



**BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**MEETING OF THE CABINET**

**WEDNESDAY 14TH OCTOBER 2020**

**AT 6.00 P.M.**

**VIRTUAL MEETING - SKYPE - VIRTUAL**

**MEMBERS:** Councillors K.J. May (Leader), A. D. Kent (Deputy Leader), G. N. Denaro, M. A. Sherrey, P.L. Thomas and S. A. Webb

**AGENDA**

1. To receive apologies for absence
2. Declarations of Interest  
  
To invite Councillors to declare any Disclosable Pecuniary Interests or Other Disclosable Interests they may have in items on the agenda, and to confirm the nature of those interests.
3. To confirm the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 9th September 2020 (Pages 1 - 8)
4. Any recommendations from the Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting held on 12th October 2020  
  
(these will be tabled at the meeting)
5. Planning for the Future - Government White Paper (Council Response) (Pages 9 - 42)
6. Recovery and Restoration Plan (Pages 43 - 80)
7. Medium Term Financial Plan 2020/21 to 2024/25 - Update (Pages 81 - 86)
8. To consider any other business, details of which have been notified to the Head of Legal, Equalities and Democratic Services prior to the

commencement of the meeting and which the Chairman, by reason of special circumstances, considers to be of so urgent a nature that it cannot wait until the next meeting

K. DICKS  
Chief Executive

Parkside  
Market Street  
BROMSGROVE  
Worcestershire  
B61 8DA

6th October 2020

If you have any queries on this Agenda please contact  
Amanda Scarce

Parkside, Market Street, Bromsgrove, B61 8DA  
Tel: (01527) 881443  
e.mail: [joanne.gresham@bromsgroveandredditch.gov.uk](mailto:joanne.gresham@bromsgroveandredditch.gov.uk)

## **GUIDANCE ON VIRTUAL MEETINGS**

Due to the current Covid-19 pandemic Bromsgrove District Council will be holding this meeting in accordance with the relevant legislative arrangements for remote meetings of a local authority. For more information please refer to the Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police Crime Panels meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020.

Please note that this is a public meeting conducted remotely by Skype conferencing between invited participants and live streamed for general access via the Council's YouTube channel.

You are able to access the livestream of the meeting from the Committee Pages of the website, alongside the agenda for the meeting or through the link detailed below.

[Live Stream for Cabinet on 14th Octobe 2020 at 6.00 pm](#)

If you have any questions regarding the agenda or attached papers please do not hesitate to contact the officer named above.

### **Notes:**

As referred to above, the virtual Skype meeting will be streamed live and accessible to view. Although this is a public meeting, there are circumstances when Council might have to move into closed session to consider exempt or confidential information. For agenda items that are exempt, the public are excluded and for any such items the live stream will be suspended and that part of the meeting will not be recorded.





## **INFORMATION FOR THE PUBLIC**

### **Access to Information**

The Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 widened the rights of press and public to attend Local Authority meetings and to see certain documents. Recently the Freedom of Information Act 2000 has further broadened these rights, and limited exemptions under the 1985 Act.

- You can attend all Council, Cabinet and Committee/Board meetings, except for any part of the meeting when the business would disclose confidential or “exempt” information.
- You can inspect agenda and public reports at least five days before the date of the meeting.
- You can inspect minutes of the Council, Cabinet and its Committees/Boards for up to six years following a meeting.
- You can have access, upon request, to the background papers on which reports are based for a period of up to six years from the date of the meeting. These are listed at the end of each report.
- An electronic register stating the names and addresses and electoral areas of all Councillors with details of the membership of all Committees etc. is available on our website.
- A reasonable number of copies of agendas and reports relating to items to be considered in public will be made available to the public attending meetings of the Council, Cabinet and its Committees/Boards.
- You have access to a list specifying those powers which the Council has delegated to its Officers indicating also the titles of the Officers concerned, as detailed in the Council’s Constitution, Scheme of Delegation.

You can access the following documents:

- Meeting Agendas
- Meeting Minutes
- The Council’s Constitution

at [www.bromsgrove.gov.uk](http://www.bromsgrove.gov.uk)



## **BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

### **MEETING OF THE CABINET**

**9TH SEPTEMBER 2020, AT 6.00 P.M.**

PRESENT: Councillors K.J. May (Leader), G. N. Denaro (Deputy Leader), A. D. Kent, M. A. Sherrey, P.L. Thomas and S. A. Webb

Officers: Mrs. S. Hanley, Ms. J. Pickering, Ms. C. Flanagan, Mr D Riley and Ms. A. Scarce

23/2020 **TO RECEIVE APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

There were no apologies for absence.

24/2020 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest on this occasion.

25/2020 **TO CONFIRM THE ACCURACY OF THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE CABINET HELD ON 6TH AUGUST 2020**

The minutes of the meeting of Cabinet held on 6<sup>th</sup> August 2020 were submitted.

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting of Cabinet held on 6<sup>th</sup> August 2020 be approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chairman.

26/2020 **MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD HELD ON 6TH AUGUST 2020**

Officers confirmed that the recommendation within the Overview and Scrutiny Board minutes from the meeting held on 6<sup>th</sup> August, had been discussed at the Cabinet meeting on the same day. It did not therefore need consideration at this meeting.

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board held on 6<sup>th</sup> August 2020 be noted.

27/2020 **DRAFT COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME**

The Executive Director, Finance and Resources introduced the report and advised that the Council needed to produce this each year and had done so for a number of years. This year's scheme contained a number

# Agenda Item 3

Cabinet  
9th September 2020

of fundamental changes from the previous scheme which had provided a blanket 85% support.

The Revenue Services Manager provided further detail in respect of the changes, together with the rationale behind them. The report asked for authority to go out to consultation for the scheme and this was in two stages, the first with the major precepting authorities, and then the people with interest in the operation of the scheme, the residents of Bromsgrove. The key questions that would be included within the consultation were included within the appendices of the report. The key areas to note were:

- The administration of the scheme - currently it was based on Council Tax Benefit and was reactive to customer changes, such as an increase in income. It was heavy in administration and was difficult to recover the Council Tax as it became due.
- The new scheme was based on Council Tax discount and was designed to give clear percentages of discount linked to household income which made the scheme less responsive to change and gave customers a clear idea of how much support they would receive and the impact of any changes.
- It prevented the Council from continually having to assess claims and was more static and allowed the Council to be able to better budget for it. It also allowed the Council to be more responsible in the recovery of unpaid Council Tax.
- It would also be aligned with Universal Credit which would provide the appropriate information and would allow the Council to assess and determine any Council Tax support needed at an earlier stage. This would also help to increase take-up of Council Tax support, which had decreased.
- The current scheme was capped at 85%, the proposed new scheme would provide the poorest household with 100% discount.
- The housing element of Universal Credit would also be discounted, which was important for those low income households in rented accommodation.

There was a financial impact to the changes to the scheme, which would increase the cost of Council Tax support by approximately £350k which was shared between the major preceptors, approximately 12.5% by the Council and 71% by Worcestershire County Council. It was noted that whilst there was an increase in Council Tax support at present the Council Tax demanded from recipients was not always paid and there was currently around £400k outstanding; that non-collection brought an increased cost in bad debt collection and was ultimately written off. It was anticipated that the increase in support would improve the collection rates and balance out by reducing that bad debt that would be written off. It should be noted that following consultation there may be some adjustment to the final scheme.



# Agenda Item 3

Cabinet  
9th September 2020

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources commented that at the Finance and Budget Working Group it had been noted that the amount of savings allowed had been reduced from £16k to £6k, which had raised some concerns. He appreciated that the report would come back again for a more detailed discussion once the consultation had been completed. Although it was noted that Universal Credit used £16k as the amount of savings and it was therefore questioned why the Council had decided to use £6k.

It was important that the Council looked after the most vulnerable in the district, who needed this support, particularly as at the current time there was over 92k people furloughed in the County and concerns were raised around the long term effect of this.

Members discussed a number of areas following presentation of the report, including:

- Difficulties around the savings perspective as the aim of benefits were hopefully to get the majority of people through a relatively short term situation.
- How easy was it to access the scheme for someone who was perhaps applying for Universal Credit for the first time. The Revenue Services Manager explained that within the existing scheme when someone applied for Universal Credit, the Council was advised by the DWP and this was treated as the claim for Council Tax Support, but currently additional information needed to be requested from the household. The proposed changes would enable the Council to assess entitlement from that initial notification.
- Members were pleased to see that the Council was relatively proactive but questioned the signposting process to ensure that anyone claiming in the future would be able to access any benefits they were entitled to – again Members were mindful that the future months held a lot of uncertainty for many residents. The Revenue Services Manager provided details of how the scheme was publicised through the Council's website, the main trigger for people was through the Council Tax recovery process. The scheme was publicised with any documents that were sent out to people and over the phone. One of the benefits for the new scheme would be that it was clearer for our own officers to identify what support was available.
- When there are changes, such as the current furloughing of people, the Council made sure that it promoted the support available through social media and other channels. The Council was quite proactive, and had liaisons with the main housing associations in Bromsgrove and a team within the Welfare Support Team who looked after the most vulnerable.
- It was suggested that a short email to all Councillors signposting what was available and where to find it would be useful. It was agreed that the Communications Team would also be contacted and asked to promote this in the coming months.

Members were reminded that the proposed scheme would not come into place until April 2021 should it be agreed. However, it was noted that whilst the existing scheme was capped at 85% within the Council's own scheme there were additional funds available through its Hardship Fund (and additional funding had also been provided through Central Government following Covid-19), which could be used to top up the support. This was an additional £150 for this year with a reduction in the amount that needed to be paid, on average £65.

**RESOLVED** that the Council will consult with the public and major precepting authorities on the introduction of a new income banded council tax support scheme for working age applicants to be implemented from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2021.

28/2020

## **BUDGET FRAMEWORK - PRESENTATION**

The Executive Director, Finance and Resources took Members through a presentation in respect of the Budget Framework (included in the supplementary agenda). In so doing she highlighted the following:

- A general update in respect of the outturn position.
- A £231k underspend and its allocation across all areas of the Council in line with the strategic purposes.
- £1m in reserves for Economic Regeneration particularly in respect of Covid-19. Schemes to be funded from this were currently being worked on and it was hoped would come forward shortly.
- Just under £400k had been allocated to balances to bring these up to around 34.4m.
- There had been significant underspends and a more detailed summary position on these had been discussed at the Overview and Scrutiny Board's Finance and Budget Working Group the previous evening, which could be circulated to Cabinet Members.
- Balances position and detail around this – the minimal level of balances had been agreed by Members at around £1.1m. Whilst the Council was above that, in light of Covid-19 and the uncertainty its impact on Council services it was felt prudent to keep the levels at the maximum it could.
- Reserves – an amount had been set aside for Economic Development and £300k had been not been used and was used to balance the budget. There was also a significant Business Rates reserve, again it was important to mitigate against any loss of Business Rates following the impact of Covid-19. The Government may also re-set the Business Rates and it may also change if there are any amendments to the appeals system for this. There were also reserves for Services Reviews and IT Systems.
- Covid-19 Financial Impact – the Return to Central Government had been set for July and this showed the grants which had been

# Agenda Item 3

Cabinet  
9th September 2020

paid out on behalf of Central Government. There was a drop in Business Rates and it was projected that there would be a loss of £2m., which would be shared with Central Government and Worcestershire County Council. There was also likely to be an impact on Council Tax, Leisure Provision and Car Parking, some of which could be claimed back from Central Government. Currently £1.2m of Grant Funding had been received and a further claim would be completed at the end of September.

- Medium Term Budget Gap for 2021/22 moving forward for the next three years from £495k to £797k which was largely due to the loss of New Homes Bonus. The concern was the potential impact of Covid-19 going forward and areas that the Council could see a reduction in funding for – Members were reminded that previously the Council was looking at paying Central Government £750k a year, which had been taken out of the budget, but there was always the possibility that this would come back in again.
- Review of the Medium Term Financial Plan – assessing impact of Covid-19, Fees and Charges would come forward in December. Five service areas which have been subject to significant savings or overspends would be looked at in more detail, to ensure that this was reflected in 2020/21 and future years.
- Capital Programme - £300k underspend around borrowing, which was a concern as Members were making decisions on the back of Capital Programmes which then did not get spent.
- Central Government had advised that due to Covid-19 the Council would only receive a one year settlement and the Fair Funding review which was being looked at and the potential devolution and re-organisation which the Council did not currently know what this would look like, needed to be considered.

The Leader questioned whether the Council had a full understanding of the income streams which came in to it at present, the Executive Director, Finance and Resources commented that the income streams that it was getting were being updated weekly through the Corporate Management Team, this included car parking and planning applications, as there had been particular concerns around these areas. In respect of additional income for 2019/20 it was not as much as had been hoped, but was £70k above what had been expected. Income and Capital and Salaries were areas which were being looked at as there were some salary budgets which had been rolled forward, which needed to be addressed for the future.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources said this provided a comprehensive view of where the Council could be and luckily it had sufficient monies in balances to cover the gap if it had to, but he hoped that there would be other ways of doing this in order to retain the balances at the current position, which felt more comfortable in the current circumstances.

Members discussed the following in more detail:

# Agenda Item 3

Cabinet  
9th September 2020

- The Council had given around £23m in grants to local businesses – it was believed that this was around 1,800 businesses (it was 1,688 at the end of August).
- The money for Economic Recovery – concerns were raised around the future of many businesses and it was hoped that this would go towards supporting them. Colleagues were working with Portfolio Holders in this respect and once the £1m to this scheme was agreed at full Council on 16<sup>th</sup> September these would begin to come forward. This had not come up as an issue with the Finance and Budget Working Group when discussions had been held. It was accepted that it was important to get the local economy back up and running as soon as possible.
- Thanks were given to the Executive Director, Finance and Resources and her team for all their hard work in ensuring that the grants from Central Government went to those that needed them and the speed at which the Council had delivered these had been exceptional.
- The Executive Director, Finance and Resources commented that one of the things which there had been concern about was the interpretation of the Government Grants, the Council and the Team had been very clear around this and the Council had written to BIS advising that there were still a number of businesses that it had not been able to help due to the interpretation and advised that this really needed to be looked at again. The Council did not want to give out the grant and then for it to be re-claimed further down the line because it had been incorrectly allocated.
- There was a list of all the businesses which the Council had helped and this would be made available to any Members who wished to see it.
- Capital Programme – needed to be looked at with the economy in mind, hopefully some projects would come forward in order to help this. The Executive Director Finance and Resources advised that the wider Economic Development opportunity fund that remained available for investment opportunities, had been widened to allow for social gains as well as financial gains. In terms of the Capital programme we have just rolled it forward and now was the opportunity to do a more robust review of this and perhaps realign some of the funding already available.
- It was an excellent opportunity to invest in the District and stimulate growth and help people get back in to work.

The Leader took the opportunity to give a sincere thank you to the Executive Director, Finance and Resources for her work over the last 17 years at the Council and wished her well in her new venture.

**RESOLVED** that the presentation be noted.

29/2020

## **REVENUE MONITORING QUARTER 1 REPORT**

The Executive Director, Finance and Resources introduced the report which set out the Revenue Monitoring for the first quarter using the new Strategic Purposes, which had been agreed by Council. Unfortunately, these showed a significant overspend, the Team had not allocated the Covid-19 grant as she had wanted Members to see a “clean” position that the Council is facing. This did not include Council Tax or Business Rates, which would not normally be included, but what was included was the losses from car parking. The position was not in fact as bad as it looked but it was important for Members to see the wider picture in respect of Covid-19. There were a number of explanations around some of the underspends and projects which had not been undertaken. She explained the position in respect of the Leisure Centre and the how this had to be shown for accounting purposes. The Government grant of £1.2m was much needed, together with the compensation fund. The position would be much clearer when Quarter 2 was produced as this would reflect the whole position.

The Executive Director, Finance and Resources advised Members that Human Resources had requested a shared allocation of the training budget, which would mean a reduction in it for Bromsgrove. This could be allocated back to the Councils savings target, which was important in the current circumstances. In respect of Capital, a budget of £4.371m and underspend of £200k against Living Independently and this was mainly on Disabled Facilities Grants. This was largely due to being unable to access Occupational Therapists into people’s homes from April through to June 2020.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources commented that, as had previously been discussed, the availability of Occupational Therapists and whether there was anything the Council could do to bypass this by employing them itself, as this had been an ongoing problem prior to Covid-19. The Executive Director, Finance and Resources confirmed that she would speak to the Head of Community Services in order to explore this option further.

