

**BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**MEETING OF THE COUNCIL**

**16TH SEPTEMBER 2020, AT 6.00 P.M.**

PRESENT: Councillors R. J. Laight (Chairman), A. J. B. Beaumont (Vice-Chairman), S. R. Colella, R. J. Deeming, G. N. Denaro, S. P. Douglas, A. B. L. English, M. Glass, S. G. Hession, C.A. Hotham, S. A. Hughes, R. J. Hunter, R. E. Jenkins, H. J. Jones, A. D. Kent, J. E. King, A. D. Kriss, L. C. R. Mallett, K.J. May, M. Middleton, P. M. McDonald, H. D. N. Rone-Clarke, M. A. Sherrey, C. J. Spencer, P.L. Thomas, M. Thompson, J. Till, K. J. Van Der Plank, S. A. Webb and P. J. Whittaker

**WELCOME**

As a number of Members were experiencing connectivity issues, the meeting commenced at 6.10 pm and initially the Vice Chairman welcomed Members to the virtual full Council meeting and reminded them of the protocol to be followed during the meeting. This covered both the muting of microphones, the use of the instant messaging facility and the use of roll calls for the approval of items. Members were reminded that the detail of these would not be included within the minutes and if Members wished for a named vote, then this should be requested in the usual manner.

Members were also reminded that the meeting was being live streamed to the Council's You Tube channel to allow the public to view it.

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**APOLOGIES**

An apology for absence was received from Councillor S. Baxter and it was noted that Councillor S. Hession would need to leave the meeting at 8.00 pm.

15\2020

**DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor A. Kriss declared a disclosable pecuniary interest in respect of Minute No. 20/2020, the recommendations in respect of Amenity Standards Report and left the meeting during this item and took no part in the debate.

Councillors C. Hotham, M. Middleton, M. Sherrey and P. Whittaker queried whether, as Trustees of the Artrix Holding Trust they should declare an interest under Minute No. 22/2020.

The Monitoring Officers confirmed that under normal circumstances these would be disclosable pecuniary interest, but as the questions raised by other Members would not be debated, but simply responded to by the Leader, this would not be necessary but should be noted for transparency in the minutes of the meeting.

16\2020

**MINUTES**

(The Chairman, having joined the meeting via the telephone link, took over from the Vice Chairman for the remainder of the meeting.)

Members considered the Minutes of the full Council meeting held on 5<sup>th</sup> August 2020.

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the full Council meeting held on 5<sup>th</sup> August 2020 be approved.

17\2020

**TO RECEIVE ANY ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM THE CHAIRMAN AND/OR HEAD OF PAID SERVICE**

There were no announcements from the Chairman or Head of Paid Service.

18\2020

**TO RECEIVE ANY ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM THE LEADER**

(Due to connectivity issues, the meeting was paused on two occasions to give Members the opportunity to re-join the meeting and for the live stream to re-commence.)

The Leader began her announcements by updating Members on the Covid 19 situation in Bromsgrove. It was confirmed that the current numbers of Covid-19 cases in Bromsgrove District, stood at 30 cases per 100,000. The rate per 100,000 in Bromsgrove was similar to the England average as cases had risen across the Country. On 8th September Worcestershire County Council's Public Health Team took the precautionary decision to close visits to care homes and currently only essential visits were allowed. This decision was taken in order to protect the elderly and vulnerable residents something that was of paramount importance to everyone. The Leader asked everyone to continue to adhere to the social distancing rules, wash their hands regularly and wear face coverings where necessary, which was simple to do and saved lives.

The Leader was proud to report to Council, that Maz Salmou a volunteer from the Bromsgrove Community Support Group, a Group set up to help the elderly and vulnerable during the Coronavirus Crisis, had been awarded a "Make a Difference Superstar award" from BBC Hereford and Worcester. Maz had moved to Bromsgrove as a refugee in September 2018 and said he wanted to give something back to the Bromsgrove Community, which had made him so welcome since he had settled here. He was one of two overall winners of the award and would now have his

name on the side of a GWR train which he would be given free travel on. The Leader gave sincere thanks to Maz and to everyone in Bromsgrove District who had worked to ensure the safety of its residents during this pandemic, they were all very much appreciated for the work that they had done and continued to do.

The Leader went on to announce that Councillor G. Denaro had made the decision that due to family commitments he wished to stand down as the Deputy Leader of the Council. The Leader placed on record her sincere thanks for all that Councillor Denaro had done in his role as the Deputy Leader which was much appreciated. It was confirmed that Councillor Denaro would continue in his role as the Cabinet Member for Finance and Enabling.

Councillor A. Kent was to become the new Deputy Leader, and he would retain the Planning and Regulatory Services Portfolio in addition to his new role.

