

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MEETING OF THE PARISH COUNCILS' FORUM

TUESDAY, 22ND SEPTEMBER 2009

AT 6.30 P.M.

PRESENT: Councillors R. Hollingworth (Chairman) and Mrs. M. A. Sherrey JP

Representative(s)	Parish
Mr. J. Cypher (Chairman)	Alvechurch
Mrs. J. Jagger (Chairman)	Barnt Green
Mr. R. Westbury (Executive Officer)	
Mrs. C. Limm (Clerk)	Belbroughton
Mr. C. R. Scurrall	
Mr. B. J. Somner (Chairman)	Beoley
Miss P. Harrison (Executive Officer)	
Mr. G. F. Witcomb (Chairman)	Catshill and North Marlbrook
Mrs. G. Lungley (Clerk)	
Mr. E. Sheppard (Chairman)	Clent
Mr. B. Bridgewater	Cofton Hackett
Mrs. C. Limm (Clerk)	Dodford with Grafton
Mr. D. J. Prescott (Chairman)	Finstall
Mr. S. Colella (Chairman)	Hagley
Mr. G. V. Cole	
Mrs. J. A. Casey (Executive Officer)	Lickey and Blackwell
Mrs. J. Johnson	
Mr. C. W. Bateman	Lickey End
Mr. I. A. Hodgetts (Chairman)	Romsley
Mr. K. Strawbridge (Chairman)	Stoke
Mr. G. P. Whitehouse (Chairman)	Tutnall and Cobley
Mrs. H. S. Davies (Clerk)	
Mrs. S. J. Baxter (Chairman)	Wythall
Miss P. Harrison (Executive Officer)	

Officers: Mr. T. Beirne, Mr. H. Bennett, Mrs. S. Mould, Mr. J. Turner,
Mr. P. Murphy and Mr. A. C. Stephens

8/09 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Mr. R. Harper (Chairman, Dodford with Grafton Parish Council) and Mrs. R. Mullett (Clerk to Clent, Hunnington and Romsley Parish Councils).

9/09 **MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING OF THE PARISH COUNCILS' FORUM
HELD ON 23RD JUNE 2009 AND MATTERS ARISING**

The minutes of the meeting of the Parish Councils' Forum held on 23rd June 2009 were submitted. There were no matters arising and it was

RESOLVED that the minutes be approved as a correct record.

10/09 **ELECTORAL SERVICES**

At the invitation of the Chairman, Mrs. S. Mould, Electoral Services Manager, addressed the meeting. She informed the Forum that the Council's Electoral Services had completed its merger with Redditch Borough Council's Electoral Services under the Shared Services initiative, and outlined how the Elections Team had been restructured.

In addition, Mrs. Mould referred to the following election/electoral matters which may have been of interest to the Forum:

- the Annual Canvass for the Register of Electors which had commenced at the beginning of September;
- the Annual Review of Polling Stations; and
- current Parish Council Casual Vacancies.

After answering questions raised by the Forum, the Chairman thanked Mrs. Mould for attending the meeting.

11/09 **OLDER PEOPLE TASK GROUP SCRUTINY EXERCISE**

At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. H. Bennett, Assistant Chief Executive addressed the meeting and gave a brief presentation to the Forum about the work being undertaken as part of an Overview and Scrutiny exercise by the Older People Task Group.

He outlined how population projections indicated that there would be a likely increase in demand for different types of housing for older people, and how central government, together with local authorities, needed to understand and prepare for an ageing society. Mr. Bennett added that, although district councils do not have a statutory duty to provide for older people, plans needed to be established at an early stage so that the Council could play its part in providing the right services for the whole population.

Mr. Bennett referred to the Worcestershire Older People's Strategy but added that it was felt that the strategy for the whole County was too big and, therefore, the strategy was currently under review. He stated that a more localised strategy, focussing at a district level, would be likely to be more effective. In terms of present day services, Mr. Bennett outlined the current provision of services whereby older people were the target customers. Amongst others, these included the Shopmobility scheme, the over-60's swimming concession and the Lifeline service.

He went on to explain that the Overview and Scrutiny exercise would be looking at three key elements affecting the lives of older people within the District: (i) Housing; (ii) Health; and (iii) Income, Employment and Learning. Even at an early stage, there were a number of emerging recommendations from the Task Group; for example, giving greater publicity to existing services for older people, expanding the Lifeline service, continuing to ensure the provision of more housing for older people and to give the Worcestershire Older People's Strategy a more local, district dimension.