In respect of car parking, the overspend of £240k was discussed and the proportion of this that would be refunded by Central Government. It was confirmed that this would not cover the period that the shops re-opened, but the Council chose to continue to allow free parking until the payment app was in place.

**RESOLVED** that the current financial position in relation to revenue and capital budgets for the financial period April 2020 – June 2020 as detailed in the report be noted.

### **RECOMMENDED:**

- a) that a change in the 2020/21 Capital Programme of the S106 scheme already approved for Barnt Green Millennium Park –

# Agenda Item 3

Cabinet  
9th September 2020

Toilet £62k be reallocated to a new scheme at Bittell Road Recreation Ground in relation to infrastructure/fitness route improvements due the requirements of the original project no longer needed. (See 6.1 of the report) be approved;

- b) that the training budget held within the Human Resources service, is allocated to a shared service budget meaning that any training provided to our staff is beneficial to both Councils as we upskill our workforce be approved; and
- c) that the inclusion of the £1.154m of Government Grant in relation to Covid pressures and losses of income into the 2020/21 revenue budgets (see 3.6 of the report) be approved.

30/2020

## **NEW HOMES BONUS COMMUNITY GRANTS SCHEME**

The Executive Director, Finance and Resources introduced the report and reminded Members of the New Homes Bonus Scheme that was in place. For 2020/21 there had been £144k funds to be allocated, as detailed in the appendix this had been allocated in full. There had been virtual meetings of the Panel with applicants attending. Where there was a reduction in the funding it was felt that either funding should be attracted from other sources or where it was felt two or three schemes were important and warranted the full amount and therefore other schemes had their contribution reduced. It was further confirmed that, as detailed within the scheme, for those that were allocated funding and they were unable to meet the requirements and conditions placed on them then the offer would be withdrawn.

The Leader thanked officers and Panel Members for all their hard work and commented that it was a good which had been well utilised.

### **RESOLVED:**

- a) that the grants, as detailed in the Summary of NHB Grants Panel Recommendations attached at appendix 1 be approved; and
- b) that should the scheme continue into 2021/22 a full review of the process be carried out prior to the commencement of the grants allocation for that year.

The meeting closed at 7.00 p.m.

Chairman

**Planning for the Future White Paper and  
Changes to the Planning System – BDC responses**

Relevant Portfolio Holder	Councillor Adam Kent
Portfolio Holder Consulted	Yes
Relevant Head of Service	Ruth Bamford
Wards Affected	All Wards
Ward Councillor Consulted	Yes
Non-Key Decision	Yes

**1. SUMMARY OF PROPOSALS**

- 1.1 The appendices to this report contain the Council’s responses to the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), Planning for the Future White Paper, and Changes to the Planning System consultation.
- 1.2 As result of the reforms being proposed it is likely that the intended progress and content of the Bromsgrove District Plan review (BDPR) may have to alter.

**2. RECOMMENDATION**

- 2.1 **That Appendix A is submitted to MHCLG as the Councils Response to the Planning for the Future White Paper**
- 2.2 **That Appendix B is confirmed as the Councils response to the Changes to the planning System consultation**

**3. KEY ISSUES**

**Financial Implications**

- 3.1 There are no direct financial implications associated with this report.

**Legal Implications**

- 3.2 There are no direct Legal implications although should some of these reforms be implemented it likely there would be new legislation for the Council to consider.

**Service / Operational Implications**

- 3.4 **Planning for the Future White paper**

The planning for the future White Paper was published on 6<sup>th</sup> August 2020 it is split up into the pillars which in turn contain 24 proposals.

The Pillars and topics within them are

Pillar One - Planning for development (Proposals 1 -10)

- A new approach to plan-making
- Development Management Process
- New interactive, web-based map standard for planning documents
- Streamlined, more engaging plan-making process
- Speeding up the delivery of development

Pillar Two - Planning for beautiful and sustainable places (Proposals 11-22)

- Creating frameworks for quality
- A fast-track for beauty
- Effective stewardship and enhancement of our natural and historic environment

Pillar Three - Planning for infrastructure and connected places (Proposals 23-24)

- Consolidated Infrastructure Levy
- How we move into the new system

3.5 Members have been briefed in detail via the Strategic Planning Steering Group on the above, but it is worth remembering the aims of these reforms are to speed up the planning system and in particular the rate at which the planning system delivers new homes. The significant reforms which are contained within the white paper are.

- Simplified Land use plans containing only three types of allocation, **Growth Areas, Renewal Areas and Protected Areas.**
- Development Management policies set nationally.
- Simplified sustainability / environmental assessment processes.
- Abolition of the Duty to Cooperate.
- New binding standard method for establishing housing requirements.
- Areas allocated as growth areas will automatically have outline planning consent.
- More modern technology used in both plan making and decision taking.
- The requirement of Local Plans to be produced in 30 months.
- Nationally set mandatory levy to replace section 106 agreements.

The response to the white paper can be seen at appendix 1.

### **3.6 Changes to the Planning System consultation**

Alongside the White Paper MHCLG have also proposed some shorter term changes to the planning system, some of which are in a direct response to the CV19 pandemic. Again Members have also been briefed on these proposals



via the Strategic Planning Steering Group. The significant implications of the changes to the planning system are.

- Changes to the Standard method of establishing housing needs, the new approach would see Bromsgrove's annual requirement rise from 368 as per the local plan, or 379 as per the current standard method to 694 under the new standard method.
- New policies on delivering first homes to encourage and facilitate home ownership for those currently priced out of the market.
- Support for small and medium sized developers which would raise the threshold for affordable housing contributions from sites of 11+ dwellings to sites of 40 or 50 dwellings.
- Extension of the Permission in Principle (PiP) consent regime

An officer's response has been submitted to this technical consultation to meet the deadline of 1<sup>st</sup> October, this can be seen at appendix 2, any additional responses as a result of discussion at formal meetings can be added to the initial response.

#### **Implications for the Bromsgrove District Plan review**

3.7 At this stage the full implications for the BDP review are unpredictable, that said the work undertaken to date is not wasted. It is the view of officers that however the reforms are implemented, much, if not all of the work which has been done on the review will be able to be used to inform a plan prepared under a revised planning system.

3.8 The most significant issue which will affect how the plan progresses in the future, will be the amount of housing a revised standard housing method allocates to Bromsgrove, and what if anything will replace the duty to cooperate, and any subsequent additional housing as a result.

3.9 Work on the evidence base collection and the site assessment will continue, at this stage it is not suggested that any plan review public consultation documents are prepared or published, and the website updated to acknowledge that fact.

3.10 If implemented a revised 30 month timeline for plan production will also have an impact and the current plan review. Understanding when the period for plan production begins will be important, it will be essential that the Council uses the plan production time afforded to it wisely, hence the work outlined above continuing. Currently the Council gets lots of requests for updates on the plan process. As well making it clear that the Council will not be publishing any consultation documents, its also important that when in a position to do so the Council publishes what it intends to do. Therefore a new local development scheme will need to be produced as soon as possible once the outcomes of the white paper reforms are known.

**Customer / Equalities and Diversity Implications**

3.11 There are no Customer / Equalities and Diversity Implications associated with this report. Although it should be noted that the white paper contains reforms to plan making which would change the way public consultation is carried out in future.

**4. RISK MANAGEMENT**

4.1 There are no immediate risk associated with this report, as the reforms are implemented a more thorough assessment of risk can be carried out.

**5. APPENDICES**

Appendix A - BDC response to Planning for the Future white paper.  
Appendix B - BDC response changes to the planning system

**6. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- Planning for the Future - white paper
- Changes to the planning System - consultation document

**AUTHOR OF REPORT**

Name: Mike Dunphy  
Strategic Planning and Conservation Manager

E Mail: [m.dunphy@bromsgroveandredditch.gov.uk](mailto:m.dunphy@bromsgroveandredditch.gov.uk)  
Tel:01527 881325

## **Government White Paper - Planning for the Future**

Bromsgrove District Council welcomes the publication of the White paper and supports the main theme of simplifying and speeding up the UK planning system. Below we have commented in turn on the 24 proposals, and hope this response assists MHCLG in progressing these reform over the coming months.

### **Pillar One – Planning for Development**

#### **1. The role of land use plans should be simplified. We propose that Local Plans should identify three types of land – Growth areas suitable for substantial development, Renewal areas suitable for development, and areas that are Protected.**

1.1 We note with interest, the proposal for Local Plans to identify just three types of land, but understandably as this is only a white paper, the finer details which will follow in due course will be also of significant interest to the Council.

1.2 For Growth areas – the definition of substantial will be important. Whilst we understand that this will be defined in policy through the revised NPPF, the local view of substantial development can vary greatly dependent on the context and location in the country. Will size thresholds be set to define the difference between acceptable levels of development in growth areas versus renewal areas, or will there be a difference between greenfield and brownfield areas? Alongside the intention that growth areas will be for substantial development, there will inevitably be smaller scale and more routine development taking place. Therefore will further thresholds be set within growth areas as to what scale of development does or does not require further environmental assessment or reserved matters applications?

1.3 For Renewal areas, it is stated that these “could include... ..development in rural areas that is not annotated as Growth or Protected areas, such as small sites within or on the edge of villages”. For a district such as Bromsgrove which is almost 90% Green Belt, does this mean that all small villages currently washed over by the Green Belt would need to be removed from it to allow any development at these locations? Removing such small villages from the Green Belt to allow some infill development may have unintended consequences. The specific suggestion that authorities can consider the case for resisting

inappropriate development of residential gardens seems at odds with the intention for renewal areas to include “gentle densification and infill of residential areas”. In many of our rural settlements, existing homes stand in large plots where additional development can be accommodated without overdeveloping the site. This is an area where a local policy approach is needed to determine where precisely garden or back-land development should be restricted.

1.4 For Protected areas – further detail will be needed as to what types of development will be restricted. Consultation on the draft revised NPPF will be essential so that we can respond to the specific types of development which are proposed to be restricted and those which will be permissible. We would suggest that the title of this area gives the public an incorrect impression that no development can take place because the area is ‘protected’ and we suggest that an alternative name, such as ‘Restricted area’ is considered. A wider point is whether authorities will still be able to review their Green Belt boundaries through their Local Plans. It is difficult to see how housing need can be met locally without this, but clarity on this is needed. Furthermore, if Green Belt boundaries are still to endure beyond the plan period, we need further guidance on the approach to safeguarded land, particularly given that Local Plans will now be subject to more frequent reviews.

1.5 We note the specific proposal to allow sub-areas to be created within Growth areas which are specifically for self and custom-build homes, and the related requirement for local authorities to identify enough land to meet the requirements identified on their registers. If these sub-areas for self build homes are only appropriate in Growth areas, what does this mean for areas that could feasibly have no Growth areas, because of the existence of land constraints designating them as areas to be Protected? How will the demand for self-build homes be met in such areas? Also, from our experience, those who wish to build their own homes often envisage doing this in a rural or semi-rural setting. Can these aspirations be met within Growth areas? Additionally, if only certain land within a Growth area is to be designated for self-build homes, how will land value and transactional issues play out if other parcels of land are designated for higher value land uses such as open market residential?

1.6 Regarding the alternative options – if Renewal areas are deemed ‘suitable for development’ it may be appropriate to extend the grant of outline planning permission for the principle of development for certain uses in these areas.

## **2. Development management policies established at national scale and an altered role for Local Plans.**

2.1 We recognise that there can currently be unnecessary repetition of national policies in Local Plans, however, often policies within the NPPF are open to wide ranging interpretation and sparse in detail, and need expansion to be useable at the local level. To limit development management policies to site or area-specific requirements in the proposed Growth and Renewal areas is concerning to Green Belt authorities such as Bromsgrove, where there is limited scope for such areas. The suggestion here is that there would be no locally specific development management policies to guide limited appropriate development within the Green Belt.

2.2 Under this proposal policy wording in the NPPF needs to be detailed and clear. The Government is no doubt aware of the number of planning appeals, High Court and Court of Appeal cases where the wording of the NPPF is dissected and analysed in great deal given the numerous ways it can be interpreted. If national policies are to be solely relied upon to determine the majority of 'routine' planning applications outside of specific sites or areas, then further detail will need to be added to current policies to avoid excessive amounts of appeals.

2.3 We are supportive of the move to a more design focused role for Local Planning Authorities although additional training and support will be needed to retrain local government planning professionals to enable them to perform their new function. We do have some concerns about the suggestion that the production of design guides and codes be twin-tracked alongside the Local Plan production process. With new Local Plans to be light on detail, the benefits of having design guides in place at or close to Local Plan adoption are apparent. However, this will place additional demands on the limited resources of local planning authorities and may not be achievable in practice. The situation can be foreseen where the Local Plan is adopted and design guides/codes follow some months afterwards when their production can be properly resourced, leaving a vacuum on the detailed requirements for allocated sites. We support the intention that neighbourhoods will play a crucial role in producing design codes and guides for their communities, although this will require assistance from and liaison with the local authority, which will need to be resourced. We also support the suggestion to make plans more visual and engaging, which is something we endeavoured to do with our High Quality Design SPD.

2.4 The proposals to make development management policies and code requirements machine readable is an interesting concept. The prospect of using digital services to automatically screen developments should not be done, at the expense of a planning officer

using professional knowledge and experience from the planning process to make the final decision on an application. The aim of “enabling automation of more binary considerations” would appear to remove application of planning judgement in the planning process. Even the smallest and seemingly least controversial planning application can require negotiations and the need for revised plans. There is rarely a straightforward yes or no, or ‘binary’ answer. With the proposed introduction of national development management policies and local design codes, it may be possible for planning professionals to process planning applications more efficiently, but we would not support and advise against a system where the human and professional input and oversight is removed from the decision making process on planning applications.

2.5 We are supportive of the alternative options suggested under this Proposal. Allowing local authorities to continue to have local development management policies but removing any duplication of the NPPF would be a sensible change to the current system.

### **3. Local Plans should be subject to a single statutory “sustainable development” test, replacing the existing tests of soundness.**

3.1 We welcome the proposal to streamline the existing tests of soundness. Given that it is proposed that an assessment of Local Plan deliverability would be just one element to be incorporated into the single test, it is envisaged that the ‘single’ test would in fact be multifaceted. If Local Plans are to be devoid of development management policies setting local standards, the viability of the Local Plan would hinge on the proposals in Growth and Renewal areas, which could be diverse and varied. Therefore viability assessments could be more complex, having to take account of differing proposals and standards across these growth and renewal areas. However, until further detail of this single test is known, it is difficult to draw a full conclusion.

3.2 The specific proposal to remove the Duty to Cooperate is welcomed. Our experience has found the duty in some instances to be a totally ineffective mechanism in planning across local authority borders, particularly where there a multiple authorities involved. Recent well documented cases across the country (examples include St Albans, Wealdon, Sevenoaks) serve to highlight that the duty to cooperate is failing and is in need of wholesale changes. However, we are concerned about the lack of detail on what would replace the Duty to Cooperate. What would enable local authorities to plan effectively across administrative boundaries and to collaborate to provide local infrastructure? Reference is made to digital Local Plans helping LPAs to engage with cross-boundary issues but it is

unclear how having Local Plans on websites will help difficult issues to be resolved. Ultimately, dialogue between authorities will be required and without a framework or forum to work within to structure this dialogue, it is difficult to see how progress and agreements will be made. The proposal for housing requirements to be determined centrally, taking into account known constraints and for them to be binding on local authorities may remove the situation where there is unmet need from neighbouring areas to be apportioned and accommodated. However, until further details on which land constraints are to be factored in, and how this will impact on the local housing need derived from the standard methodology it is impossible to conclude that this will be the case. It is hard to envisage a scenario where all housing needs can be met locally and there is no need to export requirements to other areas which may be better placed to assist. Therefore an alternative mechanism for dealing with cross-boundary issues needs to be considered and included in the planning reforms.

3.3 The specific proposal to abolish the Sustainability Appraisal system is welcomed, given that the current process is cumbersome, repetitive and inaccessible to a lay-person. However once again, until more detail is known about the replacement simplified process for assessing the environmental impact of plans, it is impossible to comment much further. As highlighted below in response to Proposal 16, this simplified replacement still needs to robustly examine the social, environmental and economic impacts of the Local Plan and associated documentation.

3.4 The alternative proposal of using reserve sites to ensure delivery takes place is an possible welcomed addition to allow for a added flexibility in the process where site have stalled. It allows for a short terms solution rather than waiting for a plan review and will help delivery of housing continue.