Finally, the Leader took the opportunity to advise Members that, as they were probably aware, Ms. Jayne Pickering, the Director of Finance and Resources, was leaving Bromsgrove District Council at the beginning of October to take up a new role as the Deputy Chief Executive at a neighbouring authority. This was sadly Jayne's last Full Council meeting for this Authority. Ms. Pickering had been at Bromsgrove District Council for 17 years and the Leader thanked her most sincerely for her service, commitment, energy and drive over this time. Jayne would be greatly missed, and everyone wished her success and happiness in her new role.

Councillor R. Hunter took the opportunity to also pass on his and his Group's thanks and best wishes to Ms. Pickering. He also thanked the Leader for her update in respect of Covid-19 and questioned whether she had any information in respect of the reported difficulties some residents had faced in getting tested for it. The Leader provided a brief update in respect of interim plans for a walk in testing centre in Bromsgrove and the role of the proposed Marshalls (which was a work in progress) and the impact this would have on Bromsgrove. She was receiving regular updates on the position and would ensure that all necessary measures were put in place as soon as practicably possible to ensure the general safety of residents.

Councillor P. McDonald also took the opportunity to wish Ms. Pickering all the best in the future. He also asked the Leader whether she was able to provide any update in respect of the asylum seekers who were currently residing in a hotel within the District. The Leader responded that following the incident (and the video posted on social media) the security had been increased and a number of preventative actions taken to ensure the safety of the occupants. She also confirmed that it was now a Police matter. A number of other Members also raised concerns about the incident and were reassured that the appropriate action had been taken quickly.

Councillor L. Mallett also commented that he had received a number of calls from concerned and frustrated residents who had been unable to access Covid-19 testing at either Redditch or Bromsgrove. As both were on the edge of Birmingham, which had been put in a local lockdown, he shared residents' frustrations and concerns around this and the track and trace system, and asked the Leader to write to the Secretary of State raising these concerns. The Leader responded that she shared those concerns and was happy to raise the matter, although the whole situation was a "moving feast" and it was hoped the track and trace system would be up and running more effectively soon.

As there had been a number of technical issues Councillor S. Hughes raised a point of order as to whether the Chairman was able to monitor the meeting appropriately as Members had been made aware that he had had to phone-in to the meeting. The Chairman confirmed that he was being fully supported by officers who were alerting him to those Members who wished to speak and assured her that nobody would be missed.

Councillor C. Hotham took the opportunity to say a fond farewell to Ms. Pickering and gave personal thanks for all her support over recent years and her part in setting up the Finance and Budget Working Group, which had been so successful and continued to play an integral part in the budget setting process.

19\2020

**TO RECEIVE COMMENTS, QUESTIONS OR PETITIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC**

There were no comments, questions or petitions from members of the public on this occasion.

20\2020

**RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE CABINET**

**Cabinet Recommendations – 6th August 2020**

**Partnership Waste Strategy Officer**

Councillor M. Sherrey, Portfolio Holder for Environmental Services presented the report and explained the reasoning behind the need for this post. She provided background information and explained that the Government had published "Resource and Waste Strategy" in December 2018, as the first major policy document for Waste since 2007. This focused on keeping resources in use as long as possible to extract maximum value and was aimed at changing how waste was perceived and managed from production through to final disposal. The main elements affecting Local Authorities (LAs) were proposed changes to services regarding waste collection and disposal/processing:

- Compulsory Weekly Food Waste Collection by 2023

- Removal of discretionary status for garden waste collection, and removal of ability to charge residents for providing the service.
- Increased pressure on LA's to implement kerbside recycling collections.

These were being enacted in the Environment Bill currently being processed through Parliament, and currently being considered by a Public Bill Committee. The Committee was now scheduled to report by Tuesday 29th September 2020, and further Government consultation regarding elements affecting LA's were expected in September/October. These would finalise the minimum expectation for a dedicated Food Waste collection and support final decisions on the status of garden waste collections and discretionary fees for the service.

The impact of those elements on Authorities signed up to the Herefordshire and Worcestershire Joint Municipal Waste Management Strategy included: up to 80 additional vehicles and associated staff to collect food waste, approximately £8million per annum across the partnership; Approximately £801k yearly cost to this Council (this would have a significant impact on disposal arrangements and logistics for disposal, with a possible commercial opportunity through investment in Anaerobic Digestion facility with Private sector to generate income and potential loss of approx. £900k income on the existing Garden Waste service, with increased annual costs of approximately £580k in vehicles and staff to support larger take-up across the District, plus a potential cost of up to £300k to buy and deliver wheeled bins.)

In addition to these changes, the Government were also looking at Deposit return schemes and Extended Producer Responsibility, to recoup costs of processing packaging from manufacturers. These could all have an impact on the more valuable recycling materials, and potentially remove or reduce those elements that support profitability of private sector recycling facilities, and impact on viability of wider recycling arrangements currently in place.