Mr. Bennett also referred to the week of events being promoted for UK Older People's Day on 1st October 2009, in which the Council had been involved. After answering a number of questions from members of the Forum, the Chairman thanked Mr. Bennett for his presentation.

RESOLVED that the Parish Councils members report back to their respective Parish Councils the questions raised during the presentation and provide feedback to the Older People Task Group in due course.

12/09 **DRAFT PARISH COUNCIL CHARTER**

At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. T. Beirne, Executive Director - Services, addressed the meeting and formally presented the updated Parish Council Charter to the Forum. He stated that, following meetings in July 2009 of the Working Group established at the Forum meeting held on 23rd June 2009, the original draft Charter had been updated and refined to take account of issues raised at the last meeting and at the Working Group.

He stated that the Charter would continually be reviewed and developed further in the future but that, for the time being, he was eager to obtain agreement in principle to the basic framework of the document. Mr. Beirne added that he would act as the lead Senior Officer and that Councillor M. J. A. Webb would be the lead Portfolio Holder in respect of the Parish Councils.

It was anticipated that, by the start of the 2010/2011 financial year, all of the Parish Councils would have 'signed-up' to the document and that the Charter would have been approved by the District Council.

Members of the Forum raised a number of issues about the latest draft version but Mr. Beirne stated that the document was written in such a way that allowed for additional updating and amendment as the working relationship with the Parish Councils developed.

RESOLVED:

- (a) that, on the basis of the discussions, and in consultation with Mr. J. Cypher, the draft Parish Charter be further amended to refine particular areas of concern, together with the inclusion of a work programme of issues to be addressed in future (for example, finances, ICT strategy / arrangements, detailed planning guidance, review / development of the Charter, etc.); and
- (b) that the Parish Charter be forwarded to the Parish Councils for their consideration and to "sign-up" if considered appropriate.

13/09 **PLANNING ISSUES**

(i) **Enforcement**

At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. J. Turner, Principal Planning Officer within Development Control Services, introduced himself to the Forum. He explained that his main role is concerned with enforcement of planning control, having started employment with the Council within the last month or so and, so far, much of his time had been spent identifying the workload and developing a strategy for dealing with the outstanding complaints.

Mr. Turner stated that he would be unable to address individual issues at the meeting but confirmed that he would be willing to deal with the backlog of enforcement complaints in the most convenient way at the suggestion of the Forum. He explained that the planning process sometimes meant that there could be lengthy delays between receipt of a complaint and the service / taking effect of an enforcement notice, and that this was an inevitable part of planning control which made it difficult to specify rigid timescales.

Arising out of the discussion, members of the Forum detailed the problems which had been experienced in the past and expressed hope that enforcement issues would be dealt with more actively in future. In addition, it was felt that more communication between the parish councils and the district council would also be useful, especially in terms of brief updates on enforcement cases.

RESOLVED:

- (a) that each parish council draw up a priority list of enforcement issues to assist officers within Development Control to try and reduce the backlog of complaints; and
- (b) that training events for individual parishes or, preferably, several parish councils at a time, be organised in respect of enforcement procedures, together with details of what the Council can and cannot do.

(ii) **Planning Consultations - Certificates of Lawfulness**

At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. P. Murphy, Planning Business Support Administration Supervisor, addressed the meeting. In response to a question concerning consultation process for Certificates of Lawfulness, it was stated that parish councils would only be consulted for comments in respect of Certificates of Lawfulness for an Existing Use. For a Proposed Use, parish councils would not normally be consulted because the issue would be a planning matter.

Mr. Murphy also outlined the web-based 'Public Access' system which allowed members of the public to view planning application details on-line. He stated that guidance notes on the use of the system could be made available upon request or, if further help was required, an

appointment could be made for him to demonstrate the system and how it works.

Finally, in response to a question concerning the scale of plans displayed on screen, Mr. Murphy suggested that the Case Officer would be able to confirm plan scales, distances and other measurements.

RESOLVED that, in the event of parish councillors requiring further training on the 'Public Access' planning application system, officers be available to give training upon request, either individually, or to a group of parish representatives.

14/09 **FORWARD PLAN**

Consideration was given to the Cabinet's Forward Plan for the period 1st September to 31st December 2009, which had been included with the agenda for the meeting by way of information for parish council representatives.

RESOLVED that the Cabinet's Forward Plan be noted.

The meeting closed at 8.30 p.m.

Chairman