**4. A standard method for establishing housing requirement figures which ensures enough land is released in the areas where affordability is worst, to stop land supply being a barrier to enough homes being built. The housing requirement would factor in land constraints and opportunities to more effectively use land, including through densification where appropriate, to ensure that the land is identified in the most appropriate areas and housing targets are met.**

4.1 We remain supportive of the move to the standard method to determining housing need as it has removed the ambiguity, expense and time involved in preparing the local authority led objectively assessed housing need under the previous arrangement. We are cautiously supportive of the move to a standard housing requirement which would be binding

on local authorities, as this would further remove an area of challenge which causes delays to plan production. However, the biggest unknown is how land constraints will be factored into the binding requirement. For areas such as Bromsgrove with large amounts of Green Belt, this could alter the local housing need figure substantially, but until the precise weighting of the various land constraints is known, it is impossible to plan confidently for the future. There is also concern as to how affordability issues can be addressed locally if supply is to be restricted from fully addressing local housing need through the imposition of a land constraint factor.

4.2 We are concerned about the lack of guidance on planning for other development needs, most notably economic growth and question when further advice will be given on this area. There is a close relationship between economic growth and housing need and therefore it is important that there is a link between the standard method and resultant housing requirement and the amount of land to be provided for economic development.

4.3 We note the standard method is proposed to be a means of distributing the national housebuilding target of 300,000 homes annually. Given revised population and household projections projection have been released since the announcement of this target, it should be revisited to properly reflect latest figures and hence be linked to the most up to date evidence. The link between housing need and other development needs, should not be overlooked and needs similar clarity, specifically employment needs. An essential part of addressing affordability is providing the right jobs in the right locations and not forcing people to work long distances away from home to find well paid jobs. During the Covid19 pandemic we have seen changes to working patterns, the reforms to the planning system needs take this into account and give clear guidance on the future provision of employment land.

4.4 Much more detail is needed on the proposal that joint planning arrangements could be used to agree an alternative distribution of housing requirements. Although reference is made to the role of Mayors in combined authority areas, there is no further detail on the process of distributing and agreeing a reassignment of housing in non-Mayoral or combined authority areas. This follows on from the comments made above regarding the void in guidance the proposed removal of the duty to cooperate will create.

4.5 We do not support the proposal to retain the Housing Delivery Test as this would seem unnecessary if the local authority has already had to prove that the sites included within the Local Plan are deliverable. Government should instead be looking to the housebuilders and the development industry for assurances that sites will come forward in a



timely manner, with the ability to penalise them where these assurances are not met. Our authority has ongoing issues with the current Housing Delivery Test which we have taken up with the MHCLG and we are still awaiting a satisfactory solution.

**5. Areas identified as Growth areas (suitable for substantial development) would automatically be granted outline planning permission for the principle of development, while automatic approvals would also be available for pre-established development types in other areas suitable for building.**

5.1 The proposal to remove the need to apply for outline planning permission if any area was already identified for development would be welcomed especially if the principle had already been established. Often, if a site is already allocated for development, an outline planning application can attract significant public comment relating to the principle of the development and therefore give the public a false sense that they can influence whether the development goes ahead or not.

5.2 Under these reforms the council is concerned that the detail that would have been submitted to support an outline planning permission will now be submitted to promote a site for inclusion in the local plan process, as developers will be keen to demonstrate as fully as possible the credentials of their site. This is potentially a huge amount of evidence for planning authorities to consider when allocating sites, albeit with a much-reduced timescale by which to operate i.e. with in the 30 months. Similarly, this information may then have to be distilled into an allocation policy for the growth area to ensure that when the final permission is granted there is enough detail to ensure the development proceeds as planned. If this process is repeated for all growth areas, local plans could end up being reduced to a list of very detailed allocations policies, and not the short succinct easy to read documents the white paper is striving to achieve

5.3 By the time a site is allocated for development the focus needs to be on the detailed technical matters. Therefore the council would be keen to ensure that whatever method is chosen, the ability to shape the design and deal with site specific matters such as ecology/land contamination/highways etc should not be diminished.

5.4 With respect to renewal areas any move towards using a 'prior approval' type of process would be met with caution. Whilst under current legislation this has been intended to be a 'light touch' process it has, in many cases, caused a number of issues. High Court challenges have been required in order to provide clarity on the wording of such legislation,

amendments to the legislation have been required in order to make development meet basic amenity standards. The submission of an application, and the subsequent consultation procedure has given the public the impression that they are able to influence the outcome of the application with respect to the principle of the development, when this is not the case. It would therefore be necessary to give some serious consideration as to how a prior approval process for renewal areas would operate.

5.5 The use of a faster planning application process for renewal areas, whilst not necessarily an issue in principle, requires some further details as it is not clear how a proposal could be determined based on the context of the Local Plan description and the National Planning Policy Framework alone.

## **6. Decision-making should be faster and more certain, with firm deadlines, and make greater use of digital technology.**

6.1 With respect to the firm deadlines of 8/13 weeks it is a concern that the White Paper implies that the extension of time provisions will be removed from legislation. Prior to extensions of time existing it could often be the case that an applicant was forced to withdraw their application late in the day or face a refusal of permission in order to make a decision within the 8/13 weeks. A resubmitted application would then be made to resolve the outstanding matters which results in wasted time and expense for the applicant and local authority as well as ultimately delaying development. The extension of time provisions allow what are often modest extensions to the 8/13 weeks in order to resolve technical matters and largely lead to approval of planning permission. Removing this provision would almost certainly mean decisions are made more quickly but not necessarily with a positive outcome which would seem counterproductive, the extension of time should remain albeit limits imposed on how many times it can be used.

6.2 Any mechanism to front load the system to ensure accurate and adequate information is supplied at the submission of a planning application would be welcomed. The current requirement to only submit sufficient information to describe the development proposed is often sufficient for simple applications, however in the case of more complex proposals or those which fall within the Green Belt it is often the case that further discussion/information is required from the applicant in order to inform the decision making process which can extend the time taken to make a decision on applications.

6.3 The proposals for clearer planning conditions, streamlined approach to developer contributions and the delegation of detailed matters for consideration to officers is welcomed.

**7. Local Plans should be visual and map-based, standardised, based on the latest digital technology, and supported by a new template.**

7.1 The Council agrees with the above statement that there should be a requirement for Local Plans to be visual and map based. Many Local Authorities already have a digital map-based system in place which works well and doesn't require any extra training or resources. There should also be an alternative option for people to be involved in the Local Plan and consultation process. We need to be inclusive to all groups of society and ensure that for those that struggle to use the technology there are other options to engage in the planning process

7.2 Going interactive with planning applications such as architect's drawings could be a move in the right direction for development management, but there is still a need for actual documents to be able to be in order to ensure decision making is clear and accountable.

7.3 Planning for beautiful and sustainable places (Pillar Two of the White Paper) requires human judgement, so cautious use of technology to aid the human process of decision making is one which the council supports.

**8. Local authorities and the Planning Inspectorate will be required through legislation to meet a statutory timetable for key stages of the process, and we will consider what sanctions there would be for those who fail to do so.**

8.1 We have considered the proposals to reform the Local Plan production process and to meet a statutory timetable for key stages of the process. Whilst we welcome the intention to simplify and shorten the plan-making process, we have a number of concerns about the proposed reforms.

8.2 Stage 1 - it will be key for the initial 6 months of plan preparation to ensure that not all engagement happens and the end of the period. We know through experience that the majority of developer-led sites are submitted to us late in the call for sites process, leaving very limited time in this short 6 month stage to 'shape' the plan with public involvement. Requirements for the engagement to be continual and ongoing from both the local authority

and other stakeholders in the plan must be made clear to ensure that the meaningful engagement does not happen too late in the plan making stage.

8.3 Stage 2 - for the 12 month period to be a suitable time period, clear guidance on what evidence is required would help all concerned in the plan making process. Local authorities would be able to program the collection of evidence early on in the process, and other stakeholders would know what to expect when plans are published. Rather than the current situation where objections can be based on a perceived lack of evidence, whereas it often a point of debate as to whether the evidence even needs to be provided.

8.4 Stage 3 – We are concerned that the level of public engagement at this critical stage seems restricted, especially given as this ‘transparent and engaging’ process will limit consultation at the decision-taking stage. This would be the first time the public will see a full plan on which to comment, its likely that as much as there undoubtedly would be objections to the proposals in the plan, there will also simply be many questions about the plan which aren’t necessarily objections. A key element of the preferred option process we currently undergo is that it allows the Council to answer these questions and where possible positively address objections. Would it now be solely the role of the planning inspectorate to resolve those issues? Reference is also made to ‘best in class’ public involvement but we are uncertain this can be achieved if the public are limited to the number of words they can submit. This stage also seems to overlook the complexity of public engagement at this important stage in plan production, plus there is no time allocation given to processing, summarising and responding to the large volumes of responses that are envisaged.

8.5 Stage 4 – We would question why the examination period is within the statutory 30 month time period for production of the Local Plan, when this is outside of the control of the Local Authority. Resourcing at the Planning Inspectorate could delay the examination process and we would not want to see local authorities penalised for missing deadlines for something beyond their control. Instead, we would propose a timetable for Local Plan production which culminates in the Submission of the Local Plan.

8.6 We do not support the alternative option removing the ‘right to be heard’ at examination as this would stymie public involvement even further and be directly opposed to the ‘best in class’ public involvement which is being promoted for the other plan making stages.

8.7 We would emphasise the need for local planning departments to be properly resourced if they are to meet this extremely ambitious Local Plan production timetable. The additional demands on Local Plan production, coupled with the reforms to funding under Proposal 23 do not tally, particularly when considered alongside the need for Local Plans are to be reviewed at least every 5 years. Local authorities need certainty of funding so that they are fully resourced to positively and proactively plan for the future of the area they represent.

## **9. Neighbourhood Plans should be retained as an important means of community input, and we will support communities to make better use of digital tools**

9.1 We agree that Neighbourhood plans should be retained. Engagement with Neighbourhood Planning groups is something that is already done. Most authorities will have a good relationship with Neighbourhood planning groups which should be continued, and if possible strengthened by using modern technology to help produce neighbourhood plans as well.

## **10. A stronger emphasis on build out through planning.**

10.1 Proposal 10 responds to the need to speed up the delivery of development, particularly within the proposed Growth Areas. We concur that there is a need to improve the build out rates of development, particularly on large sites and highlight the wealth of research in this area (for example, [LGA – Speeding up delivery, 2018](#)). This research emphasises that planning is not a barrier to building, but there are issues of unimplemented planning permissions, land banking and slow build out rates.

10.2 Whilst the proposal to include a variety of development types by different builders on a site to allow multiple phases to come forward together has good intentions, we struggle to see how it will work in practice. How will this be controlled through the planning process? If a large site is under a single ownership and one developer has an option on that site, what is the mechanism to get multiple developers on site? We are also aware that housebuilders would not want to flood the market with new homes in a single area. More often, their approach is to limit supply, thereby increasing demand and helping them to achieve the sales values they have planned for.

10.3 The suggestion that masterplans and design codes will be the mechanism to deliver the requirement for multiple developers on a single site needs further consideration, particularly if the design code is to follow the allocation of the site in the Local Plan. Under

Proposal 2 it is stated that design codes could be prepared as supplementary planning documents. Under this scenario it is difficult to see how the number of developers on a site could be specified and enforced by the Local Planning Authority.

10.4 The White Paper makes no reference to the other tools that could be used to speed up delivery. The LGA's 2018 research refers to compulsory purchase powers as one option available to local authorities in extreme cases to get stalled sites moving. It should be made easier for Councils to use CPO powers to get development started on difficult sites, including the ability to cap land values and use the uplift to forward-fund infrastructure. This ties in with one of the key recommendations from the 2018 Letwin Review.

## **Pillar Two - Planning for beautiful and sustainable places**

**11. To make design expectations more visual and predictable, we will expect design guidance and codes to be prepared locally with community involvement, and ensure that codes are more binding on decisions about development.**

11.1 Page 48 states "*Prepare local design codes based on community input and empirical evidence of what is popular and characteristic in the local area*". The Council would be keen to understand how data will inform this. It appears this evidence will be informed by community input. This raises questions regarding how and at what point in the process to get the community involved effectively; especially given the importance of ensuring designs only have weight in the planning process if they can demonstrate that community input has been secured.

11.2 It is accepted that there have been many years of housebuilders building the same style houses, which are not necessarily representative of the local area however the Council raises concerns that this level of uncharacteristic building could inform the 'new character'.

11.3 The Council wishes to raise concern regarding how firmly the National Design Guide and upcoming National Model Design Code will feature in decision making, particularly when 'viability' features so heavily with regard to the obligations and requirements placed on developers.

11.4 With regard to responsibility for implementation, historically too much emphasis is placed at the door of planners for the failure to build and build beautiful. There needs to be

some responsibility placed on developers, and measures should be put in place to ensure they deliver what the government envisions in this Paper in their design proposals, ahead of seeking advice from Planners or submitting Planning Applications, particularly if proposals are to be in line with Design Codes.

11.5 The suggestion that Applicants could bring forward design guides themselves for significant areas of new development is an interesting addition. The Council would be keen to understand how the Local Authority could control how the area looks if applicants can do this. Given that it should be accepted that some developers tend to follow a similar style and that this is one of the elements this White Paper is seeking to change, how can the Local Authority restrict Developers proposing their existing styles in Design Codes if they permitted to prepare these documents? The Council also questions how these Codes prepared by Developers would become binding and what the status the design guidance and codes may have. What would be their process for production and how would they gain endorsement? They need to have an appropriate status to ensure they are binding in decisions which would make their production a lengthy process given the need to consult, revise and potentially examined however if their status is more akin to an SPD their influence may be limited.

**12. To support the transition to a planning system which is more visual and rooted in local preferences and character, we will set up a body to support the delivery of provably locally-popular design codes, and propose that each authority should have a chief officer for design and place-making.**

12.1 The Council considers that each Local Authority Planning Department is made up quite differently and it may be best for resources for each Local Authority to consider how best to prepare Design Codes it maybe simply that some expert input from Urban Designers is required rather than a Chief Officer role.

12.2 With respect to the expert body alluded to in the proposal. The Council suggests it is likely this will need to be heavily resourced, if given the proposals all Local Authorities are required to progress their Design Codes within the 30 month deadline alongside plan production. In addition it is queried how locally specific the advice will be, due to the varying nature and character of areas how is locally specific advice likely to be achieved. Will the advice come from a regional level body that can develop expertise and knowledge in the local towns and cities? Will there be a link or extension to the existing Design Review Panels or something similar to the West Midlands Combined Authority Design Review Charter.

**13. To further embed national leadership on delivering better places, we will consider how Homes England's strategic objectives can give greater emphasis to delivering beautiful places.**

13.1 The Council considers this is a useful point, but as Homes England will have varying levels of interest in different areas of the Country its not necessarily relevant to all authorities, the council has worked successfully with Homes England and will continue to work in future with them.

**14. We intend to introduce a fast-track for beauty through changes to national policy and legislation, to incentivise and accelerate high quality development which reflects local character and preferences.**

14.1 Page 52 states that masterplans and site-specific codes could be prepared by the LPA through the Local Plan. Although the principle of considering design early on in the process is to be encouraged, as expressed above Council has reservations about undertaking this work in conjunction with Plan preparation. If these codes are unable to be prepared alongside the Plan due to time restrictions or other factors, there will either be a delay in building or the housebuilders will likely submit plans that have no locally contextual design. There will then be no local evidence to reinforce changes to the design of the development suggested by the LPA.

14.2 The White Paper proposes a change regarding local orders being used to modify how the standard types of design apply in the local area, based on local evidence according to popular designs in the public opinion. The Council considers that further detail on how this evidence would be carried out in a comprehensive way should be given. If this evidence isn't carried out, there is a risk that many new developments across England would become indistinguishable. Additionally, whilst the public should have a say in the design of new development in their local area, traditionally this is not how the design of the built form has been decided. Instead, the local materials readily available, the style of the surrounding built environment and also the demands and character of the surrounding natural environment have all had a part in shaping design historically. Evidence relating to this would ideally need to be produced alongside evidence concerning public opinion, in order to produce beautiful developments that integrate successfully with the surrounding context.



14.3 The White Paper states that updates to the NPPF will “*make clear that schemes which comply with local design guides and codes have a positive advantage and greater certainty about their prospects of swift approval.*” If an increased importance is placed on local design, surely compliance with local design guides should be a necessity to attaining permission?

