

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MEETING OF THE COUNCIL

24TH FEBRUARY 2021, AT 6.00 P.M.

PRESENT: Councillors R. J. Laight (Chairman), A. J. B. Beaumont (Vice-Chairman), S. J. Baxter, 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. Robinson, R. J. Hunter, 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, P.L. Thomas, M. Thompson, J. Till, K. J. Van Der Plank, S. A. Webb and P. J. Whittaker

Officers: Mr K. Dicks, Ms S. Hanley, Mrs C. Felton, Mr C. Forrester, Ms C. Flanagan, Mr D. Riley, Ms K. Goldey, Ms A. Scarce and Ms J. Bayley.

65\20 **TO RECEIVE APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors R. Jenkins and C. Spencer.

66\20 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillors C. Hotham, H. Rone-Clare and P. Whittaker declared pecuniary interests in Minutes Item No x – Urgent Decisions. Their declaration was made in their capacity as trustees on the Artrix Holding Trust, as the urgent decision on the agenda related to an agreement regarding decarbonisation funding for the Artrix. However, Members were advised that, as the urgent decision had already been taken and no decision or debate on the item was required at Council, the Councillors did not need to leave the room.

During consideration of this item, the Monitoring Officer confirmed that Members the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee had previously granted all Members a dispensation to participate in the debate and vote on matters pertaining to the Council's budget and Council Tax, including in relation to Parish Councils.

67\20 **TO CONFIRM THE ACCURACY OF THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COUNCIL HELD ON 20TH JANUARY 2021**

The minutes of the meeting of Council held on Wednesday, 20th January 2021 were submitted.

During consideration of this item, the Leader advised that, following Council's decision to defer a decision on the disposal of the affordable housing units at the Burcot Lane development, Officers had been in discussions with Bromsgrove District Housing Trust (BDHT).

Unfortunately, it was not possible to advise Council further by the date of the meeting. However, Officers would be bringing forward a report for consideration by Council at the earliest opportunity. The Leader committed to arrange a briefing for Group Leaders in advance of any report to Council. Council was informed that the most respectful and beneficial way forward in both supporting BDHT and ensuring the Council secured best value in the provision of much needed affordable housing, was to have a proper informed debate and discussion when all positions were clarified.

There was a brief debate on the subject of the Burcot Lane development and the discussions that had been held at the previous meeting of Council. As part of this process, concerns were raised about how the debate on this subject had been handled at that meeting.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of Council held on Wednesday, 20th January 2021 be approved.

68\20

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

The Chairman advised that Councillor C. Spencer was in hospital on the date of the meeting. Councillor Spencer's condition was reported to be improving and Members were advised to liaise with her family to provide any messages of support. Members noted their concerns and passed on their regards to Councillor Spencer and wished her a speedy recovery.

The Head of Paid Service confirmed that he had no announcements to make on this occasion.

69\20

TO RECEIVE ANY ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM THE LEADER

The Leader explained that the rate of Covid-19 in Bromsgrove District had reached 110 cases per 100,000 by the date of the meeting. By comparison, the average number of cases in Worcestershire was 142 cases per 100,000. The vaccination programme was progressing well, with 30 per cent of residents living in Herefordshire and Worcestershire having received their first vaccination by the date of the meeting. However, the Leader commented that it remained important for people to comply with the lockdown rules and she urged Members and residents to do so in order to remain safe.

Members welcomed the opening of the Artrix as a vaccination Centre since the previous meeting of Council. Questions were raised about the number of people who had been vaccinated at this centre. Council was informed that this data was not available, though the contract would be in place for a significant amount of time in order to enable residents to receive a vaccine over the following months.