Councillor Sherrey confirmed that Government had committed to supporting the costs of these changes, with the expectation that much of the additional funding would come from the private sector to support NET costs for LA's.

The Herefordshire & Worcestershire Waste Partnership Board had been collaborating on joint responses to consultations carried out already, but the proposed Strategy Officer would:

- Actively engage with National Policy Development to understand and influence it to reflect on local needs and concerns – specifically focusing on the approach to food and garden waste, and the funding implications for each member LA.
- Prepare for the implementation of this legislation and support service planning for member authorities to

accommodate the new requirements and support consistency and best value for Herefordshire and Worcestershire authorities.

- Support implementing a Food Waste Collection as an entirely new service for Collection Authorities, and support the most cost effective disposal arrangements to suit operations, and potential opportunities to invest in new infrastructure as a commercial venture to generate future income from private sector or other authorities outside of Herefordshire and Worcestershire.

The recommendations were proposed by Councillor Sherrey and seconded by Councillor K. May.

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

- The need for such an officer and whether one officer covering all of Worcestershire was actually sufficient for such a role and whether the job grade would attract a suitable person. It was confirmed that whilst this was a fixed term contract, there may be an opportunity to review the position in due course.
- The importance of the role and the need for recycling to be promoted as there had been a significant drop during recent months, so action needed to be taken to move things forward. It was confirmed that there were a number of initiatives which the Council would progress, but there were also serious cost implications from the proposed Resource and Waste Strategy which needed to be considered. It was therefore important that such a role be put in place to ensure all local authorities were prepared.
- The conditions of the vehicles and the need and cost of replacements and what support the Government would provide in reality, as from the information provided it appeared that this would cost the Council in excess of £2m overall. Councillor Sherrey confirmed that it would be the role of the new Officer to put forward this (and the other) Councils' case in the coming months.
- It was reiterated that the report was, at this stage, only asking for £8k per year for 3 years and any of the costs referred to following the impact of the new Legislation would be addressed separately.
- It was anticipated that by creating the joint role through the Joint Board that this would give more "weight" to the lobbying of Central Government.
- Details of the work that the Partnership undertook were highlighted within the report and how the proposed post would be managed.
- The impact of the new legislation – particularly the financial impact and how it was difficult to see that Central Government would cover much of that cost.

- The amount of uncertainty around the implementation of the legislation and its impact, in light of the reference in the report to the Government's response to the consultation – particular reference was made by Members to the need to put in place a separate weekly food waste collection. It was further questioned as to why this was only now coming before Council when the consultation response had been published in July 2019.
- The role of the Strategic Waste Management Board and this Council's representative on it.
- The importance of having a specialist resource, such as this post, to be able to respond to the legislative changes, and the type of applicant it might attract, and whether this would be appropriate for the kind of work the role would involve. It was further questioned as to whether one person for such a wider area was sufficient.
- In respect of food waste, it was confirmed that this was being looked at collectively as part of future joint working. There may be an opportunity for investment, which would create an income in the future through the disposal arrangements.

At this point in the debate Councillor P. McDonald proposed that the item be deferred as he believed that due to the cost implications further work needed to be carried out and clarification sought on a number of areas before Members could make an informed decision, this was seconded by Councillor L. Mallett.

A point of clarification was raised, and the Monitoring Officer confirmed that there should now be the opportunity for the alternative recommendation put forward to be debated. During this debate, the following areas were discussed in some detail:

- Councillor McDonald did not believe that, as the report made reference to the Council needing to spend over £1m to implement the legislation, it was appropriate due to the current uncertainty around this and other Councils' financial position as a result of Covid-19. He had therefore suggested the deferral to allow Officers time to get clarification on the Government's proposal of how this would be funded.
- A number of Members were in support of Councillor McDonald's proposal and supported the reasoning behind it.
- Members questioned what contact Councillor Sherrey had had with central Government and what efforts she had made to lobby them on behalf of the Council.
- The Leader reiterated that the report was in fact merely asking this Council to release £8k per year for three years to cover this Council's cost of the proposed post and it would then be the role of the post holder to take this matter forward and help secure the best deal possible for the Council and ensure value for money was achieved. The actual areas covered within the changes to legislation did not form part of the recommendations within the

report before Members but were there as an indication as to what the post would involve.

- It was important that Members supported the role which would also contribute to the Council's Climate Change agenda, and again the request was for £8k per year in order to do this.
- Members spoke in support of the need for the role and also understood the "bigger picture" as detailed in the report, which it was felt would be addressed as much as possible through the appointment of this officer.
- It was felt that at least at this early stage, this needed to be a joint venture as this would add strength to the case put forward to Central Government in due course.

On being put to the vote the alternative recommendation was lost.