14.4 In regards to the use of permitted development rights to pre-approve ‘popular and replicable designs’, the Council questions if this will foster innovation, as the White Paper suggests. Instead it seems like this would stymie innovation. If identical designs are the quickest and easiest way to develop, it would stand that housebuilders will submit these plans rather than putting thought into alternative designs, as this would not be time or cost-effective. Whilst fast-tracking beauty in development could be an effective way to incentivise developers to incorporate better design in their sites, in other ways it seems counter-productive to this goal as it has the possibility to lead to cutting corners and making identical places.

14.5 The use of modern methods of construction should be encouraged through the planning system as a solution to building high quality developments at speed. Perhaps this should be stated in National Policy/ Local Plans explicitly rather than expecting expansion of PD rights and pre-approved designs to automatically encourage their use?

14.6 Paragraph 3.20 states “*we intend to develop a limited set of form-based development types that allow the redevelopment of existing residential buildings... in a range of common development settings (such as semi-detached suburban development)*”. The Council wish for clarity on exactly what the ‘*limited set of form-based development types*’ would be and whether this is Permitted Development aimed at the development of garden land and gentle density or increasing height of buildings? Either way the Council would either have limited or no control, or would need to be specific about what could be achieved and where through pattern books and LDOs this would again increase workloads for the Local Authority. It is unclear from the proposals what timeframe this would need to be achieved by.

**15. We intend to amend the National Planning Policy Framework to ensure that it targets those areas where a reformed planning system can most effectively play a role in mitigating and adapting to climate change and maximising environmental benefits.**

15.1 It is considered that further detail will be needed regarding marrying the changes proposed regarding the opportunities to strengthen the way environmental issues are considered with a simpler approach to assessing environmental impacts. The Council considers that protection of environmental assets should be paramount.

15.2 The Council queries how Government will decide which area are those areas “*where a reformed planning system can most effectively play a role in mitigating and adapting to climate change*” etc. will this be based on some form of evidence? What will the NPPF say regarding those areas which are not deemed to fit this criterion?

**16. We intend to design a quicker, simpler framework for assessing environmental impacts and enhancement opportunities, that speeds up the process while protecting and enhancing the most valuable and important habitats and species in England.**

16.1 Further detail on how the environmental impact assessment will be sped up will be welcomed. It is accepted that the current SEA, SA and EIA processes are cumbersome and lack transparency, however it is imperative that in the interest of faster, the processes of assessment are still robust and habitats and species are protected.

16.2 The Council wishes to question what status the European Natura 2000 sites (SPAs, SACs) will have, post-Brexit?

16.3 The Council acknowledges and welcomes there will be further consultation in the autumn on these proposals.

**17. Conserving and enhancing our historic buildings and areas in the 21st century.**

17.1 The White Paper recognises the importance of heritage assets including listed buildings and conservation areas, and highlights that assets have continued to be protected as part of the Government’s planning reforms since 2010 (Pg 16). The main proposal in the White Paper is for local plans to identify three types of land; Growth areas, suitable for substantial development; Renewal areas, suitable for development; and areas that are protected (pg 28). Conservation areas would fall into this latter category.

17.2 It is noted that the existing planning system including statutory protection and the NPPF has worked well in terms of protecting heritage assets including listed buildings and conservation areas. The aim is to build on this.

17.3 It is proposed that local planning authorities will identify the location of all heritage assets including listed buildings, conservation areas and locally designated heritage assets, in addition to protected views in their local plans.

17.5 Bromsgrove has published criteria and a process for compiling a local heritage list but compilation of this list is a work in progress and has yet to be completed. If more weight is to be attached to assets that have been identified in the Local Plan then this work needs to be expedited.

17.6 Where they exist, conservation area appraisals identify important views, but more work across both districts will be required to identify important views particularly in respect of listed buildings. The setting of heritage assets, where it contributes to the significance of that asset, currently has a high degree of protection as a result of the 1990 Act (listed buildings) and the NPPF. It is assumed at this stage that this protection will continue when the planning framework is updated. Setting of heritage assets will have to be taken into account when 'Growth' and 'Renewal' areas are identified.

17.7 The proposed change towards enabling historical buildings to install energy efficiency measures by ensuring the planning consent framework is "sufficiently responsive to sympathetic changes" is welcomed by the Council, as long as there are acceptable control measures in place to protect the buildings from adverse effects. The Council acknowledges that there is a necessity for existing housing stock to be made more energy efficient. There are some concerns, however, regarding the structure and fabric of Listed Buildings: can it be adapted to house insulation and other energy efficient measures without harming the integrity and uniqueness of the asset? It is in cases like this where a 'catch all' policy would not be appropriate; each building should still be assessed individually in terms of suitability for changes such as these.

17.8 The suggestion on page 59 regarding exploring if experienced architectural specialists have earned enough autonomy from routine listed building consents to bypass the conservation officer is potentially worrying, as taking control away from LAs and giving it to architects seems contradictory to the purpose of planning and conservation departments. Additionally, it is considered that there is no such thing as "routine" listed building consent, and to suggest otherwise would be to stop considering listed buildings as the individual assets that they are.

17.9 Finally it is suggested in the White Paper that to assist local planning authorities in concentrating on conserving and enhancing the more important historic buildings, architectural specialists may be given more autonomy in respect of routine consents. This has been suggested in the past but the concern is how objective these 'architectural specialists' might be when it is their client paying their bill. The gradual loss of small details on historic buildings can in the long run have a major cumulative impact on the significance of the asset.

**18. To complement our planning reforms, we will facilitate ambitious improvements in the energy efficiency standards for buildings to help deliver our world-leading commitment to net-zero by 2050.**

18.1 The Council believes that strong commitments in the Future Homes Standard are required if targets are to be met and real improvements towards slowing the impacts of climate change are to be made.

18.2 For a matter of the importance of the role that LPAs can play in setting energy efficiency standards, new standards should be imposed at a national level in the new National Design Guide. Currently local standards require justification and plan viability testing, and in some cases financial viability stands in the way of locally imposed standards being implemented. If other matters are being taken out of the Local Planning Authority's control, it would be productive at the same time for a standard of this importance to be implemented nationally also.

**Pillar Three: Planning for infrastructure and connected places**

**19. The Community Infrastructure Levy should be reformed to be charged as a fixed proportion of the development value above a threshold, with a mandatory nationally-set rate or rates and the current system of planning obligations abolished.**

19.1 The Council support the need for a streamlined mechanism for securing developer contributions, and in particular the need to capture uplifts in land value, in order to help fund vital infrastructure required to support new development.

19.2 Within the proposal for a new Infrastructure Levy (IL), we do however have concerns with the idea of a national rate, or indeed area specific rates set nationally. This proposal would appear to be too simplistic to cater for the differences in land and development values across the country, or even within regions such as the West Midlands. Therefore there is the prospect of extremely low rates being set in areas of marginal development viability, which consequently generate little levy income for the funding of essential infrastructure. It would seem prudent in such an example that the system of S106 developer contributions was retained although subjected to a specific viability test , in order that any large development sites with a need for significant infrastructure delivery to mitigate the impact of the development could provide specific S106 contributions to top up the likely low level of infrastructure levy receipts. This twin track approach would be akin to that proposed through the Local Infrastructure Tariff (LIT) in the 2017 CIL Review.

19.3 The proposal further states that the IL would be charged on the final value of a development and payable on occupation of development. There is concern that if a local authority is to borrow against future IL revenue, then the uncertainty of final development values or any unforeseen delays to payment of the levy would leave local authorities in a compromised position with regards to the funding and thus timely delivery of infrastructure to support new development as soon as it is completed. There is also some concern over the practical considerations of collecting payment of the levy if payable on completion of development, rather than at the point of securing planning permission as is the case with the current system.

## **20. The scope of the Infrastructure Levy could be extended to capture changes of use through permitted development rights**

20.1 As PD rights have expanded in recent years to allow for more significant conversion from one land use to another, in particular to allow more residential development, it would seem sensible that the potential impacts of such developments in the future can be mitigated through levy receipts, which offer an opportunity for investment in essential infrastructure. We would therefore support the proposal that the IL is extended to include change of use through PD rights.

20.2 However this will require submission of a sufficient level of detail on the development proposal from the developer or applicant to the local authority, to enable the correct levy to be calculated based on the relevant amount of floorspace being converted or developed.

## **21. The reformed Infrastructure Levy should deliver affordable housing provision**

21.1 We note the comment under this proposal that the reformed approach should continue to deliver on-site affordable housing in perpetuity to at least the present levels and we would strongly agree with this. However where there is an affordable housing need demonstrated for a local authority, it is important that provision of affordable housing as an in kind delivery or right to purchase does not detract from the IL funding available for other infrastructure provision to support the delivery of new housing development. It is also important that any in kind delivery is built to the same standards of traditional affordable housing provision.

## **22. More freedom could be given to local authorities over how they spend the Infrastructure Levy**

22.1 The proposed retention of the 'neighbourhood share' applies to parished areas where a neighbourhood plan is in place ('made'), rather than all local communities or parishes regardless. It will be important that local planning authorities have the resource to potentially manage a higher level of neighbourhood planning in their local authority, if local communities now see neighbourhood planning as a more attractive option to secure funding from the new IL. Furthermore, division of IL receipts between a local authority and parish / NP areas presents a risk of more disparate, smaller infrastructure projects being sought rather than investment in larger, more costly schemes.

22.2 Whilst the principle of local authorities being able to fund service provision through IL receipts is welcomed, in areas of high development needs it is unlikely that there would be sufficient receipts to invest in service provision once the high cost of certain infrastructure provision, for example costly transport infrastructure to mitigate the impact of a substantial new residential development, is taken into consideration.

**23. As we develop our final proposals for this new planning system, we will develop a comprehensive resources and skills strategy for the planning sector to support the implementation of our reforms.**

23.1 Implementing a new planning system requires resources. Local Planning Authorities need to be properly funded and resources available. External training has reduced significantly due to budgets being cut for LA's.

**24. We will seek to strengthen enforcement powers and sanctions.**

Proposals are particularly weak with little substance and unfortunately the opportunity has not been taken to make enforcement powers more robust. Although the recognition that enforcement is an overlooked part of the service was welcomed.

This page is intentionally left blank



## **Government consultation – Changes to the current planning system**

This response, as submitted represents an Officer view for Bromsgrove District Council. Due to the closing date for consultation responses and it has not been possible to ratify this response through the Committee cycle. The response will be considered by Council Members on 21<sup>st</sup> October, should the need arise we will update the consultation response if any amendments are requested by Members. The Council will send notification on 22<sup>nd</sup> October to advise if this is the case and to provide an anticipated date for forwarding an updated response.

## **The standard method for assessing housing numbers in strategic plans**

Step 1: Setting the baseline – providing stability and certainty by incorporating a blend of household projections and stock:

**Q1: Do you agree that planning practice guidance should be amended to specify that the appropriate baseline for the standard method is whichever is the higher of the level of 0.5% of housing stock in each local authority area OR the latest household projections averaged over a 10-year period?**

*Paragraph 13 of the consultation document states that “household projections have attracted criticism for their volatility and the way in which they can result in artificially low projections in some places... Crucially, they cannot in isolation forecast housing need – they project past trends forward.”*

*Paragraph 20 of the consultation document goes on to say that housing stock figures “should also offer the stability and predictability which has been absent when solely relying on household projections.”*

*The Council is mindful of the volatility of the household projections, which was highlighted when the 2016 projections were released and dismissed for the purpose of calculating LHN figures.*

*The Council’s only preference is for clarity and certainty that an adopted methodology is substantially robust and can endure over time.*

**Q2: In the stock element of the baseline, do you agree that 0.5% of existing stock for the standard method is appropriate? If not, please explain why.**

*As above The Council’s only preference is for clarity and certainty that an adopted methodology is substantially robust and can endure over time.*

Step 2: Adjusting for market signals – maintaining price signals using the current affordability ratio and the change in affordability over the last 10 years:

**Q3: Do you agree that using the workplace-based median house price to median earnings ratio from the most recent year for which data is available to adjust the standard method's baseline is appropriate? If not, please explain why.**

*The Council agrees with the use of workplace-based data as this is more representative in terms of potential affordability issues within a local authority area.*

**Q4: Do you agree that incorporating an adjustment for the change of affordability over 10 years is a positive way to look at whether affordability has improved? If not, please explain why.**

*The introduction of the two part affordability adjustment is considered to better reflect market conditions and affordability in a pragmatic and positive manner.*

**Q5: Do you agree that affordability is given an appropriate weighting within the standard method? If not, please explain why.**

*No comment*

Transition

Do you agree that authorities should be planning having regard to their revised standard method need figure, from the publication date of the revised guidance, with the exception of:

**Q6: Authorities which are already at the second stage of the strategic plan consultation process (Regulation 19), which should be given 6 months to submit their plan to the Planning Inspectorate for examination?**

**Q7: Authorities close to publishing their second stage consultation (Regulation 19), which should be given 3 months from the publication date of the revised guidance to publish their Regulation 19 plan, and a further 6 months to submit their plan to the Planning Inspectorate?**

If not, please explain why. Are there particular circumstances which need to be catered for?

*No comment, the transition arrangement will not apply to Bromsgrove.*

## Delivering First Homes

**Q8: The Government is proposing policy compliant planning applications will deliver a minimum of 25% of onsite affordable housing as First Homes, and a minimum of 25% of offsite contributions towards First Homes where appropriate. Which do you think is the most appropriate option for the remaining 75% of affordable housing secured through developer contributions? Please provide reasons and / or evidence for your views (if possible):**

**i) Prioritising the replacement of affordable home ownership tenures, and delivering rental tenures in the ratio set out in the local plan policy.**

**ii) Negotiation between a local authority and developer.**

**iii) Other (please specify)**

*Option i) Prioritising the replacement of affordable home ownership tenures, and delivering rental tenures in the ratio set out in the local plan policy. Focus should remain on the delivery of rental tenures which has already been set through the local plan process. Our current requirement provides for 60% of affordable housing to be social rented therefore this proposed change will not have a negative impact on the provision of this tenure. This will also ensure mixed and balanced communities are being delivered on developments.*

**With regards to current exemptions from delivery of affordable home ownership products:**

**Q9: Should the existing exemptions from the requirement for affordable home ownership products (e.g. for build to rent) also apply to this First Homes requirement?**

*Yes – The private rented sector provides an important provision of housing which should not be diluted with the need for the provision of home ownership products.*

**Q10: Are any existing exemptions not required? If not, please set out which exemptions and why.**

*Small sites and those benefiting from vacant building credit should not be exempt from the provision of First Homes on site. The provision will not have such an impact on the viability of a development.*

**Q11: Are any other exemptions needed? If so, please provide reasons and /or evidence for your views.**

*No comment*

**Q12: Do you agree with the proposed approach to transitional arrangements set out above?**

*Yes*

**Q13: Do you agree with the proposed approach to different levels of discount?**

*Yes, providing the valuation is a RICS red book valuation.*

**Q14: Do you agree with the approach of allowing a small proportion of market housing on First Homes exception sites, in order to ensure site viability?**

*Yes, providing developers are required to fully evidence the need for market housing to make the scheme viable.*

**Q15: Do you agree with the removal of the site size threshold set out in the National Planning Policy Framework?**

*No comment*

**Q16: Do you agree that the First Homes exception sites policy should not apply in designated rural areas?**

*Yes - A rural exception site is designed to meet need and the affordable housing provision provided should be purely to meet that need.*

### **Supporting small and medium-sized developers**

**For each of these questions, please provide reasons and / or evidence for your views (if possible):**

**Q17: Do you agree with the proposed approach to raise the small sites threshold for a time-limited period? (see question 18 for comments on level of threshold)**

*The Council disagrees with the proposal to raise the site size threshold for affordable housing contributions. Paragraph 57 of the NPPF already offers the flexibility to negotiate expected contributions from development if there are justifiable circumstances which affect the viability of a site. Furthermore, NPPF, paragraph 68, directs LPAs to identifying a range of smaller site allocations through the Plan-making process. During this process, LPAs are balancing the delivery of the overall requirement with meeting the housing needs of different groups in the community (NPPF paragraph 61). Raising the site size threshold has the potential to compromise much needed affordable housing provision.*

*With respect to the time limited period for the proposed approach, there is no certainty that this initiative wouldn't be extended beyond the initial 18 month period, given the reoccurring nature of Covid-related restrictions throughout the country. This is a time where the need for affordable homes is possibly at its most prevalent.*

*The office to residential prior notification initiative was originally time restricted, and then extended. There have since been many lost opportunities to secure affordable housing provision due to this initiative*