During consideration of this item, the Leader led Members in paying tribute to the Senior Democratic Services Officer for Bromsgrove, Amanda Scarce, who was due to retire the following day. Council was informed that Amanda commenced employment with Bromsgrove District Council in September 2009. Initially, she was employed as a Committee Services Officer supporting the then Overview and Scrutiny Officer with the Overview and Scrutiny process at the Council. She subsequently became the lead support officer for Overview and Scrutiny in Bromsgrove and from 2012 worked as part of the Democratic Services team to deliver the shared Democratic Service for Bromsgrove and Redditch. In September 2017, Amanda was promoted to the position of Senior Democratic Services Officer for Bromsgrove and since then had both co-managed the team and co-ordinated the democratic process for Bromsgrove, taking a lead on Cabinet and Council. Over the years Amanda had supported Members and facilitated scrutiny reviews into a range of subjects, from car parking to equalities. As well as being a professional officer, the Leader commented that Amanda was kind, intelligent, had a great sense of humour and had been immensely supportive to both colleagues and Members across all groups and parties. The Leader concluded by noting that Amanda would be missed by all staff, particularly her team, as well as Members, and she wished her well for the future.

A number of Members subsequently commented on the Senior Democratic Services Officer's departure, starting with the group leaders. Members commented that Amanda had been particularly supportive to new Members, helping to inform them about the democratic process and responding to queries in a timely manner. Reference was made to the Senior Democratic Services Officer's experience, in terms of facilitating scrutiny reviews and ensuring that these operated effectively. The Senior Democratic Services Officer was cited as being instrumental in the introduction of the Finance and Budget Working Group and Measures Dashboard Working Group and Members agreed that both groups had had a positive impact on the governance arrangements in place at the Council.

70\20

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

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

71\20

URGENT DECISIONS

The Chairman advised that one urgent decision had been taken since the previous meeting of Council but he reminded Members that this was not scheduled for debate.

72\20

INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL REPORT

Councillor G. Denaro, the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Enabling, presented the Independent Remuneration Panel's (IRP) Report

regarding Members' allowances in the 2021/22 municipal year. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the IRP had chosen to focus on changes to the basic allowance for Members. The IRP was proposing that the basic allowance should increase by 2.75 per cent, which would result in a basic allowance of £4,650 per member. No changes were proposed to the Special Responsibility Allowances (SRAs) at this point.

RESOLVED that the Basic Allowance for 2021-22 be £4,650 representing a 2.75 per cent increase.

73\20

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE CABINET 17TH FEBRUARY 2020
(TO FOLLOW)

Medium Term Financial Plan 2021/22 to 2023/24

Councillor G. Denaro, Portfolio Holder for Finance and Enabling, introduced the Medium Term Financial Plan 2021/22 to 2023/24 and in so doing commented that the budget had been prepared at a challenging time, due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Councillor Denaro thanked the Head of Financial and Customer Services and the Financial Services team for their hard work in preparing the budget under these circumstances.

Members were informed that the Council had only received a one-year settlement from the Government for 2021/22. There remained substantial gaps in the budget for 2022/23 and 2023/24 which would need to be addressed moving forward. The external auditors had recognised that the Council was in a sound financial position but had commented that the Council would be in a challenging position in future years. Anticipated savings and income generation schemes would need to be delivered in order for the Council to avoid using reserves to balance the budget in the long-term. However, the auditors had provided the Council with an unqualified opinion on the Council's value for money arrangements.

An increase in Council Tax was proposed in order to help balance the budget in 2021/22. The Government had announced that District Councils could only increase Council Tax by a maximum rate of 1.99 per cent, or £5. In Bromsgrove, it was proposed that Council Tax should increase by £5 as this would result in a slightly higher rate of return to the authority. The Council Tax Base would be reducing for the first time in many years, as a consequence of changes to the Council Tax Support Scheme and as a result of fewer homes having been built than anticipated due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Additional pressures had been taken into account when preparing the budget. This included the loss of income from car parking during the Covid-19 pandemic. However, some of the losses in income had been offset by financial support that had been provided by the Government.

The Corporate Management Team (CMT) had reviewed the budget on a line-by-line basis and officers had identified a number of savings and

income generation opportunities by doing so. Many of the savings were relatively small but cumulatively, they contributed to a balanced budget for 2021/22. These savings and income opportunities had been discussed in more detail at a recent meeting of the Finance and Budget Working Group.