As there was no further debate the substantive recommendations were voted on and it was

**RESOLVED that**

- (1) the establishment of a Joint Waste Strategy Officer to work on behalf of the partnership of all 8 Local Authorities in Herefordshire and Worcestershire be agreed;**
- (2) the allocate £8,000 per annum from existing funds for a fixed term of three years be agreed; and**
- (3) the consideration of requests for additional funding to support further work which has been identified and proposed via the partnership Senior Waste Officer Group be agreed.**

**Finance Outturn 2019/20 and Reserves**

Councillor G. Denaro, the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Enabling presented the report and highlighted that the figures to the end of March only included one week of lockdown figures so that impact would be more evident in the figures due at the end of September for the half year. It was noted that, from the figures on page 65 of the agenda pack, the Council ended the year with an underspend of £231,000 made up of a mix of savings and vacancies with all areas maintaining budgets within the 10% guidelines. Councillor Denaro doubted that this would be able to be maintained over the current year. 'Keep my place safe and looking good' had an overspend of £136k as a result of additional disposal costs in trade and domestic services.

Considerable savings had been made in Enabling Services, amounting to £314k. With this surplus and the addition of £267k of saving on Capital financing, the refund of Business rates on Burcot of £189k and £267K from the Business Rates Pool, the Council had been able to make a substantial transfer to its economic development reserve of £1m plus. The Financial Services team would be undertaking a full review of



the savings and vacancies that had been achieved and the causes of this.

Councillor Denaro commented that It is perhaps fortunate to have achieved these savings at this time as it helped to secure the Council's overall financial position with Balances at year end of £4.4 million, after demolition costs of £1.0m at the Dolphin site. Detailed analysis of departmental adjustments were shown on pages 65 to 67 in the agenda pack.

The Council's Capital programme has once again shown a shortfall against projection. Burcot Lane had taken longer than planned but was at last on the move and action on site was expected shortly. A full review would be undertaken to tighten management to avoid slippage in the future. The new finance system would also be a great help.

Whilst the Council recognized the benefit in its surplus, Councillor Denaro advised Members that Council would wish to use its Economic Reserve for the benefit of businesses and residents, as the effect of the Pandemic continued to ravage High Streets and the Government furlough scheme would end soon. With the Investment and acquisition strategy the Council had the financial firepower to make an impact. To date opportunities had not met the finance guidelines, but this had now been amended to allow for a social impact and value to be considered.

Councillor Denaro recognized this was a truncated report but had done so knowing full details were in Members' agenda packs and had therefore concentrated on pertinent areas.

The recommendations were proposed by Councillor Denaro and seconded by Councillor K. May, and it was noted that Recommendation 2 was as amended in the explanatory note within the agenda pack.

Members were pleased to see that the savings and reserves would be used for the benefit of residents and agreed that the issue around vacancies being carried needed to be addressed, as this was something which had been questioned on a number of previous occasions.

It was further commented that the report had been discussed in detail at the recent Finance and Budget Working Group meeting and whilst it was the right thing to do in increasing balances, concerns had been raised that for a number of years greater savings than anticipated had been made, and there may come a time when the figures went the other way with a hefty overspend being recorded. It was therefore hoped that the new finance system would support managers and Heads of Service in being able to budget much more accurately in the future.

**RESOLVED that**

- 2) movement of £758k in existing reserves as included in appendix 1 of the report be approved;**

- 3) the addition of new reserves of £1,411k be approved;
- 4) the carry forward to the 2020/21 capital programme of £8,600k be approved;
- 5) an increase in the 2020/21 Capital Programme of £163k for Disabled Facilities Grants be approved. This is due to the budget allocations having now been announced by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG). This will increase the available budget to £913k;
- 6) an increase in the 2020/21 Capital Programme of £119k for additional funds towards the already approved capital project for Environmental services new IT system, to be funded from borrowing, be approved;
- 7) the funding from balances of the overspend from the demolition of the Dolphin Centre of £217k be approved;
- 8) an increase in the 2020/21 Capital programme 2019/20 of £100k due to match funding being received for a ULEV Taxi infrastructure scheme in Bromsgrove be approved;
- 9) an increase to the revenue budget for 2020/21, due to receiving £40k SEP Grant (Strategic Economic Plan), be approved;
- 10) an increase to the Capital programme 2020/21 of £13k s106 monies for the Bromsgrove Town Centre be approved;
- 11) an increase to the Capital programme 2020/21 of £150k ringfenced capital receipts for a grant to be provided to BDHT for the provision on new affordable homes be approved.

#### **Amenity Standards Report**

Councillor S. Webb presented the report and in so doing explained that the Council had revised its previous amenity standards in line with the requirements under the Housing Act 2004, together with guidance from the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health. The new amenity standards were in line with those adopted by the majority of other West Midlands Local Authorities.