**Q18: What is the appropriate level of small sites threshold?**

- i) Up to 40 homes**
- ii) Up to 50 homes**
- iii) Other (please specify)**

*The Council considers that the threshold should remain at 11+.*

**Q19: Do you agree with the proposed approach to the site size threshold?**

*No*

**Q20: Do you agree with linking the time-limited period to economic recovery and raising the threshold for an initial period of 18 months?**

*See response to Q17*

**Q21: Do you agree with the proposed approach to minimising threshold effects?**

*If the threshold does have to be increased, then the Council welcomes measures to ensure that larger scale developments are not brought forward on a piecemeal basis to avoid exceeding the threshold.*

**Q22: Do you agree with the Government's proposed approach to setting thresholds in rural areas?**

*The Council welcomes this approach.*

**Q23: Are there any other ways in which the Government can support SME builders to deliver new homes during the economic recovery period?**

*No comment*

**Extension of the Permission in Principle consent regime**

**Q24: Do you agree that the new Permission in Principle should remove the restriction on major development?**

*The Council welcomes this change. For sites that have been allocated through the Local Plan process, this initiative could shorten the route to full planning approval and secure earlier housing delivery on site.*

*Mixed use sites allocated through Local Plans that exceed to 150 dwelling threshold for PiP would also benefit from this initiative, which would again secure earlier housing delivery on sites without compromising other uses/ needs that have been identified as part of the Plan-making process*

**Q25: Should the new Permission in Principle for major development set any limit on the amount of commercial development (providing housing still occupies the majority of the floorspace of the overall scheme)? Please provide any comments in support of your views.**

*The Council agrees with the approach identified in paragraphs 98 and 99 of the consultation document.*

**Q26: Do you agree with our proposal that information requirements for Permission in Principle by application for major development should broadly remain unchanged? If you disagree, what changes would you suggest and why?**

*The Council agrees with the proposed approach.*

**Q27: Should there be an additional height parameter for Permission in Principle? Please provide comments in support of your views.**

*Following PiP consent, any development would need to meet the rigours of adopted planning policy, both nationally and locally. The height of development should be considered by locally distinctive policies in adopted local plans rather than the imposition of a national parameter.*

**Q28: Do you agree that publicity arrangements for Permission in Principle by application should be extended for large developments? If so, should local planning authorities be:**

- i) required to publish a notice in a local newspaper?**
- ii) subject to a general requirement to publicise the application or**
- iii) both?**
- iv) disagree**

**If you disagree, please state your reasons.**

*No comment*

**Q29: Do you agree with our proposal for a banded fee structure based on a flat fee per hectare, with a maximum fee cap?**

*No comment*

**Q30: What level of flat fee do you consider appropriate, and why?**

*No comment*

**Q31: Do you agree that any brownfield site that is granted Permission in Principle through the application process should be included in Part 2 of the Brownfield Land Register? If you disagree, please state why.**

*No comment*

**Q32: What guidance would help support applicants and local planning authorities to make decisions about Permission in Principle? Where possible, please set out any areas of guidance you consider are currently lacking and would assist stakeholders.**

*No comment*

**Q33: What costs and benefits do you envisage the proposed scheme would cause? Where you have identified drawbacks, how might these be overcome?**

*No comment*

**Q34: To what extent do you consider landowners and developers are likely to use the proposed measure? Please provide evidence where possible.**

*No comment*

**Q35: In light of the proposals set out in this consultation, are there any direct or indirect impacts in terms of eliminating unlawful discrimination, advancing equality of opportunity and fostering good relations on people who share characteristics protected under the Public Sector Equality Duty?**

**If so, please specify the proposal and explain the impact. If there is an impact – are there any actions which the department could take to mitigate that impact?**

*No comment*

This page is intentionally left blank



Relevant Portfolio Holder	Cllr Karen May
Portfolio Holder Consulted	Yes
Relevant Head of Service	Kevin Dicks – Chief Executive Officer Deb Poole – Head of Transformation, OD & Digital Services
Ward(s) Affected	N/A
Ward Councillor(s) Consulted	N/A
Key Decision / Non-Key Decision	

### 1. SUMMARY OF PROPOSALS

- 1.1 The Covid-19 pandemic has required an unprecedented response from the Council. Even though the requirement to respond to the pandemic is still ongoing it is important to look towards recovery and to the return of business as usual, whenever that may be. The purpose of this report is to update Members on the proposed approach to recovery and to ask Members to consider and endorse the attached Recovery and Restoration Plan 2020 – 2021. Members are also asked to note the attached Corporate Peer Challenge Report 2020.

### 2. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Cabinet is asked to AGREE

- 2.1 That the proposed Recovery and Restoration Plan 2020 - 2021, as set out in Appendix 1, be endorsed
- 2.2 That the Cabinet monitor the council’s recovery actions against the plan and that the Chief Executive Officer, in consultation with the Leader, be authorised to make amendments to the plan as required.

The Cabinet is also asked to NOTE

- 2.3 The attached Corporate Peer Challenge Report 2020.

### 3. KEY ISSUES

#### Background Information

- 3.1 Whilst the delivery of essential council services has been maintained during the pandemic we have seen major changes in the way officers work and the way councillors carry out their duties. Our local and national economies have been adversely impacted by the unprecedented suspension of trading for most of our local businesses who were unable to operate as normal. Members should be aware that a county wide, multi-agency economic recovery plan is being produced and this will sit alongside our own Recovery and Restoration Plan. It

### **Recovery and Restoration Plan 2020/21**

14<sup>th</sup> October 2020

---

should also be noted that the Head of Planning and Regeneration and the Head of North Worcestershire Economic Development and Regeneration are also developing a Bromsgrove specific economic recovery plan.

- 3.2 In line with government guidance at the beginning of the pandemic, a number of council staff were classified as key workers. Whilst we have been able to successfully implement a more agile approach to allow everyone who can to work from home, we have also continued to provide all core services with as little disruption to our community as possible.
- 3.3 As Members will have experienced, normal governance and decision making procedures have changed. The introduction of new emergency legislation to allow for the provision of virtual meetings, has seen the process of decision making continue, albeit in a very different way to our usual approach. In light of the pandemic, Members role as community leaders has also become increasingly important and appreciated by our community.
- 3.4 It is acknowledged that whilst the initial 'first wave' of infections now appears to be in decline, it is possible that a 'second wave' or local outbreaks may occur over the coming months. In order to plan for these eventualities, the Senior Management Team and Corporate Management Team have taken key learning points from the first outbreak to develop a number of actions to prepare for this situation. The actions include: a further review of Business Continuity Plans, development of a revised Communications Plan, development of a list of employees who live outside the district who may be impacted by local outbreaks, discussions with existing local support networks to understand their preparedness, discussions with partner agencies regarding the sharing of data and the identification of any staff who may be able to assist with Track and Trace activities.
- 3.5 Whilst the ongoing pandemic still requires some officers to continue to focus on response, the Council as a whole now needs to start planning for recovery and restoration and all that will entail. Whilst the recovery will, no doubt, take some time to implement; it is appropriate that we start to plan our way forward towards 'business as usual'.
- 3.6 To this end, officers have produced the attached Recovery and Restoration Plan. The Recovery and Restoration Plan is built around the five strategic purposes within the current BDC Council Plan and includes some of the priority areas from the Council Plan alongside key recovery actions. The Strategic Purposes in the BDC Council Plan are:
- Run and Grow a Successful Business
  - Affordable & Sustainable Homes
  - Work & Financial Independence
  - Living Independent, Active & Healthy Lives
  - Communities which are Safe, Well Maintained & Green
- The Recovery and Restoration Plan also includes a section for our Corporate Priorities which focus on the internal business of the council.

- 3.7 It is recognised that the BDC Council Plan was developed prior to the Covid pandemic and as such the focus of some of the previous priorities may have changed as a result of the current crisis. A review of the BDC Council Plan will be undertaken in early 2021 to ensure the priorities are refreshed and remain relevant in a post Covid environment. The Recovery and Restoration Plan also incorporates the main recommendations from the recent Corporate Peer Challenge Review which can be found in Appendix 2.

#### **Legal Implications**

- 3.8 None.

#### **Service / Operational Implications**

- 3.9 Whilst the continuation of services to our community remains the focus of the councils activities, it is anticipated that service areas will also begin to implement the high level actions outlined in the attached Recovery and Restoration Plan.

#### **Customer / Equalities and Diversity Implications**

- 3.10 None.

### **4. RISK MANAGEMENT**

- 4.1 None.

### **5. APPENDICES**

Appendix 1 – Draft Recovery and Restoration Plan 2020 – 2021  
Appendix 2 – Corporate Peer Challenge Report 2020

### **6. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

None

### **7. KEY**

None

### **AUTHOR OF REPORT**

Name: Deb Poole – Head of Transformation, OD & Digital Services  
email: d.poole@bromsgroveandredditch.gov.uk  
Tel.: 01527 881256

This page is intentionally left blank

# **Bromsgrove District Council COVID-19 Recovery & Restoration Plan**

**2020 – 2021**

**Version 1.4**

Purpose	Original Council Plan Commitments	Recovery & Restoration Issues and Actions	New or Modified Actions (what we will do...who with/partners)	By When	Owner
<b>Run and Grow a Successful Business</b>	<b>Supporting businesses to start and grow within the District</b>	Consult businesses to understand current needs, recovery, and growth plans, working with partners to support business recovery and growth	Arrange discussions with businesses via BEIS to understand position and future needs Further schemes available and due to be launched which will be promoted alongside partners	Ongoing	NWEDR
		For many strategic purposes, the planning system can play a key role in contributing to recovery and restoration. For all strategic purposes, where relevant, there will be support through the timely determination of planning applications and the implementation, evidence gathering and review of the Local Plan			
		Ensure businesses access Government Coronavirus Support Grants	Ensure all appeals are responded to robustly	Completed	DR
		Provide businesses entering Recovery Cycle for Non-Domestic Rates with information relating to support mechanisms	Advise businesses of support available via comms	Ongoing	DR
		Provide businesses with information on recovery support available internally and nationally.	Advise businesses of support available via comms	Weekly/Ongoing	NWEDR
		Revisions made to letters that are going out to businesses to explain debt recovery processes.	Work with recovery teams to ensure all businesses are provided with support and advice on debt management.	Aug – Dec 2020	DR
Liaise with internal partners to provide information in relation to business in arrears and delaying payments of liabilities.	Work with other recovery officers across the councils to ensure debt is managed holistically to provide the customer with the correct level of support.	Ongoing	CFor		
			Nov 2020	NWEDR	

		Look to provide incubator units or the like through the investment programme to give businesses spaces to open and operate.	Continue to circulate the weekly Business Bulletin and provide further updates from partners as appropriate.  Prepare Master planning / feasibility study for key sites	Aug – March 2021	NWEDR
<b>Regenerating our Town Centre</b>		Continue with the regeneration of the Town Centre	Utilise Bird Box as additional space to support local businesses	Ongoing	NWEDR
		Provide low cost loans to businesses to encourage growth and attract them to the area	Develop loan policy to enable this option to be available for Businesses	Dec 2020	CFor
<b>Economic development &amp; regeneration</b>		Engage with businesses to understand current needs, recovery & growth plans, working with partners to support business growth.	North Worcestershire Business Advisor appointed by GBSLEP to engage with businesses in North Worcestershire	Ongoing	NWEDR
<b>Undertake a comprehensive review of all Council owned assets and assess all opportunities for investment privately in land and premises within the District with a particular focus on business centre and industrial estates</b>		Investigate alternate sources of funding to PWLB to ensure best value borrowing can be achieved to maximise the range of investment opportunities and returns to the council	Ensure that the council is compliant with guidance when accessing these funds.	Ongoing	CFor
		Identify partners to invest with	Revise the treasury management policy to enable all options to be made available to the council	Mar 2021	CFor
		Review of the councils asset base	Review the property structure to enable an asset review to be undertaken	Mar 2021	CFe
		Identify opportunities for strategic investments	Develop an asset management strategy	Mar 2021	CFe
			Review the property structure to ensure there is the resource to enable strategic investment opportunities to be identified and pursued	Mar 2021	CFe
<b>Develop an economic development strategy, to include stimulating the growth of low carbon industries</b>		Develop a Local Economic Recovery Framework	Work with the Worcestershire Economic Recovery Group to ensure Bromsgrove's economic recovery needs are addressed in the county wide economic recovery plan.	Nov 2020	NWEDR

		Work up an approach for the council to make investments in the locality to contribute towards economic recovery/implement its Economic Recovery Framework	Develop and deliver a Bromsgrove Economic Recovery Plan	Nov 2020 and ongoing	NWEDR
			There are a number of disparate programmes of support to help businesses diversify into the low carbon sector. Propose to work with colleagues to pull these together and promote as a cohesive whole	Oct 2020	NWEDR KM
			Consider holding a local jobs fair, focusing on reskilling, including carbon friendly skills	Dec 2020	NWEDR
	<b>Work with partners to improve digital &amp; physical connectivity (to include broadband, 5G &amp; transport infrastructure)</b>	Ensure that adequate digital infrastructure is in place to support the accelerated adoption of digital technologies by local businesses as a result of Covid-19	Work with the West Midlands 5G Company and the GBSLEP and WLEP on exploring the potential of a 5G testbed in Bromsgrove	Summer 2021	NWEDR
			Work with Superfast Worcestershire on delivering superfast broadband to Bromsgrove homes and businesses	Ongoing	NWEDR
	<b>Support local businesses to embrace new technologies in order to maximise business growth, particularly in the knowledge &amp; creative industries</b>	Identify local businesses that plan an accelerated adoption of digital technologies	Work with Betaden Tech Accelerator to promote opportunities to learn about innovative technologies being developed in the county	Ongoing	NWEDR
			Promote the new Business Recovery Grant, being administered by the Growth Hubs, which is designed to support businesses affected by Covid-19 to access new technology. Grants from £1k-£5k, available for a limited time	Due to be launched late Sept	NWEDR
			Promote learning and training opportunities for businesses - courses	Ongoing	NWEDR



			and workshops delivered by GBSLEP Growth Hub and Worcestershire Business Central		
	<b>Look to stimulate adequate supply of land &amp; premises to enable existing &amp; new businesses to grow</b>	Identify brownfield sites and long term empty premises that could be redeveloped	Continue to work with the Worcestershire LEP Land supply group and private landowners and landlords to identify development opportunities in the district	Ongoing	NWEDR
	<b>Strengthen the vibrancy &amp; viability of our towns &amp; district centres</b>	Make the town centre a more attractive place/space to do business	Prepare Master planning and Feasibility Study for key town centre sites	Oct 2020	NWEDR
		Make the town centre a more attractive place to spend free time (leisure, arts & culture, well-being)	Develop a programming strategy for the Birdbox within the restrictions of Covid-19 regulations and guidance	Oct 2020	NWEDR
			Prepare the Bromsgrove Town Centre 2040 vision	Feb 2021	NWEDR
			Undertake a refresh of the Centres Strategy, covering the identified town and local Centres in Bromsgrove	Dec 2020	NWEDR
			Commission a further car parking review of the Town Centre, linked to work on the vision and Local Plan development	Mar 2021	GR/KH
			Implement the 5 year Car Park capital infrastructure programme as detailed in the Business Case	From Dec 2020	GR/KH

## Affordable &amp; Sustainable Homes

Purpose	Original Council Plan Commitments	Recovery & Restoration Issues and Actions	New or Modified Actions (what we will do...who with/partners)	By When	Owner
Affordable & Sustainable Homes	<b>Rough Sleepers</b> To continue the legacy of having no rough sleepers in the District	To review and adapt work to the Housing First Model in partnership with the voluntary sector, the Police and mental health services.	To identify funding from MHCLG grants and complete claims for those helped.	Dec 2020	DA
		To work with WCC and other District colleagues on the County Next Accommodation Programme Bid.	To implement the programme of activities outlined in the bid	Ongoing	DA
		To identify suitable accommodation from within BDHT's housing stock and ensure no-one helped in crisis returns to the streets	To identify funding from MHCLG grants.	Dec 2020	DA
		Capacity around support of all providers – financial health check to ensure continued support available	To write to agencies concerned to contact the Council with any issues	Oct 2020	DA
	<b>A balanced housing market</b>	Develop & implement a District Housing Strategy giving consideration to the impact of Covid 19 and how the impact of crisis on the economy will impact on housing supply and demand	To work with new government guidance /legislation issued in response to Covid 19	Oct 2020	DA
			To include the impact of Covid in the strategy and associated actions over the next 12/18 months.	Dec 2020	DA
			Contribute to the countywide housing delivery strategy.	Mar 2021	DA
	<b>Work with developers to deliver more affordable homes</b>	Continue work with developers on the impact from the crisis on the economy and consequently housing supply and demand	Continuously monitor and review the impact of Covid 19 and provide influence and support to developers	Sept 2020 & Ongoing	DA MB
			Review impacts of the new planning guidance	Dec 2020 & ongoing	DA MB
Building Control will continue to support developers with consistent and timely advice			Ongoing	AW	

