershire County Council. Acting as facilitators, Councillor Hollingworth anticipated that as well as running the seminar to enhance the District / parishes working relationship, Mr. Cropp and Ms. Bryan would help to commence work on a Parish Council Charter for Bromsgrove.

However, before arranging the seminar, Councillor Hollingworth asked what problems the parish councils had been experiencing in their dealings with the District Council, and opened up the floor for feedback from the Forum.

From the ensuing discussion, the following matters were raised:

- Working together / working relationship

There was general concern that parish councillors' detailed knowledge of their local area, and their local populations, was not more effectively used by the District Council. In fact, it was felt that the parish councils tended to be overlooked by District Council officers, when their local knowledge may not necessarily be as detailed as the parish councils'. In response, Councillor Hollingworth stated that, in order to work better together and support each other, all three tiers of local government in Worcestershire would need to seek to improve and enhance working relationships.

The Chairman also stated that, if there were any matters which individual parish councils had reported to the District Council which were not being resolved as quickly as hoped, the parish council should take up the matter with the relevant Ward Councillor(s) who would then report back to him in order to resolve the matter. On the whole, it was reported that the parish councils had a good working relationships with their relevant Ward Councillor(s).

It was considered that parish councils had limited input into District Council policy and procedural issues, especially in terms of planning matters. The Chairman stated that the Council had a deadline of eight weeks for the determination of planning applications in order to meet targets set by the Government and that it would be difficult to extend the period for consultations with parish councils. However, it was pointed out that details of all applications received were published on the Council's web-site.

- Communication

It was stated that communication with the District Council was considered to be frustrating and annoying, especially in terms of responses to letters, telephone calls and emails. The Chairman stated that this was a managerial issue which affected the general public as well, but he hoped that an improved working relationship with the parish councils would improve two-way communications.

Furthermore, it was felt that communication was inconsistent between departments and service areas. Where the general public were concerned, the Forum believed that it did not matter which authority was inconsistent or liable for a problem with service delivery - "the Council" was viewed as a single authority instead of County, District or parish.

The Forum considered that the District Council was slow in promoting "good news" items and events, especially where news and projects involving parish councils were concerned. As both the

District Council and the parish councils are working towards the same goals (that is, provision of efficient services), better communications would hopefully lead to an enhanced reputation.

In respect of the Local Development Plan, the Forum considered that more communication from the District Council would be of benefit, especially in view of those parish councils which had developed, or in the process of developing Parish Plans and / or Village Design Statements.

- Unitary / Community Council proposals

Consideration was also given to the future of the two-tier (or, including the County Council, three-tier) arrangements for local government within the District. It was felt that the associated inequalities in the provision of services under the current arrangements, together with the public view of the "double taxation" concept needed to be addressed. The Chairman stated that, if there was a "double taxation" problem within the District, it is most likely to relate to highways and footpath matters which are a County Council responsibility. However, he added that, as far as the general public were concerned, it was perceived to be the responsibility of "the Council." Furthermore, as the District (and County) Council were able to benefit from economies of scale in respect of the provision of services, the issue of the parish councils "buying-in" services from the District would also need to be addressed.

The provision of services in parished areas, as compared to those provided in unparished parts of the District were also questioned. The Chairman responded by saying that this would be addressed fully at a later date during the creation of a Parish Charter.

- The Forum

It was felt that meetings of the Forum have not been used to their full potential in the past and that the items for the agenda, put forward by the Area Committee of CALC, have been rather mundane. Ideally, the Forum should be used to communicate information to the parish councils which could be publicised within the parishes (for example, the LifeLine presentation), with more robust agenda items provided by CALC for discussion, and improved follow-up after each meeting.

In addition, it was considered that, wherever possible, meetings of the Forum should be held in the Committee Room.

However, positive comments were also expressed, including an indication good working relationships with individual departments, expressions of appreciation in respect of the actions of individual District Council officers and the improvements which had been made so far, together with the prospects for the future.

It was also felt that meetings of the Forum had been getting better in recent months and that this could be a useful indicator as to anticipated

future improvements. Furthermore, most parishes believed they had a good working relationship with their Ward Councillors.

The Chairman concluded by thanking the Forum for their comments and stated that he would inform them of the date for the seminar with Mr. Cropp and Ms. Brayn in the near future.

6. **THE STREET CLEANSING STRATEGY AND TIMETABLE**

The Chairman reported that Mr. M. Bell, the Council's Head of Street Scene and Waste Management Services, was in the process of developing a Policy Document relating to a Street Cleansing Strategy from which a timetable of works could then be produced. He added that the delay has been caused, in part, due to trying to merge the Street Scene Service and the Community Services.

A statement by Mr. Bell had been prepared prior to the meeting:-

"The [Street Scene and Waste Management Services] department is working on a Policy Document for Street Cleansing which will detail all of the processes and procedures that we undertake in this activity. This document should be ready by the end of March 2008 and will be presented to the Parish Councils' Forum at a future meeting.

"The schedules for the service have been delayed because of the combining of Street Scene and Culture and Community into a single department. It is our intention to combine street cleansing and grounds maintenance into a single operation and thus prevent the situation that has occurred in the past where grass cutting machinery has cut up litter not picked up by Street Cleaning crews.

"By scheduling both services a better and more efficient service will be provided."

The Chairman clarified that all concerns the parish councils had concerned street cleansing, footpath cleansing, litter collecting, etc.

7. **DATE OF FUTURE MEETINGS**

It was **AGREED** that the next Meetings of the Forum be arranged for 6.30 p.m. on the following dates:-

- Tuesday, 1st April 2008
- Tuesday, 24th June 2008
- Tuesday, 30th September 2008
- Tuesday, 6th January 2009

The Meeting closed at 7.45 p.m.

Chairman