The recommendation was proposed by Councillor Webb and seconded by Councillor K. May.

**RESOLVED that power be delegated to the Head of Community and Housing Services to approve the adoption of the Amenity Standards documents.**

(Councillor A. Kriss was removed from the meeting during this item and took no part in the discussions.)

#### **Replacement of the Burcot Hostel**

Councillor S. Webb presented the report and in so doing reminded Members that back in February 2016 Cabinet had received a report in respect of the options for replacement of the Burcot Hostel in light of its closing as a consequence of the redevelopment of the wider area. The report set out how the Hostel had now finally been replaced by alternative facilities in the District provided by Bromsgrove District Housing Trust (BDHT).

The recommendations were proposed by Councillor Webb and seconded by Councillor K. May.

**RESOLVED that**

- (1) the creation of a £35k capital budget for the scheme for the 2020/21 capital programme funded from balances be approved;**
- (2) the creation of a new net revenue budget of £41k, to be funded from balances in 2020/2021, and an ongoing unavoidable revenue pressure for future years to be considered as part of the review of the Medium Term Financial Plan be approved; and**
- (3) the creation of a bad debt provision of £5k per annum for potential non-payment of Council Tax liabilities, to be funded from balances in 2020/21 and as an unavoidable pressure from 2021/22 onwards be approved.**

**Cabinet Recommendation – 9th September 2020**

**Revenue Monitoring Quarter 1**

Councillor G. Denaro as the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Enabling presented the report which set out the Revenue Monitoring for the first quarter using the new Strategic Purposes, which had been agreed by Council. Whilst this showed a significant overspend, it was noted that the Covid-19 grant had not been allocated as it was important for Members to see a “clean” view of its current position. This did not include Council Tax or Business Rates, which would not normally be included, but did include 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, detailed in the report. 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. Councillor Denaro advised 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 Council’s 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. Councillor Denaro had raised the issue of 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 recommendations were proposed by Councillor Denaro and seconded by Councillor K. May.

Following discussion, Councillor P. McDonald asked that the recommendations be taken with a) and c) together and recommendation b) separately, as his Group could not support a shared budget in respect of training.

On being put to the vote it was

**RESOLVED that**

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

21\2020

**TO NOTE THE MINUTES OF THE MEETINGS OF THE CABINET HELD ON 6TH AUGUST 2020**

The minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 5<sup>th</sup> August 2020 were noted.

22\2020

**QUESTIONS ON NOTICE**

The Chairman advised Members that due to the exceptional circumstances under which everyone found themselves, the Leader had again agreed to allow one supplementary question in respect of each question asked. He would also allow the time spent on questions to be extended as it had been agreed that the Motions on Notice attached to the agenda for this meeting would not be debated.

**Question Submitted by Councillor K. Van der Plank**

“A number of trees have been cut down, in Alvechurch and around the District, over recent months which is extremely concerning when we are facing a climate emergency and should be protecting trees and planting more, not removing them.

Why have these trees been removed? What checks are in place to ensure that trees are only cut down where absolutely necessary and

how is this being monitored and reported? What plans are in place to ensure new trees are planted to replace any that are removed”

Councillor A Kent responded that after checking with the officers they had come back and stated that they were not aware of any of the trees to which Councillor Van der Plank had referred. However, Councillor Kent advised that he believed that Councillor Van der Plank had raised an important point about trees and their impact on the environment and feeling of well-being within Bromsgrove. He therefore hoped that she would be delighted with the proposal by Worcestershire County Council to plant 150,000 trees throughout Worcestershire.

Councillor Kent further commented that, he could not recall whether Councillor Van der Plank had attended the Strategic Planning Steering Group where Members had discussed the new planning consultation paper; but within that was a proposal to ensure that all the streets are lined with trees on new developments.

Councillor Kent apologised for not being able to answer Councillor Van der Plank’s question in more detail but if she were able to evidence the trees concerned he would ask the officers to look into the matter in more detail.

**Question submitted by Councillor C Hotham**

“Now that the Bird Box is complete, please could the cabinet member responsible inform council of the final build cost? Thank you”

The Leader thanked Councillor Hotham for his questions and confirmed that the total capital spend was £210K in line with the budget, £100k of which had come from Hintons.

Councillor Hotham’s supplementary question was whether, if the Birdbox was seen as a success, the Council would consider it remaining in situ as opposed to the original plan of it being in place for approximately 18 months, until a more permanent use was found for the site.

The Leader responded that due to the current circumstances, all options were being considered before a final decision was made and that those options would come before this Council in due course.

**Question Submitted by Councillor J King**

Protecting our Green Belt from Government planning reforms

“Are you concerned about the analysis from Lichfields planning consultants which indicates that the number of new homes to be built in Bromsgrove will almost double to 694 a year under the Governments proposed new formula? What will you do to ensure that Bromsgrove’s Green Belt is protected and that new homes are genuinely affordable for local people to rent and buy?”