<b>Develop a plan for the Burcot Lane site</b>	Include consideration of Covid 19 in Cabinet report	Undertake a revision of financial remodelling.  To continuously monitor the milestones that have been reviewed with Homes England.	Ongoing	DA SH CFor
<b>Improve outcomes for tenants in the private rented sector</b>	To continue to work with private landlords and tenants to support the impact of Covid 19 and work with any new government guidance/legislation.	Develop and implement an action plan for helping private renters avoid eviction, including maximising the use of Discretionary Housing Payments and other financial means available to incentivise landlords to refrain from evictions.	Ongoing	DA SS
<b>Support people to live &amp; remain in appropriate homes</b>	Work with Worcestershire Partnership Groups, County pathways and other bids to support this priority	Work with the Worcestershire Strategic Housing Partnership to develop and implement actions.	Ongoing	DA
<b>Engage with leaseholders, such as park home residents, to understand their needs</b>	To pause progression of this in light of other service priorities following Covid 19	Monitor and review capacity to undertake this commitment in future years	April 2021	SS
<b>Work with developers to deliver more energy efficient homes</b>	To continue to work with developers to promote upfront investment for long term savings and acknowledging that developers may focus on must-haves and reduce spend on energy efficiency	Monitor post Covid 19 development proposals for new build and influence to achieve this priority  Implement a £610k funding bid submitted to the Getting Building Fund programme for low carbon housing at the Burcot Lane site.  Consider and bid for new energy grant schemes as they are announced including the Green Homes Grant	Ongoing  Dec 2020  Sept 2020 & ongoing	MB  DA MB  MB

		Government guidance on improved green credentials	Implemented by Building Control and advised upon wherever possible	Ongoing	AW
--	--	---	--	---------	----

Purpose	Original Council Plan Commitments	Recovery & Restoration Issues and Actions	New or Modified Actions (what we will do...who with/partners)	By When	Owner
<b>Work &amp; Financial Independence</b>	<b>Skills for the future</b>	Undertake a skills audit with partners & work together with them to address any gaps	Work with partners to see what the needs are in terms of skills  Work with WCC who are leading on the “Creating our Future Workforce” campaign including the skills show and Careers & Enterprise Company	Nov 2020  Nov 2020	NWEDR  NWEDR
	<b>Support schools &amp; HOW College to link students to local employers</b>	A number of schemes have been launched to help address the effect of the economic downturn on Young People – apprenticeship grants, traineeship grants and kick-start (6 month placements)  Understand the partnerships that are already in place	Work to promote the availability of schemes and, in addition, continue to deliver the ‘Opening Doors to Business’ initiative alongside partners  Arrange meetings with high schools and HOW to establish their current links with schools	Nov 2020  Nov 2020	NWEDR  NWEDR
	<b>Work with businesses to utilise the apprenticeship levy &amp; increase the number of apprenticeships</b>	Ensure that the council maximises the levy by taking on the full cohort of apprentices which can be funded through the levy the council pays. In addition, review if the council wants to utilise other organisations levy payments to further increase this number	Fourth tier managers and HOS to undertake a session to identify how training can be funded from the levy in the future  Work with GBSLEP apprenticeships triage service and Worcestershire Apprenticeships to promote apprenticeships opportunities and support available to businesses	Dec 2020  Ongoing	BT PSmith  NWEDR
	<b>Provide support to people to enable them to access employment opportunities in digital &amp; low carbon industries</b>	Promote the support available through the Worcestershire Jobs Match programme and GBSLEP Employment triage programme	Promote the GBSLEP skills hub when launched.	Ongoing	NWEDR

<b>Support residents to manage their finances, including working with schools on money management</b>	<p>Promote the work that the FIT team do, as part of this create stronger partnership working with CAB/BDHT.</p> <p>Improve website to include budgeting tips and tools. Get greater awareness to residents.</p> <p>Provide Taxpayers in arrears and failing to maintain CT payments with information in relation to support available</p>	<p>Undertake full service review to ensure posts are in place to deliver support</p> <p>Utilise accessibility project to improve website and improve information available online.</p> <p>Liaise with partners (eg CAB) to identify the support and signposting that they can give</p> <p>Develop script of support advice to customer service teams</p>	<p>Dec 2020</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p>	<p>LD</p> <p>LD</p> <p>DR</p> <p>DR</p>
<b>Ensure people get the benefits they need</b>	<p>Ensure support for prison leavers / ex-offenders to access the benefits they need as one of the key drivers to reducing re-offending</p> <p>Work with DWP to identify support to jobseekers/ advice re benefits</p> <p>Be prepared for potential spike with regards to furloughed workers – unemployment, UC claims, and HB/CTR claims.</p> <p>Optimise spending of DHP budgets to those in need.</p> <p>Liaise with foodbanks on their capacities and demand and investigate whether we can we assist through ELF and Food Vouchers</p>	<p>Liaise with prison to ensure advice and support given to leavers and ex-offenders</p> <p>Arrange quarterly meetings with DWP to understand impact of Covid on benefit take up and unemployment</p> <p>Restructure to be implemented to ensure staff resource is sufficient to meet demand</p> <p>Regular meetings with Housing Officers to monitor level of spend</p> <p>Work through County funding support model</p> <p>FIT team to continue to support and provide data of demand</p>	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>Oct 2020</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>Completed</p>	<p>Benefits Team / Comm. Safety Team</p> <p>LD</p> <p>LD</p> <p>LD</p> <p>LD</p>

		Simplify CTR scheme for 2021/22	CTR scheme to be presented to Cabinet, O&S and Council. Consultation with the community to be undertaken	March 2021	LD
	<b>Supporting young people to gain the skills they need</b>	Support schools & HOW College to link students to local employers	Liaise with high schools and HOW to understand what links are currently in place. Discuss with BEIS as to future link	Dec 2020	NWEDR
	<b>Working with businesses to develop skills for the future</b>	Undertake a skills audit with partners & work together with them to address any gaps	Work with North Worcestershire Employment and Skills Board, Skills4Worcestershire, GBSLEP and Worcestershire LEP to commission a skills audit	Feb 2021	NWEDR
Develop a single Bromsgrove Business Leaders Group that can focus on skills development within the broader context of other key issues of importance to local businesses.		Work with the various business groups in North Worcestershire e.g. Worcestershire ESB, North Worcestershire ESB etc to establish a Business Leaders Group that will focus on skills development in the district alongside other key business issues.	Oct 2021	NWEDR	
Encourage the sharing and placement of staff in businesses for fixed durations to share and learn new skills		As previous column	Oct 2021	NWEDR	

Purpose	Original Council Plan Commitments	Recovery & Restoration Issues and Actions	New or Modified Actions (what we will do...who with/partners)	By When	Owner
<b>Living Independent, Active &amp; Healthy Lives</b>	<b>Improving health &amp; well-being</b>	Support targeted activities for healthy lifestyles	Discuss with Partnership officer the demand / need for activities. Liaise with Sports Development and Everyone Active to enable community activities to take place	End Sept 20 and ongoing	JP
		To deliver on the Bromsgrove Social Prescribing contract	To consider new funding opportunities from the Govt's proposal to expand the army of social prescribing link workers to support mental wellbeing.	Oct 2020	TD
		To promote the Lifeline wellbeing checks	To work with communications to promote the benefits of the Lifeline Well Being Checks.	Nov 2020	RN
		To support targeted virtual activity and creativity sessions for healthy lifestyles	1) long term health condition interventions (respiratory illness COPD, MS, postural stability), 2) disability sessions in partnership with Aztec Upton Warren & Sailing Club, BSLC, 3) Fit for Free guided sessions with outdoor fitness equipment in Bromsgrove, Clent & Alvechurch, 4) Active Kitchen holiday hunger projects	Aug & ongoing	Dev Service
	<b>Continue to support the Redditch &amp; Bromsgrove Dementia Friendly Communities initiative</b>	Continue to support this work		Ongoing	JW
	<b>Provide targeted activities for older people &amp; support the emerging Bromsgrove</b>	Working with Active Herefordshire and Worcestershire Virtual Strong and Steady classes have replaced the face to face delivery.	Funding from the Health Innovation Network has allowed an online Escape Pain class to start for people suffering with Osteoarthritis	Sept 2020	Dev Services



<b>Age Friendly Community</b>				
<b>With partners, enable targeted activities &amp; initiatives to support mental well-being</b>	Work with WCC on the legacy of Here2Help to support vulnerable residents post Covid	To promote and support that local communities access the legacy of Here2 Help and link this with the work of the Bromsgrove Partnership around the 'Deal Approach'  To support the work of Support Bromsgrove and BARN's volunteer Bureau to increase the number of volunteers working with VCS mental wellbeing services.	Dec 2020  Ongoing	JW  JW
<b>Support improved access to services that reduce social isolation (including Lifeline)</b>	<p>Promote the Lifeline Service locally and through partner agencies including self-installation during the pandemic.</p> <p>Develop and promote a new range of digital equipment and sensors to enhance the service user experience, including devices that will work outside of the home, encouraging independence and peace of mind when going out.</p> <p>Continue to work with WCC and Amica24 installing complex technology enabled care solutions on their behalf in Bromsgrove . Expand the 6 week free scheme to all health and care professionals.</p> <p>To continue with the Bromsgrove BURT bus and Shopmobility with new Covid safety measures</p> <p>Work with WCC on the legacy of Here2Help to support vulnerable residents post Covid</p>	<p>To develop a communications/ marketing plan</p> <p>Monitor conversion rates to establish how many of those, that have the service for free, choose to retain the service and pay for it ongoing. Target is 50% conversion</p> <p>Review opportunities with County and Health colleagues new tele health technologies post Covid</p> <p>To review with Members both of these services and whether further funding is available or income generation through charging to invest and develop them as a Council priority</p> <p>Work with Support Bromsgrove to achieve a legacy for the VCS</p>	<p>Nov 2020</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>June 2021</p> <p>Dec 2020</p> <p>Dec 2020</p>	<p>RN</p> <p>RN</p> <p>RN</p> <p>JW TD</p> <p>JW</p>

<p><b>Develop a Parks &amp; Open Spaces Strategy (including increased physical activity &amp; cycling)</b></p>	<p>Provide a clear brief on what the detail of the strategy will be</p>	<p>Develop a phased approach to the work to fine tune the technical documents that would feed into the overall strategy</p>	<p>Mar 2021</p>	<p>RB IKF JC</p>
<p><b>Enhance sport &amp; cultural opportunities offered by the Council</b></p>	<p>Work with partners to ensure that provision is accessible and safe for all participants, particularly those from minority and marginalised communities.</p> <p>Deliver the “Tell me what you want” action plan, the consequence of a 2 year £90,000 action research piece that identified projects designed to break down barriers to engagement with arts culture and heritage.</p>	<p>Liaise with partnership group to understand what is needed within the District for minority and marginalised communities.</p> <p>Working with all instructors and venues to provide COVID-19 Secure measures ready for a phased return to face to face delivery from mid Sept 2020</p> <p>Work with Bromsgrove Arts and Culture Consortium partners to deliver the plan.</p>	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>Completed</p> <p>End of March 2021</p>	<p>JP DM</p> <p>Dev Services</p> <p>Dev Services</p>

Purpose	Original Council Plan Commitments	Recovery & Restoration Issues and Actions	New or Modified Actions (what we will do...who with/partners)	By when	Owner
<b>Communities which are Safe, Well Maintained &amp; Green</b>	<b>Reducing crime &amp; disorder</b>	To consider the impact on society of Covid 19 and work with partners and service areas to ensure the Community Safety Partnership action plan reflects this.	To review and update the Community Safety Partnership action plan to contribute to the recovery of consequences from Covid 19	March 2021	BH
	<b>Work with partners, schools &amp; communities to reduce crime &amp; the fear of crime</b>	<p>Ensure effective Parking Enforcement, via the SLA with Wychavon, covering both on and off street contraventions.</p> <p>Through the Community Safety Respect Schools Programme, continue to work with partners and provide additional support for young people affected by the impact of Covid 19</p>	<p>Currently working with County Highways, Police &amp; Schools. Recruit to post (additional hours) to assist with enforcement around schools.</p> <p>Identify funding opportunities to sustain and continue to deliver the Respect Programme</p>	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p>	<p>KH</p> <p>NWCSP</p>
	<b>Review services to understand how we can adapt to address the implications of climate change</b>	<p>Currently working with the Energy Savings Trust who are undertaking an initial high level fleet review followed by a more detailed vehicle specific review with Cenex to identify the best low carbon emission vehicles to purchase in the future.</p> <p>Review fleet usage for Waste Collection, Cleansing and Grounds Maintenance to consider opportunities to further reduce our carbon footprint through technology.</p> <p>Service review of domestic waste service to support upcoming legislative changes to services aimed at reducing waste and increasing recycling as part of the circular economy.</p> <p>Campaign to increase recycling quality and quantities with residents (domestic waste service) and businesses via our Commercial Waste service.</p>	<p>Review the priorities for Climate Change across the district</p> <p>Review of technologies and innovation and funding</p> <p>As previous column</p> <p>As previous column</p>	<p>12 months</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p>	<p>GR KH PW</p> <p>MA KH PW</p> <p>MA KH PW</p> <p>MA KH PW</p>

	<b>Improve targeted environmental enforcement</b>	<p>Define Council priorities regarding environmental enforcement, and then review existing arrangements and alternative models available either through partnership with adjacent LA's, or Private Sector as a commercial arrangement.</p> <p>Identify effective responses to environmental crime activity to identify perpetrators and take appropriate enforcement action to reduce/prevent further offences, utilising available ASB tools and powers</p>	<p>Review of council enforcement arrangements, across priority areas.</p> <p>Review environmental enforcement with regard to increased commercial fly tipping in the urban fringe of the district since lockdown was eased</p> <p>Review enforcement arrangements and impact of Covid 19, eg on fly tipping, and new resources/new model of working may be required</p>	<p>April 2021</p> <p>Oct 2020</p> <p>April 2021</p>	<p>MA GR</p> <p>MA GR</p> <p>SH GR JW RB</p>
	<b>Understand the different needs of our local areas in order to keep them clean &amp; tidy</b>	<p>Review IT systems in place to help manage demand data and introduce mobile working more effectively to support maintenance operations.</p>	<p>To procure and implement new Environmental Services IT system</p>	<p>Sept 2021</p>	<p>GR KH MG</p>
	<b>Explore the options to reduce residual waste, increase recycling &amp; maximise the efficiency of waste collection services</b>	<p>Campaign to increase recycling quality and quantities with residents (domestic waste service) and businesses via our Commercial Waste service.</p> <p>Provide opportunities around better management of waste and introducing recycling projects including an introduction of recycling options within parks</p>	<p>Restart recycling quality project from Sept 2020 with direct mail to households in targeted areas</p> <p>Work with other Councils across Herefordshire and Worcestershire to develop a programme of work for the shared strategic waste officer and ensure that programme of work meets needs of the district</p>	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>April 2021</p>	<p>MA AM AW</p> <p>GR</p>

## Corporate Priorities

	Original Council Plan Commitments	Recovery & Restoration Issues and Actions	New or Modified Actions (what we will do...who with/partners)	By when	Owner
Corporate Priorities	Financial Sustainability	Produce & deliver sustainable financial plans	Development of General Fund 4 year plan to ensure financial impact of Covid assessed.	Feb 2021	CFor
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Clarify impact of Covid</li> <li>Assess prior year underspends</li> <li>Review Capital Programme</li> <li>Identify savings plans</li> <li>Review fees and charges</li> </ul>	Oct 2020 Oct 2020 Jan 2021 Nov 2020 Dec 2020	
			Recruit additional technical capacity	Sept 2020	
			Work with managers to better understand budget implications	Sept 2020	
		Restructure of financial services team	Dec 2020		
		Improved commerciality: maximising every opportunity to generate income, including review of fees & charges	Implementation of new system to better understand income and financial management	Nov 2020	CFor
	Review of fees and charges	Dec 2020			
	Workshops with budget holders	Sept 2020			
	Undertake effective contract management	Continue to work through corporate training and development programme. Work internally to maximise efficiency and economy of scale.	Mar 2021	JS	
		Develop comprehensive contracts register and effective contacts management through new finance system	Mar 2021	CFe	
		Targeted and bespoke departmental training and development	Mar 2021	CFe	