Funding from the New Homes Bonus (NHB) had reduced, so that the Council was left with £12,000 to distribute within the community. An additional £68,000 from Covid grant funding had been combined with this figure to create a community grants budget for 2021/22. Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) groups would be able to bid for up to £5,000 grant funding each for community projects under this scheme.

A list of revenue bids had been provided in the report for Members' consideration. This included a bid to fund a new Member Support Officer in respect of ICT services. Should this bid be successful, it was anticipated that the Officer would provide support to Members and would help address some of the technical issues Members experienced during meetings.

Savings had been proposed in the report but, despite the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, no cuts to services had been proposed. In total, the savings added up to £426,000 and contributed to the balanced budget position.

There had been a review of the Capital Programme and some capital bids had also been recorded in the report. Included within this was a bid for £250,000, for the operation of an electric bus service between Bromsgrove town centre and the railway station. The funding for this project would help to support the green agenda detailed in the Council Plan. Bids for electric charging points for vehicles had also been included in the report, though there was the potential that some of the costs arising from this would be offset by external grant funding.

The Council would be using £638,000 from earmarked reserves to help balance the budget in 2021/22. These reserves could only be used once. However, the Council's balances were in a healthy position. In 2021/22 it was proposed that £22,000 should be returned to balances, which would result in the authority having balances of £4.306 million. In the period 2022 to 2024 the Council could use £2.571 million of balances to balance the budget, though this would take balances below the minimum threshold of £2 million. Therefore, the budget gap would need to be addressed using additional income and savings.

The Covid-19 pandemic had added to uncertainty in relation to local government finances and it was difficult to predict how the pandemic would impact in the future. Furthermore, Brexit was adding to this uncertainty, particularly with regard to the potential implications for local businesses and the associated impact on the collection of local business rates.

Councillor Denaro concluded by stating that the proposed budget would help to support the Council's strategic purposes and economic growth in the District, whilst enabling the Council to achieve a balanced position. He urged Members to therefore support the budget.

The recommendations in the Medium Term Financial Plan 2021/22 to 2023/24 were proposed by Councillor G. Denaro and seconded by Councillor K. May.

During consideration of this item, Councillor P. McDonald proposed an alternative budget from the Labour Group, as detailed in the main agenda pack. The alternative budget from the Labour Group was seconded by Councillor H. Rone-Clarke.

In proposing the alternative budget, Councillor McDonald commented that the Council budget for 2021/22 would apply at a time when the country would only just be coming out of lockdown and many residents would still be on furlough or would have unfortunately lost their jobs. In this context, Councillor McDonald suggested that it was not an appropriate time to increase Council Tax, as many residents would struggle to pay the excess bill and the alternative budget therefore did not propose a Council Tax increase. The Council Tax bill for many residents was already due to increase as Worcestershire County Council and other precepting authorities were requesting an increase to their Council Tax contributions and an increase to the contribution for Bromsgrove District Council would add to this bill. Councillor McDonald expressed concerns that many residents on lower incomes would potentially enter into poverty as a result of increases to Council Tax.

Reference was made to the funding available to local government. Councillor McDonald commented that the Government needed to increase funding for Councils, rather than authorities having to rely on Council Tax rises to help balance the budget. Members were informed that funding could potentially be redirected by the Government from other areas, such as funding for management consultants.

Councillor McDonald expressed concerns that the most vulnerable children in the District were at crisis point. In particular, Councillor McDonald highlighted concerns that many families on low incomes were struggling to pay bills and this was impacting on their children.

Members were informed that, by not proposing an increase to Council Tax, there would be a gap in the budget of £180,000 in 2021/22. Councillor McDonald suggested that this gap could be addressed through savings in other areas. In particular, Members were asked to note that the Council paid Redditch Borough Council to host various services at Redditch Town Hall. Following the introduction of remote working arrangements, Councillor McDonald suggested that staff would be working more at home in future and those not working at home could be accommodated at Parkside. Members were informed that an estimated £65,000 could be saved from this change to working

arrangements. Councillor McDonald also commented that the Council had spent £210,000 on management consultants, including Mott MacDonald. Councillor McDonald suggested that management consultants could be used less frequently, and that Mott MacDonald's assistance was no longer required by the Council. Members were therefore advised that £100,000 could be saved on management consultancy fees. Should these measures be taken, there would be a remaining gap of £16,000 in the alternative budget, which could be addressed using funding from reserves.