Councillor A Kent, as Portfolio Holder for Planning and Regulatory Services responded to the question and advised Councillor King that the

analysis from Lichfield was simply repeating the Government's own figures which had already been worked out and presented by this Council's officers to Members via the recent Strategic Planning Steering Group. Under the reforms the Council would still be required to produce a local plan and it was under this mechanism that it would be able to consider the protection of the green belt and the appropriate levels and types of affordable housing.

Councillor King's supplementary question was in respect of houses being affordable on new developments and Councillor Kent responded that up to 40% had to be affordable as this figure was included within the Local Plan.

### **Questions from Councillor R Hunter**

Preparing for a second wave of Covid

"How much of the Government's £89,000 'Reopening High Streets Safely' grant allocated to Bromsgrove has been spent and how are we preparing to protect local people and businesses in the event of a second wave?"

The Leader responded to Councillor Hunter's question, in two parts, in respect of his first question she confirmed that £7,170 had been spent on 19 sanitiser stations and £352.50 on printing, £7,522.50 in total.

The Leader responded to Councillor Hunter's question, in two parts, in respect of his first question she confirmed that £7,170 had been spent on 19 sanitiser stations and £352.50 on printing, £7,522.50 in total.

The Leader explained that the Government guidance set out four categories of eligible activities, as these were lengthy in description, she was happy to provide details of these outside of the meeting if Members would like to see them.

It was further explained that a whole range of costs were deemed ineligible, including but not limited to; market stalls coverings and / or new gazebos to enable more businesses to trade outdoors; temporary outdoor furniture to enable businesses to trade outdoors; changes to toilets; cleaning regimes, consumables and staff; purchase or installation of seating; loss of car parking revenue; parklets / erection of seating within parking bays and car parks; new cycle lanes / paths; street wardens / town ambassadors / security to support the reopening of the high street; activities / events of town re-launch.

In response to the second question, the Leader advised that preventative work continued to be the key, Worcestershire County Council had the lead responsibility for responding to the pandemic through its Public Health team and it was the County Council that had been given some limited powers to support additional control measures if required. As part of the response, a Local Engagement Board had been created with membership from the six district councils and the county (the Leader sat on this Board on behalf of this Council). One of

its roles was to support the delivery of messages from the dedicated communications cell to its communities to help prevent a second wave of the pandemic. Clearly the behaviour of members of the public would be the key determinant in how the disease was propagated in communities and following the right measures around hand-washing, social distancing and limiting contacts would remain the best measures for preventing the spread of the disease.

Apart from communications, the district council had direct input into the Local Outbreak Management Team via its Environmental Health officers in the shared regulatory service, WRS. A group of WRS officers worked as part of this Team, dealing mainly with outbreaks at business premises. This would continue for the foreseeable future and would also play a key part of managing any outbreak and limiting spread. Those officers were used to dealing with similar situations when they dealt with things like food poisoning outbreaks or diseases such as legionella. The contact tracing processes used in such circumstances were equally applicable to Covid-19 outbreaks. Most of the small outbreaks at business premises so far had related to activities regulated by the HSE for health and safety purposes, so the team had worked closely with those colleagues to help the businesses move into safe operations and to adjust processes to reduce the risk of further outbreaks.

As well as this, at the commencement of any outbreak, the Secretary of State had made Environmental Health Officers (district councils) and Trading Standards Officers (county councils) responsible for the enforcement of business closure provisions. WRS created a team from within its Community Environmental Health to deliver such enforcement activities and continued to respond to alleged breaches of Covid-19 controls in shops, pubs and similar venues. The team had provided significant levels of advice and support to businesses during the process of the re-opening of the economy, helping them to interpret the provisions and apply them to their local situations. The demand for advice had now fallen significantly but the service continued to respond to allegations of breaches. This work would continue going forward and the service would look to use legal powers if necessary where persuasion did not lead to changes in business behaviour.

This work would continue to help reduce the risk of a second wave. With the rise in case numbers, the WRS Management team was looking at establishing more regular out of hours working to look at potential non-compliances as they occurred.

However, the Leader advised that in terms of the anticipated second wave it should be noted that all teams were completing a review of their business continuity plans. This was because a second wave was a risk that was anticipated and could be and should be planned for, in order to ensure this Council could support its residents and maintain its services through this difficult and uncertain time. The process of reviewing business continuity plans had, amongst other things, triggered compiling information for all managers about where officers lived in relation to

actual or anticipated lockdown areas. In terms of the national Test, Track and Test approach officers across the organisation had been identified and would be trained to assist with this national initiative. As an aside, and in line with Test, Track and Trace, there was a strict approach to entering council buildings so that Test, Track and Trace could be instigated by the council as landlord, if required.