			Social responsibility policy with focus on local suppliers	Mar 2021	CFe
		Manage our assets to get the best outcomes for our residents	Review use of buildings, facilities and assets	Mar 2021	CMT
			Develop comprehensive assets management strategy in line with the Council Plan	Mar 2021	CFe
		Make financially viable strategic acquisitions & investments	Review the property structure to ensure there is the resource to enable strategic investment opportunities to be identified and pursued	Ongoing	CFe CFor
		Undertake a self-assessment against CIPFA's new Financial Management Code (CPC)	Undertake the self-assessment online	Feb 2021	CFor
		Encourage all levels of the organisation to articulate their role clearly and succinctly in delivering financial sustainability (CPC)	Workshops and training on the new ERP system	Sept 2020	CFor
		Review services currently delivered to determine if they offer VFM, and if not and not legally required then consider discontinuing.	Restructure in the financial services team	Dec 2020	CFor
			Work with members to understand priority services and assess those that are not as a priority against benchmarking to fully understand value for money and associated costs	Nov 2020	CFor
	<b>Sustainability</b>	Review alternative delivery models. The production of Service Business Plans will begin to outline what a Future Operating Model may look like.	Service Business Plans will be assessed in order to establish an overall council operating model	Nov 2020	SMT CMT
		Exploit digital technologies, enabling more automation of services through the implementation of the Digital and Customer Strategy to ensure both technology and process change. (CPC)	Develop a delivery action plan for the Digital Strategy and digital developments outlined in the Service Business Plans	Sept 2020	DP MH
			Encourage customer use of website for payment and alternative methods of payment	Ongoing	PS

		Invest in leadership development to reinforce culture change and lay foundations for the future. (CPC)	Start the ILM programme later in 2020  Ensure the Apprenticeship Levy is used to cover training costs  Ensure the first cohort focuses on 5 <sup>th</sup> tier level employees.	Oct 2020  Ongoing  Ongoing	DP BT  BT
		Be consistent in internal communications and explore opportunities for two-way internal communications (CPC)	Implement the learnings from remote working and Covid 19 staff surveys	Oct 2020	DP BT
		Strengthen financial forecasting to underpin the refreshed approach to financial management (CPC)	Workshops and training on the new ERP system  Restructure in the financial services team	Dec 2020	CFor
		Utilise external commercial expertise to ensure delivery of agreed priorities (CPC)	Ongoing support via remote working/virtual meeting	Ongoing	GR DP
		Review key risks on the Corporate Risk Register	Regular review of the added Covid risk – financial and service	Oct 2020	CFor
<b>Review Resources and Services</b>		Review services to understand how we can adapt to climate change	To identify opportunities through departments service plans and develop an action plan	Jan 2021	CMT JW
		Prioritise clearly and resource accordingly (CPC)	Review priorities post Covid	Feb 2021	SMT CMT
		Ensure that budget manager engagement and ownership is invested in to make self-service a success (CPC)	Workshops and training on the new ERP system  Restructure in the financial services team	Oct 20 – Feb 21	CFor
		Workforce planning – employee skills, gap analysis, workforce profile, succession planning etc	Create a workforce strategy in light of the 'new normal' after the Covid crisis. To consider the impact of remote/agile working on employee numbers/skills.  Develop improved management information for services through a renewed corporate dashboard.	Dec 2020  Apr 2021	DP BT  DP BG

		Support workforce recovery and transition to 'new normal'	Determine what 'new normal' means and understand what policy changes will be needed to support new ways of working.	Dec 2020	DP BT
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deliver a remote working policy</li> <li>• Arrange management training to develop skills for remote working and performance management.</li> <li>• Review working arrangements of whole organisation.</li> <li>• Explore flexible work arrangement.</li> </ul>	May 2021	DP BT
		Capture lessons learned/details from surveys in order to assess impact of remote working.	Analyse data and pass this out to service areas.	Sept 2020	DP BT
		Review appetite for agile working post-crisis	Services to use the data to determine what their service reviews may look like. To include future operating model, agile working etc	Feb 2021	SMT CMT
		Review HR&OD Strategy to ensure recognition and reward are encompassed within it.	Link the strategy to business planning cycle, development of 'new normal' and workforce planning	Dec 2020	DP BT
	<b>Review the Council Plan</b>	Review the delivery of priorities in light of the impact of the pandemic.	Review during 2021 for the next 3 years to link in with the MTFP	Apr 2021	CMT
	<b>Community Leadership</b>	Explore the development of "Deal" approaches (based on the concepts / principles of the Wigan Deal).	Consider the legacy of the Covid volunteers and how they and the VCS organisations can support the 'Deal' approach in terms of community assets.	Aug/Sept 2020	HoS 4th Tier Managers LSP Managers Policy Team
		Continue to work with the support networks (Support Bromsgrove) and partnerships to underpin future economic and community recovery (CPC)	Undertake / co-ordinate work across Council departments and with partner organisations to create a better understanding of our most vulnerable and in need residents.	Sept 2020	4th Tier Managers LSP Managers Policy Team DS



			Bring together data and information the Council and partners hold about vulnerable residents which can be utilised to target future resources, support, and opportunities to those most in need in our communities. This data to also be used for future planning and response in emergencies e.g. any future waves of the Covid-19 pandemic	Oct 2020	JW
--	--	--	--	----------	----

This page is intentionally left blank



Corporate Peer Challenge: Follow Up Visit  
**Bromsgrove District Council and  
Redditch Borough Council**

June 2020

Feedback Report

## 1. Introduction and purpose

Bromsgrove District and Redditch Borough Councils received an LGA Corporate Peer Challenge in January 2018. Feedback from the Peer Challenge concluded the two councils had delivered over £7.5m of savings since 2010/11 through joint working and are continuing to deliver around £1.5m per annum. In 2018 the team identified further scope for efficiencies and service improvements. The Peer Challenge process recommended that the councils should focus on ensuring improved corporate ownership of financial management with tighter control of budget savings and guarantee that expenditure is directed only towards agreed priority areas.

The peer team suggested more rigour should be introduced into developing and analysing business cases, and to their impact on priority setting. The Peer Challenge recommended the councils should be clearer about how they will track progress on key projects and savings and report against them. This should include identifying the consequences and mitigation if delivery does not progress as planned.

In 2018 the peer team invited the councils to re-assess what they are seeking to achieve from the shared services partnership moving forward. Whilst it had delivered savings, resilience and a greater opportunity to lever influence it had not in 2018 established a single workforce or culture.

The purpose of the follow up visit on 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> February 2020 was to help the councils take stock of progress made against the areas of improvement identified in 2018. This report provides a written summary of the key observations made by the peer team during their visit in February 2020. This report was finalised in June 2020 having been delayed whilst the councils responded to the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic.

### Peer review and challenge

Peer challenges are improvement-focussed and tailored to meet individual councils' needs. They are designed to complement and add value to a council's own performance and improvement focus. The peer team used their experience and knowledge of local government to reflect on the information presented to them by people they met, things they saw and material that they read. The process is not designed to provide a technical assessment or due diligence on specific proposals. Neither is it intended to provide prescriptive recommendations. The peer challenge process provides feedback, observations and insights from experienced practitioners that will help validate, reality check and further develop the councils' current plans, proposals and evolving thinking about the future.

### Scope and focus

The peer team were asked to consider the progress made since January 2018 and provide recommendations for continued improvement. In doing so peers considered the areas for

improvement identified by the original peer review and the key recommendations made at that time:

- Pause and reflect on the shared service journey to date – celebrate your success – use the 10 year anniversary as a moment to do this
- Prioritise the work on tightening financial processes so that they provide the most up to date profiling, model the best in the sector and support strong decision making
- Spend more time together – introduce more joint informal meetings at political level
- Create space to have conversations about the future with your valued partners
- Redefine the shared future journey and ambition
- Define a new shared culture from the bottom up – with input from officers and members
- Share this emerging culture with partners and collectively shape the future community leadership role for the councils and partners
- Establish a single workforce and reduce duplication and time spent navigating two structures and systems of governance
- Having established the above use this re-energised culture to enable officers and members to design services to meet and pre-empt customer needs within your financial envelope.

A further 22 recommendations were made within the five core themes of corporate peer challenge. These are set out in Annex A.

## Peer team

Peer challenges are delivered by experienced elected member and officer peers. The make-up of the peer team reflected the councils' requirements and the focus of the peer challenge. Peers were selected on the basis of their relevant experience and expertise and agreed with the councils. The peers who undertook the follow up visit were:

- Matt Prosser, Chief Executive, Dorset Council
- Cllr Paul James, Former Leader, Gloucester City Council
- Cllr John Kent, Former Leader, Thurrock Council
- Bindu Arjoon, Director, Exeter City Council
- Claire Taylor, Corporate Director Customers & Organisational Development, Cherwell DC and Oxfordshire CC
- Karen Iveson, Chief Finance Officer Selby DC and Assistant Director North Yorkshire CC
- Raj Khera, LGA membership engagement officer
- Clare Hudson, LGA Peer Challenge Manager

Seven of the team had been involved in the original peer challenge in 2018. The team spent two days onsite at Bromsgrove and Redditch councils on 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> February during which they spoke to more than 40 stakeholders including councillors, senior

managers, frontline staff, and partners. Peers prepared for their visit by reviewing a range of documents and information in order to ensure they were familiar with the councils, their current challenges and recent progress.

## 2. Key findings and observations

### 2.1 Progress since the Peer Challenge

In 2019 Redditch BC changed political control and became Conservative controlled. This change in political balance and leadership means both councils are Conservative controlled and provides an opportunity to make progress on some fundamental issues facing the councils. The councils continue to benefit from a dedicated workforce and there has been significant effort in the senior officer core put into identifying what culture change might best support the workforce going forward. There is now a stronger sense of a single workforce serving two councils at the senior officer level. The councils now need to work to embed culture change from the bottom up to ensure all parts of the councils are engaged in moving towards a more dynamic and financially accountable culture.

This emerging culture change has been facilitated through the harmonisation of terms and conditions for the two councils. Several key steps have also been taken to address the recommendations made by the peer team, and the section 24 notice that was served to Redditch BC in 2019. A new finance system is in the process of being introduced which will be fundamental to delivering the financial control and accountability needed. The scheme of delegation in Redditch BC has been revised and this is having a positive impact in empowering officers to be more innovative.

Partners continue to value working with the councils, both individually, and collectively and the councils' leadership have continued determined effort to underpin this. There remains significant scope for collaboration with partners to improve outcomes for the communities in Redditch and Bromsgrove and the councils need to carefully consider how to harness this without necessarily always leading it.

### 2.2 Shared services – direction of travel

There were mixed views expressed to the team, particularly by members, on whether shared services has reached its maturity within these two organisations. Senior leaders need to be clear about their understanding of this maturity and whether the full benefits have been realised. Leaders should explore whether or not shared services will be actively pursued with others – and be clear with staff where future efforts will be placed. The councils should also establish regular benchmarking to understand if services are providing value for money and if further efficiencies could be realised within the current shared services framework.

Given progress made and the maturity of the shared services partnership the councils should now be considering how they can translate the benefits that operating a long running shared service has bought to drive further collaboration.

## 2.3 Understanding of local place and priority setting

The leaders of both councils are well respected for their energetic passion for place. Through collaborative working this can be harnessed to help shape the delivery of future growth, regeneration and economic prosperity respectively. The regeneration plans in Redditch are ambitious and have the potential to be transformative. Redditch BC must now consider how it will bring together exciting individual projects and schemes into single vision that can galvanise the resources and capability of partners.

Bromsgrove DC is seeking to deliver on its vision for an economically vibrant and sustainable district within the constraints of its green belt. The Government's Review of Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) may well result in the Council no longer being able to maintain membership of two LEPs. This will mean a major strategic decision about where Bromsgrove DC wishes to align itself economically.

There is evidence of speculation about future local government arrangements for Worcestershire. Without wishing to comment on the merits or otherwise of change, the peer team would encourage the councils not to be distracted by this and to concentrate on collaboration and partnership working for the benefit of residents and businesses. The need for Worcestershire County Council to complete a strategic transport assessment could be considered to be a practical example of this.

Having focused effort on instigating culture change the councils must now focus on strengthening approaches to prioritisation and associated delivery plans. The councils are continuing to commit to too numerous priorities and need to be clearer about when something is no longer a priority and what that means for the organisations, and how this is reflected in corporate plans. Plans to deliver agreed priorities are not as embedded as they need to be resulting in lower levels of rigour on project delivery than are needed in the current financial climate.

The councils are well versed in transformation principles but these would benefit from a more clearly articulated and agreed transformation programme and governance being updated and fully aligned to refreshed – and fewer – priorities. These refined priorities and delivery plans should then be resourced accordingly. The councils should bear in mind that agreeing a priority does not mean the councils always have to be the deliverer of services. There is a history of providing services to the community that are not the traditional role of district councils. This feels more prominent in Redditch, such as the Connecting Families project. Whilst these projects may have received external funding the council should also consider the wider resources implications of committing to non-statutory service delivery.

## 2.4 Political and managerial leadership

The Chief Executive continues to lead from the front and remains a visible presence for partners and staff. Since the original peer challenge in 2018 there has been constructive action to change the behaviour and conduct of political debate in Bromsgrove Council meetings. This is positive and the Council should build upon these improvements to overcome the historic legacy of negative political debate in public.

Group leaders are now invited to meet together informally, and this more regular engagement is welcome amongst councillors and officers alike. There has been a management restructure which is still embedding and senior officers must work to ensure that managerial approaches are consistent and managers are well supported to deliver priorities. Having invested in clarifying the culture the councils want staff to operate in consideration should now be given to what accountability and positive challenge means for everybody in the organisation as part of the culture change programme – and how it influences decision and behaviours.

## 2.5 Financial planning and viability

A clearer understanding of what financial accountability means for individuals is progressing at the corporate management team level and this now needs testing with wider staff and members. A self-assessment against CIPFA's new Financial Management Code will provide a focus for further improvement.

The finance system that has been committed to will provide a catalyst for improved financial management and accountability. It is critical that this is delivered to deadline to and becomes quickly embedded in a strengthened culture of financial accountability. Given the financial challenges it is important that robust forecasting is embedded with budget managers in order to build greater confidence in financial management.

The peer team heard that there has been a solid response to the s24 notice issued to Redditch and substantial work has been done on identifying savings and clarifying the council's approach to financial sustainability. Future savings plans need rigorous testing and there is a particular need for more work to be done on the financial sustainability of Redditch's Housing Revenue Account.

The revised budget reports are more consistent between the two councils and provide detailed analysis. The overarching MTFs has the opportunity to set the wider context for the budget reports but needs to be more widely articulated across the organisations. Staff working to deliver services against planned budgets are not always clear when they are seeking to make changes what are efficiencies and what are savings and cuts to services.



The focus on continual service review and redesign for efficiencies and improved outcomes could be clearer. The councils have developed a substantive approach to commercialisation including using property investment to generate income as well as selling services and expertise. However, the councils' approach to borrowing to finance commercial property investment also needs careful consideration in light of the latest MHCLG and CIPFA code and guidance.

The concept of commercialism as 'part of the day job' seems embedded for those colleagues that have advanced it. There is however, a need for a clear risk assessment to ensure that both savings delivery plans and income generation plans are built on the foundations of tested and robust delivery plans and that services provided for other parties, such as Lifeline for Cannock, are genuinely contributing to financial sustainability.

## 2.6 Capacity to deliver

The councils are operating a high number of live programmes and projects. In our brief time there the peer team noted at least seven major change programmes that officers were working on. The councils have also established property investment funds but progress on this has not been as expected, with limited viable commercial opportunities coming forward. There is significant breadth in what the councils are seeking to achieve but they do not always achieve the depth of their planned project/intervention. This is having a negative impact on organisational resilience with projects not always seeming to have been closed down before a new one is started. It is also not clear how the organisation learns from the projects it has delivered and how this can influence project design and service delivery as well as organisational culture.

The councils have set out a comprehensive approach to programme management and should ensure this is oriented towards generating pace and momentum in delivery of savings including identifying opportunities for improving productivity and reducing costs as well as delivering savings and service redesign.