In seconding the alternative budget from the Labour Group, Councillor Rone-Clarke commented that the Labour Group could not support a rise in Council Tax during a global pandemic. Members were advised that an increase in Council Tax would place many people's finances on an unsustainable footing, especially as an increase to the Council Tax contribution from Bromsgrove District Council would be accompanied by increases to the Council Tax contributions for other precepting organisations. Councillor Rone-Clarke expressed concerns that there had been many years of austerity leading up to 2021 which had also impacted on residents' finances over the years and meant that people on lower incomes in particular did not have the resources necessary to pay larger bills. Councillor Rone-Clarke also commented that he thought it would be morally wrong to increase Council Tax bills for key workers, in occupations such as nursing or teaching.

Council subsequently discussed the Labour Group's alternative budget in detail. On the one hand, concerns were raised that use of funding from reserves, as proposed in the alternative budget, could impact on the long-term sustainability of the Council's finances. Members noted that Mott MacDonald continued to work for the Council on planning related matters, including in relation to traffic congestion, though this work would be reducing over the following years. Members also suggested that support could potentially be provided to vulnerable people on low incomes through the Council's Hardship Scheme. On the other hand, concerns were raised that many businesses were struggling during lockdown and this would inevitably impact on staff, both those on furlough and those at risk of redundancy. In such circumstances, it was suggested that the alternative budget, by not proposing an increase to Council Tax, would not create an additional burden for local residents on low incomes. The role of Mott MacDonald moving forward was also questioned and it was suggested that the advice of this company did not always inform Council policy and the advice of these consultants was not necessarily therefore needed moving forward.

In accordance with the Local Authorities (Standing Orders) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2014 the alternative budget from the Labour Group was subject to a named vote.

Members voting FOR the alternative budget from the Labour Group:

Councillors L. Mallett, P. McDonald and H. Rone-Clarke. (3)

Members voting AGAINST the alternative budget from the Labour Group:

Councillors S. Baxter, A. Beaumont, S. Colella, R. Deeming, G. Denaro, M. Glass, S. Hession, R. Hunter, H. Jones, A. Kent, J. King, A. Kriss, R. Laight, K. May, M. Middleton, S. Robinson, M. Sherrey, P. Thomas, M. Thompson, J. Till, S. Webb and P. Whittaker. (22)

Members voting to ABSTAIN in the vote on the alternative budget from the Labour Group

Councillors S. Douglas, A. English, C. Hotham and K. Van Der Plank

The vote on the alternative budget from the Labour Group was therefore lost.

A further alternative budget, on behalf collectively of the Liberal Democrat group, the Bromsgrove Independent East District Group and the Bromsgrove Independents West and Central District Group, was proposed by Councillor K. Van Der Plank and seconded by Councillor R. Hunter.

In proposing this alternative budget, Councillor Van Der Plank commented that the proposals detailed in the alternative budget were designed to support the administration's budget. The alternative budget proposed that some of the Covid-19 grant funding that had been received by the Council from the Government should be allocated to projects that would support the local community. The proposals would support the community, including through additional support for community groups, and would support the Council's green agenda whilst leaving some funds in reserves.

Members were informed that the 3 political groups welcomed information about the electric bus service that would operate between Bromsgrove town centre and Bromsgrove Train Station. However, Council was informed that more public transport was needed in the District, particularly to serve rural areas. Therefore, Councillor Van Der Plank explained that in the alternative budget it was proposed that 4 new bus services should be funded which would operate around the District. Further consideration would need to be given as to how these bus services would operate and the routes involved but the proposals in the alternative budget would establish a principle that these services were needed to connect the district. Members were advised that many rural communities would benefit from these additional services as they were cut off under existing arrangements.