Councillor Hunter's supplementary question was in respect of any opportunity to make a further claim and that all actions necessary be put in place to safeguard the residents.

The Leader confirmed the claim process and that the Council was working with the relevant partner organisation to ensure the safety of everyone.

**Question Submitted by Councillor S Hughes**

Putting no limit on our climate ambition

"Can you please clarify that it is not BDC's target to become carbon neutral by 2050 and that in fact we aim to drastically reduce emissions long before then. The motion this council passed last June means that in Bromsgrove action will not be delayed to 2050 but taken as soon as possible, as is required to save the planet?"

The Leader confirmed that, the Council declared a climate emergency at its meeting on 26th July 2019 and had formally created the Climate Change Working Group (of which Councillor Hughes was a Member) which was working with officers to develop a Climate Change Strategy for the Council to better understand its impact and how to reduce this.

This strategy would inform how the Council's services could work towards being carbon neutral and officers were currently working with the Climate Change Working Group and Heads of Services to consider realistic timelines, costs, alternatives and the resources required to achieve this

This Council was working hard to becoming carbon neutral as soon as was practicably possible and was already working on initiatives to reduce carbon with projects coming forward for example electric vehicle charging and a district heating network, which had been discussed at both Overview and Scrutiny Board and Cabinet meetings.

The Leader confirmed to Councillor Hughes that she did not think it was necessary to be tied to a deadline and that this Council would work hard to be carbon neutral as soon as practicably possible and support its residents wherever possible to do so.

**Question Submitted by Councillor P McDonald**

After the success regarding extending the suspension of rent evictions, would the Leader write once again calling upon the Government to support: Landlords, letting agents and charities urging the Government



to support private tenants with a £270 million fund to help with rent arrears.

At least 322,000 private renters have fallen behind on payments since the pandemic began, according to a coalition of Shelter, the National Residential Landlords Association, ARLA property mark, Crisis, Citizen Advice and Generation Rent. Without the fund it is feared there will be a devastating homelessness crisis.

The Leader responded that whilst writing to the Government would give a view on this Council's commitment to supporting tenants and residents across all tenures, as Leader, she considered the Council could best support the families and communities in financial difficulty and crisis supported by its actions. By providing them with supportive financial advice and working with a range of agencies and partners to ensure families received the correct benefits, and advice to minimise debt and reduce arrears throughout would ensure the Council could serve them best.

The Leader confirmed that the Government had advised that renters affected by Covid-19 would continue to be supported over Autumn and Winter through comprehensive measures, which was most welcome. The Government had changed the law to increase notice periods to 6 months, meaning renters who were served with notice could stay in their homes over Winter, with time to find alternative support or accommodation. The only exceptions to this were the most egregious cases including where tenants had demonstrated anti-social behaviour or committed fraud, and the landlord rightly would like to re-let their property to another tenant. The Housing Secretary had also confirmed that with Covid-19 still posing a risk, if an area was in a local lockdown that included a restriction on gathering in homes, evictions would not be enforced by bailiffs.

Clearly any additional national fund would help those in the greatest difficulty but the Council's work in support was also vitally important.

Councillor McDonald raised a supplementary question in respect of letting agents and writing further to the Government.

The Leader responded that whilst writing to the Government would give a view on this Council's commitment to supporting tenants and residents across all tenures, as Leader, she considered the Council could best support the families and communities in financial difficulty and crisis supported by its actions. By providing them with supportive financial advice and working with a range of agencies and partners to ensure families received the correct benefits, and advice to minimise debt and reduce arrears would ensure the Council could serve them best.

**Question Submitted by Councillor S Hughes**

Can the council leader update on the support the council has given to the Artrix Holding Trust to date and confirm its intention to continue to engage with the Holding Trust to exercise its community leadership role and secure a future sustainable model of delivery for the venue.

The Leader responded that the Artrix Holding Trust was an independent organisation and must make decisions on the future of the Artrix venue unfettered by the Council or other bodies. This Council had worked and continues to work, with the Holding Trust to provide support so that it was able to take decisions independently.

This support had included Council officer time, securing independent industry expertise through the Theatres Trust and providing independent legal advice to the Holding Trust. The Council would continue to engage with and support the Holding Trust so that it could independently secure a sustainable future for the venue.

Councillor Hughes' asked a supplementary question in respect of what the Council's response would be should the Holding Trust come to it and ask for support for the Artrix. The Leader responded that this would be a matter for full Council to consider when and if the time came.

**Question Submitted by Councillor K Van der Plank**

"Can the leader please update the council on the progress that has been made since the Council agreed the actions in the Fly Tipping motion that I submitted in September 2019."

Councillor Kent responded to this question and provided an update on progress made since the motion, which had been seconded by the Leader and endorsed by all Members in November last year.