The councils have embraced the need for change and have developed processes for setting up new programmes and projects. As this matures and the councils clarify their future operating models there will need to be a focus on how to allocate resources towards redesigned services ensuring that costs are regularly benchmarked and efficiencies sought out. The workforce is generally very long-serving and opportunities should be sought out for officers at every level to 'get out' and find out about practice elsewhere in order to bring in new ideas and promote an open and innovative culture.

## 3. Recommendations 2020

The councils have made solid progress since 2018, particularly in solidifying the concept of a single workforce and responding appropriately to the section 24 notice in Redditch. The peer team recommend the councils now focus on:

1. Prioritise clearly and resource accordingly
2. Invest in leadership development to reinforce culture change and lay foundations for the future
3. Consider how and when you can be the convenor/enabler of services and change within your communities. The Councils through the Bromsgrove Partnership and Redditch Partnership (at the time of the visit) were exploring possible “Deal” approaches (based on the concepts / principles of the Wigan Deal). During the pandemic response two support networks have been established (Support Redditch and Support Bromsgrove) – the Councils could seek to work with these networks and the partnerships to underpin future economic and community recovery.
4. Be consistent in internal communications and explore opportunities for two-way internal communications
5. Develop a clear action plan to implement your digital and customer strategy, recognising that a focus on digital and customer experience requires both technology and process change. Make this a clear element of your plans to improve effectiveness and efficiency.
6. Undertake a self-assessment against CIPFA’s new Financial Management Code
7. Ensure that budget manager engagement and ownership is invested in to make self-service a success
8. Strengthen financial forecasting to underpin the refreshed approach to financial management
9. Encourage all levels of the organisation to clearly and succinctly articulate their role in delivering financial sustainability
10. Utilise external commercial expertise to ensure delivery of agreed priorities

## 4. Next steps

We appreciate the councils will want to reflect on these findings and suggestions with the senior managerial and political leadership in order to determine how the organisation wishes to take things forward.

As part of the peer review/challenge process, there is an offer of further activity to support this. The Local Government Association (LGA) is well placed to provide additional support, advice and guidance on a number of the areas for development and improvement and we would be happy to discuss this. Helen Murray is the main contact between your authority and the LGA. Her contact details are: Tel. 07884 312235 and Email [helen.murray@local.gov.uk](mailto:helen.murray@local.gov.uk).

In the meantime, we are keen to continue the relationship we have formed with the councils throughout the peer challenge. We will endeavour to provide additional information and signposting about the issues we have raised in this report to help inform ongoing consideration.

Clare Hudson

On behalf of the peer team:

- Matt Prosser, Chief Executive, Dorset Council
- Cllr Paul James, Former Leader, Gloucester City Council
- Cllr John Kent, Former Leader, Thurrock Council
- Bindu Arjoon, Director, Exeter City Council
- Claire Taylor, Corporate Director Customers & Organisational Development, Cherwell DC and Oxfordshire CC
- Karen Iveson, Chief Finance Officer Selby DC and Assistant Director North Yorkshire CC
- Raj Khera, LGA membership engagement officer
- Clare Hudson, LGA Peer Challenge Manager

## Annex A

### Further Recommendations from original Peer Challenge report - 2018

1. Be clear about how you identify when something is no longer a corporate priority – and what it means
2. When change is introduced guarantee that it is introduced with greater pace and rigour – with clear lines of accountability at the officer and political level
3. Invest more time in considering what role all levels of the organisation contribute towards corporate aims – transformation is everyone's role. Ensure that transformation is adequately resourced with clear programme and project governance, and appropriate skills.
4. Management approaches need more consistency to support the development of a single corporate culture
5. Establish greater consistency in the foundations of shared services – ICT, HR, Finance should all be enablers of change
6. Re-examine your existing commitments and have an honest conversation about whether they are sustainable, relevant or appropriate
7. Evaluate the opportunities for maximising your influence – and focus your energy and leadership on where you can be most effective
8. Take action at Bromsgrove District Council to raise the conduct of political debate so that it is constructive and does not undermine the council's reputation, as well as the local government sector
9. Review processes for supporting members at council meetings, and where necessary, implement change to ensure members are well supported
10. Ensure that boundaries between officers and members are publicly clarified and that their implementation is regularly reviewed
11. Review Council Procedures to ensure that they can support constructive debate
12. Ensure that report proofing procedures are 'watertight' and errors are not published
13. Establish clearer lines of accountability for the leadership and delivery of major programmes and projects – that is appropriately dispersed throughout the organisation to mitigate potential risk in investing too much in one role.

14. Financial accountability needs greater ownership across the organisation
15. Budget planning needs to be more focused on future financial sustainability and not simply meeting service needs and short term demands
16. Be clearer about how you track progress and manage risk – on delivering savings and key projects
17. Establish a transparent, regularised and proportionate system of reviewing and amending recharges between the two councils – rather than leaving it to specific service areas
18. Expedite the business case and implementation of a new finance system
19. Consider how to meet customer need and expectation within your financial options using the systems thinking approach. This will help you identify what matters to the customer and design efficient processes to meet this need, removing service boundaries where required.
20. Consider how to re-align your customer strategy to most effectively meet customer need within your identified priorities.
21. Consider the impact that digital transformation of services can have, releasing capacity whilst improving the customer experience – develop and implement a single digital strategy.
22. Develop a clear plan to assess what high volume low complexity transactions can be directed towards more cost effective channels. There is no tension between this and a systems thinking approach - many customers expect and are happy to access council services by means other than face- to-face- as indeed they do for services from other public and private organisations.

This page is intentionally left blank

**CABINET**

14th October 2020

**MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN - FINANCIAL FRAMEWORK 2021/22 – 2024/25**

<b>Relevant Portfolio Holder</b>	Councillor Geoff Denaro , Portfolio Holder for Finance and Enabling Services
<b>Relevant Head of Service</b>	Jayne Pickering, Executive Director Finance and Corporate Resources
<b>Non-Key Decision</b>	

**1. SUMMARY OF PROPOSALS**

1.1 This report considers some preliminary matters relating to the 2021/22 budget process and the Medium Term Financial Plan to 2024/25. A proposed timetable for the budget process is set out, including proposals for scrutiny of the draft budget, and parameters to be used for the 2021/22 budget. Uncertainties still remain around the expected Spending Review, Fair Funding Review and business rates reforms which mean that the 2021/22 budget will be a one-year budget in line with an expected one-year finance settlement.

**2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

2.2 **That Cabinet notes the parameters to be used to prepare the 2021/22 budget and the framework for the Medium Term Financial Plan to 2024/25.**

**3. KEY ISSUES**

**Financial Implications**

**Financial Framework**

3.1 The Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) is the strategy which sets out the Council’s commitment to provide services that meet the needs of people locally and that represent good value for money within the overall resources available to it. The MTFS is what links our Council Plan with forecasted resources and budgets and shows how our Council’s finances will be structured and managed to ensure that this fits with, and supports, the priorities of our Council and its community. The Medium Term Financial Plan presents the detailed financial position over a 4 year period and is developed in line with the strategy objectives

3.2 The overall MTFS was approved in 2019 and in light of the financial pressures the Council faces the strategy aims to provide a framework in

### CABINET

14th October 2020

which the Council can become financially sustainable whilst delivering the priorities to our communities. The key objectives are:

- To ensure resources are directed to the council's strategic purposes
- To set financially sustainable budgets over the 4 year period
- To maintain balances at £2m to ensure funds available for future projects and to mitigate opportunities
- To maximise income opportunities whilst supporting the vulnerable
- Identify and disinvest in non priority areas
- To ensure all savings are achievable and developed with robust data
- To reduce overheads & direct costs over the 4 year period
- To maximise use of assets and disinvest surplus or non performing assets
- To further develop the commercial culture within the Council
- To consider and adapt to the uncertain future financial climate
- To work with the public, members and staff to engage and inform partners on the impact of the financial pressures of the Council

3.3 Prior to the final budget approval in February 2021 the financial plan will be developed and presented to members to include, over the next 6 months;

- Review of Prior year underspends and additional income generated
- Review of vacant posts
- Review and approval of fees and charges
- Identification of savings plans
- Consideration of additional pressures to the budgets
- Detailed consideration of the Capital Programme
- Review of Reserves
- Consideration of Government Funding settlement and impact on the financial position
- Service Plans developed to ensure the funding follows the key priorities of the Council and resources are aligned to service delivery

3.4 The Budget Scrutiny working group as established by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee will continue to meet on a regular basis to review costs, fees and charges and the capital programme and it is anticipated they will make a number of recommendations to Cabinet.

### **Current Issues**

3.5 The Covid-19 pandemic has had a significant negative effect on Council income in the first half of 2020. Budget monitoring to the end of June 2020 indicates a year to date overspend of £275k against the 2020/21 revenue budget, most of which relates to under-achievement of car parking and planning application fee income. Additional payments to provide funding to support the Councils Leisure centre have resulted in further unanticipated financial pressures being met by the Council.



### CABINET

14th October 2020

---

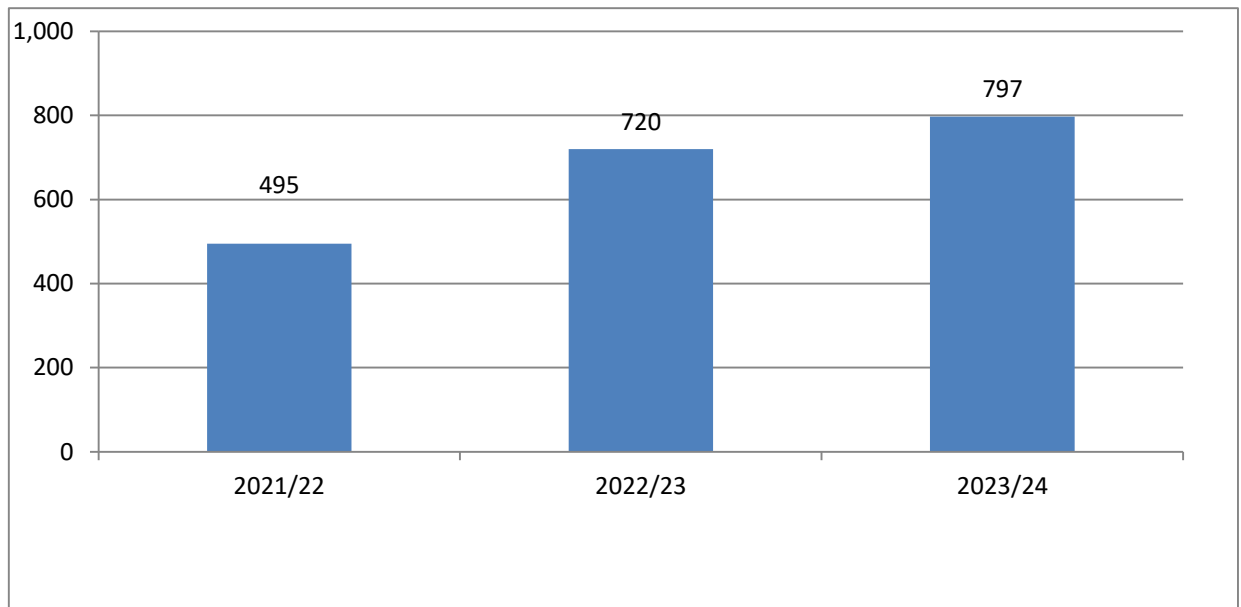
- 3.6 Due to Covid-19 there is an impact on Business rates and Council Tax income where an increase in Local Council Tax Support is already becoming apparent and is likely to increase in the autumn when the Government furlough scheme ends.
- As part of the Covid-19 response the Government has allowed any council tax deficits to be spread over 3 years. A review has been made and currently the Council has made a decision to not spread the deficit encountered year to date. Although there has been an increase in support given through the Council Tax support scheme, there has been some growth in the area and a reasonable level of bad debt provision was made. A regular review of the Council Tax outturn position will be done in order to keep members updated on whether there have been significant increases to the deficit position.
- Due to the high level of reliefs available to businesses in 2020/21 we expect the main impact on business rates from Covid-19 will also be felt in the following year in 2021/22 when claims for empty property relief are likely to increase.
- 3.7 The Council received £1.155m in Covid-19 support grant from the Government in 2020/21. In addition, the Council will receive Government funding for sales, fees and charges losses but the amount is yet to be determined. Furthermore it is hoped that funding will be received in relation to the deficits faced by leisure providers, however, it is highly likely that Government support will not cover all the losses the Council has or will sustain in the future. Any additional shortfall will be met from general balances.
- 3.8 The 2020/21 local government pay award has been agreed at 2.75%. We are estimating that the pay award in future years will be 2% as shown at Appendix C. The additional cost of the 2020/21 pay award of around £86k will need to be included in revised budgets and will increase the deficit for the year, other things being equal.
- 3.9 As the current year 2020/21 is a one-year finance settlement and next year is likely to also be a one-year settlement we do not know at this stage what we can expect regarding our business rates baseline / guaranteed income from business rates and rules for surplus retention in future years. From 2020/21 we had previously assumed a significant reduction in our business rates income, supposing that the results of the Spending Review, Fair Funding Review and the move to increased local retention of business rates would impact 2021/22 onwards. With a rolled-forward one-year finance settlement this is now no longer likely to be the case so we will be reviewing the impact of this change on the budget moving forward.
- 3.10 Uncertainties also remain regarding the future of New Homes Bonus. The amount of New Homes Bonus we will receive from 2021/22 will depend on the outcome of the Government consultation on the future of the housing incentive. According to the Government, "this will include moving to a new, more targeted approach that rewards local authorities where they are

### CABINET

14th October 2020

ambitious in delivering the homes we need and is aligned with other measures around planning performance”. We have assumed New Homes Bonus will be phased out over the period to 2022/2023

3.11 Prior to any of the proposed parameters as included at 3.13, the Medium Term Financial position for the Council presents the following gap to 2023/24.



3.12 As can be seen from the above table the Council has to deliver £3m over the next 3 years with a £495k to be found for 2020/21.

### 3.13 Budget Parameters

3.14 Work is already underway regarding detailed budget preparation for the budgets for next year. The following are proposed:

- A **2%** pay award effective on 1 April 2021. This will be determined as part of the national local government pay settlement. A pay award of 2.75% will be applied for 2020/21 only;

### CABINET

14th October 2020

---

- Continue with a staff vacancy allowance of £172k in 2021/22. This equates to around **2%** of total staff costs;
  - In addition to this, we will continue to seek further efficiency gains and remove any excess budgets;
  - Other unavoidable pressures, revenue bids and savings will be subject to separate considerations and approval by Cabinet.
  - Council Tax increases at 2% per annum
- 3.15 Before the pandemic the Council was in a good financial position with reasonable general fund balances. Since the pandemic the Council has largely been able to mitigate losses through Government funding however the medium and long term effect on council tax and business rates is still unknown and it would be prudent to set aside any windfall revenue into reserves to cover any future shortfalls.

#### **4 Legal Implications**

- 4.1 As part of the budget and the Council Tax approval process, the Council is required by the Local Government Finance Act 1992 to make specific calculations and decisions in approving a balanced budget for the following financial year and setting the Council Tax Level. These will be included in the report to Cabinet and Council in February.

#### **5 Service / Operational Implications**

- 5.1 The Financial Strategy will enable services to be maintained and, where achievable, improvements to the community.

#### **6 Customer / Equalities and Diversity Implications**

- 6.1 The link with the finances supporting the Council Plan will enable the funding to be directed to the Councils purposes to support the community.

#### **7 RISK MANAGEMENT**

- 7.1 To mitigate the risks associated with the financial pressures facing the Authority regular monitoring reports are presented to both officers and Members to enable proactive action being undertaken to address any areas of concern. Risks include:

### **CABINET**

14th October 2020

---

- Reductions in government funding leading to a reduction in the level of services delivered to the public
- Reductions in business rates income as a result of appeals or reduction in the rateable value leading to a lower level of income for the Council.
- Identification of sufficient and ongoing revenue savings to deliver a balanced budget.
- Allocation of sufficient resources to meet the needs of service delivery and the Councils priorities.
- Maintain adequate revenue and capital balances as identified in the MTFP to ensure financial stability.

The regular financial monitoring by Officers and Cabinet will provide a framework to mitigate the above risks.

### **AUTHOR OF REPORT**

Name: Jayne Pickering – Exec Director Finance and Resources  
e-mail: [j.pickering@bromsgroveandredditch.gov.uk](mailto:j.pickering@bromsgroveandredditch.gov.uk)  
Tel: 01527-881400