Councillor Van Der Plank suggested that it was possible the Council would be able to secure grant funding for the proposed budget services, by working in partnership with other organisations, as this could have a beneficial impact on local vehicle emissions. Members were advised

that the proposals would also support the Council's efforts to tackle climate change.

Members were advised that the Covid-19 pandemic was having a significant impact on the mental wellbeing of local residents. Councillor Van Der Plank suggested that there needed to be investment in support for people in respect of their health and wellbeing, including in parks and open spaces. The alternative budget proposed investment of Covid grant funding to help tackle fly tipping in the District. The funding would be used to support the installation of CCTV cameras in areas where fly tipping occurred frequently. Funding was also proposed to support the museums in the District, to help promote these services and encourage visitors to these attractions once it was safe to reopen.

Council was asked to note that the Covid-19 grant funding provided the authority with a once in a lifetime opportunity to make a difference in the community. The grant funding was not ring-fenced and therefore the Council could spend the funds to support the community as proposed in the alternative budget.

In seconding the alternative budget, Councillor Hunter explained that the 3 groups had worked together to bring forward proposals that would support the wider community. The alternative budget supported the proposals from the administration but added expenditure of some of the Covid-19 grant funding that had been received by the authority. Councillor Hunter questioned why the Council had not yet brought forward proposals to spend this grant funding and he commented that the alternative budget's proposals would result in investment in the local community.

Members subsequently discussed this alternative budget in detail. Those Members speaking in favour of the alternative budget welcomed the opportunity to provide bus services in rural locations in the District, support to people who had experienced mental health difficulties as a result of the pandemic and funding for museums, which had struggled during the pandemic. Reference was made to the need to support the local economy to ensure its recovery and the potentially positive contribution that the proposals in the alternative budget could make to this process. Some Members also commented that there had been an increase in fly tipping in parts of the District during the pandemic and the proposed extra CCTV cameras would help the Council to address this. In concluding these remarks in favour of the alternative budget, some Members suggested that it would be appropriate to use the Covid grant funding for the purposes proposed in the alternative budget as the funding was designed to help with the recovery process locally in respect of Covid-19. Council was asked to note that the grant funding had not otherwise yet been allocated.

During consideration of this alternative budget, a number of Councillors spoke against the proposals. Concerns were raised that these proposals had been brought forward at a time when the Council was

already working with partner organisations in respect of plans for a demand response transport system to be introduced in the District. There had been a lot of preparatory work in respect of this matter, including improvements to local infrastructure. The demand response system would provide a transport system that would serve multiple locations and would be trialled in Bromsgrove by Worcestershire County Council, with touch screens being made available to enable passengers to request specific journeys. In this context, it was suggested that the proposals in respect of the extra bus services were not necessary.

Other Members speaking against the proposals commented that the Covid grant funding was needed to help local businesses. Fly tipping was already being addressed by the Council as was additional funding for VCS groups, through continuing funding of a community grants scheme. Concerns were also raised that the alternative budget was contingent on the substantive proposals in respect of the budget, including a Council Tax increase, being approved. Some Members commented that they could not support the alternative budget for this reason.

In accordance with the Local Authorities (Standing Orders) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2014 the alternative budget from the Liberal Democrat, Bromsgrove Independents East District and The Bromsgrove Independents West and Central District groups was subject to a named vote.

Members voting FOR the alternative budget from the Liberal Democrat, Bromsgrove Independent East District and The Bromsgrove Independent West and Central District Groups

Councillors S. Baxter, S. Colella, A. English, C. Hotham, R. Hunter, J. King, S. Robinson and K. Van Der Plank. (8)

Members voting AGAINST the alternative budget from the Liberal Democrat, Bromsgrove Independent East District and The Bromsgrove Independent West and Central District Groups

Councillors A. Beaumont, R. Deeming, G. Denaro, M. Glass, S. Hession, H. Jones, A. Kent, A. Kriss, R. Laight, L. Mallett, K. May, M. Middleton, P. McDonald, H. Rone-Clarke, M. Sherrey, P. Thomas, M. Thompson, J. Till, S. Webb and P. Whittaker (20)

Members voting to ABSTAIN in the vote on the alternative budget from the Liberal Democrat, Bromsgrove Independent East District and The Bromsgrove Independent West and Central District Groups

No Councillors (0)

The vote on the alternative budget from the Liberal Democrat, Bromsgrove Independents East District and The Bromsgrove Independents West and Central District groups was therefore lost.