The motion had covered a range of issues including developments regarding enforcement, funding and CCTV, publication of prosecutions, education, working with partners and communications.

In respect of how enforcement was carried out across the district, the Council continued to review its arrangements to make best use of existing resources and develop closer partnership working with its neighbouring districts, including working more closely with the Police.

It was looking to develop its CCTV usage and would be starting Covert surveillance in the near future at designated areas. There was some funds in this year's budget to support higher standards of CCTV camera to support such use. This would be used initially as a trial and to support future bids for funding if it proved effective at areas considered as hot spots.

In respect of publicising formal action and prosecutions, there was currently a case waiting to go to court, but for obvious reasons, there were significant delays in the court system due to Covid-19 at the moment. The Council always publicised convictions as widely as

possible so that its communities were aware of the action it was taking and always at the time of any conviction.

The Council was continuing with its awareness and education programme and although the planned project to support recycling across the district had been slightly delayed, it was planned to tie-in the required duty of care elements with the future programme, which was planned to commence in 2021. The Council was also continuing with regular messages via its social media and recycling week in late September was a national campaign which the Council would be supporting and publicising locally. The Council was also looking at how it could get involved with rural schemes to support residents, alongside the local Police and SNT teams.

In addition to the communications already stated, further publicity was planned specifically on fly tipping over the coming months, with simpler access through its website to check waste carriers licences, which would be referenced using the web page, all future publicity on social media and in the media.

Bulky Waste collections were still limited as to what the Council could take, but it was hoping to be able to start a trial in 2021 to consider additional items at a commercial rate to cover the disposal costs. Councillor Kent concluded by confirming that he would continue to keep Members updated as to progress in all of these areas.

Councillor Van der Plank thanked Councillor Kent for his comprehensive response as this was an area where there had been a huge increase over recent months and which needed addressing as a matter of urgency.

Councillor Kent agreed to provide the exact dates in respect of the areas he had covered, outside of the meeting.

**Question Submitted by Councillor J King**

“We are pleased to hear that subsidy for local bus services is set to increase in Worcestershire this year. Could the Leader please confirm how much additional funding has been allocated for services replacing the 202?”

Councillor S. Webb, as Portfolio Holder for Housing and Communities responded that Worcestershire County Council had allocated an additional £200,000 bus subsidy to the budget for this year. The additional cost of extending the 145 to replace areas affected by the withdrawal of the 202 bus was £29k per annum.

**Question Submitted by Councillor S Douglas**

“Can the leader confirm that this council will be urging the Artrix Holding Trust when considering future management options, to take note of the demise of the previous operator, that the new lease has sufficient longevity, and ensure that any future operator has a robust and

sustainable business plan including the ability to invest in Arts development for the future?”

The Leader reiterated her view that the Artrix Theatre was a valuable and cherished community asset, as was evidenced by the responses when the previous operator went into administration. This Council very much wanted to see a vibrant Artrix Theatre in the future, and not be in the same position as it found itself now in a year or 18 months time. The Council would therefore be supporting the Holding Trust to ensure that any future operator had a robust and sustainable business plan and the ability to invest in Arts in the district in the future.

**Question Submitted by Councillor P McDonald**

“I understand that it might be possible for the Rubery Festival to apply for some support with the running costs of the event. Can the Leader confirm the best route for the organisers to take to achieve this?”

The Leader confirm that it would be possible for the Rubery Festival to apply for funding. The Arts Development Service would be ideally suited to support the development of Rubery Festival in the summer of 2021.

The Leader understood that the Arts Development Service already had a long standing relationship with Rubery Festival and its Chairman. The work of the festival, outside of the main Rubery Festival event, had also been integrated into other Council events including the Rubery and Bromsgrove Christmas Lights Switch On events. The Rubery Festival’s initial success was achieved through the work of the Arts Development Service working with the Chairman and his team. The Leader would therefore ask a member of the Arts Development team to make contact with the Rubery Festival Chairman in order to discuss this matter further.

**Question Submitted by Councillor P McDonald**

“Would the Leader please request the Holding Trust to keep the Council updated of events.”

The Leader advised that, as per her previous replies regarding the Artrix Holding Trust, the Council was supporting the Holding Trust to review its options for the future of the Artrix Venue, and the Council would ask and expect to be kept updated on progress.

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**MOTIONS ON NOTICE**

The Chairman confirmed that it had already been agreed by the Leader, in consultation with all Group Leaders, that the motions from Councillors Hotham and Colella will be considered by Cabinet. In respect of the motion from Councillor Hunter, the Leader had agreed to write to the Chancellor. There would therefore be no debate on these items. The Leader confirmed that she was in agreement with this.

Council  
16th September 2020

The meeting closed at 8.58 p.m.

Chairman