Members subsequently returned to discussing the proposals in respect of the Medium Term Financial Plan 2021/22 to 2023/24 detailed in the agenda. Councillor Denaro, Portfolio Holder for Finance and Enabling, reintroduced the report and explained that the proposed budget would support the green thread in the Council plan and enhance public transport through the new proposed electric bus service operating between Bromsgrove town centre and Bromsgrove Train Station. There were also a number of important capital projects that would be funded should the budget be approved.

In seconding the proposed Medium Term Financial Plan 2021/22 to 2023/24, Councillor K. May commented that the proposed budget was fiscally responsible. The budget would help to support local businesses as well as action that would have a positive impact on climate change, including the introduction of the electric bus service operating between Bromsgrove town centre and Bromsgrove Train Station. Members were advised that Councillor May intended, as the Leader of the Council, to lobby for more detail on the budget in future beyond a one-year settlement in order to create greater certainty about the budget position for local government moving forward.

During consideration of the Medium Term Financial Plan 2021/22 to 2023/24 the following points were discussed in detail:

- The distribution of grant funding to local businesses and how this had progressed in Bromsgrove District. Councillor Denaro advised that a lot of grant funding had been provided and further information would be circulated after the meeting on this subject for Members' consideration.
- The additional capital funding that had been proposed for waste and recycling bins. Members were informed that this funding would be spent on additional commercial waste bins as the Council had gained an additional 170 customers for the commercial waste scheme.
- The purpose of the capital funding that had been proposed for car charges. Councillor Denaro explained that this was intended for personnel and the public in cases where there was no access to private driveways. There would be match funding available for this project.
- The funding for the play area in Sanders Park and the date when this work would be completed. Councillor P. Thomas, Portfolio Holder for Leisure, Community Services and Community Safety, explained that, subject to Members' approval, procurement would commence immediately and the aim would be to complete the project by May 2021.
- The extent to which the Council's budget was in a sustainable position, particularly with the use of reserves to balance the budget in 2021/22.
- The potential to use more of the Council's reserves to help balance the budget, as an alternative to Council Tax rises.

- The need to use reserves in emergency circumstances and the potential to classify the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic as an emergency.
- The financial gaps in the Council's budget in 2022/23 and 2023/24 and the action that would need to be taken in order to balance the Council's budget in those years.
- The uncertainty about local government funding and the difficulties this created when trying to balance the budget.
- The minimum level of balances that could be sustained by the Council whilst also balancing the budget.
- The funding available for improvements to bus shelters and the extent to which it was likely this would need to be transferred to Worcestershire County Council as part of that authority's role in managing bus shelters.
- The Council's financial performance in the 2020/21 financial year and the availability of data in respect of the third quarter of the year. Councillor Denaro explained that the data for the third quarter was not yet available, though it was anticipated that by the end of the year the Council would be in a balanced position.
- The potential for residents living in rural wards to access bus services through the demand response transport system. Councillor A. Kent, Portfolio Holder for Planning and Regulatory Services, explained that there would be 3 buses operating in the District in this system and they would operate in a responsive manner, linked to key transport points. The buses would calculate routes in transit under this system.
- The proposals in the budget that would support the continuation of service delivery and the Council's green agenda.
- The potential for some of the Covid grant funding received by the Council to be allocated to supporting businesses and VCS groups in 2021/22.

In accordance with the Local Authorities (Standing Orders) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2014 the Medium Term Financial Plan 2021/22 to 2023/24 was subject to a named vote.

Members voting FOR the Medium Term Financial Plan 2021/22 to 2023/24

Councillors S. Baxter, A. Beaumont, S. Colella, R. Deeming, G. Denaro, S. Douglas, A. English, M. Glass, S. Hession, C. Hotham, H. Jones, A. Kent, A. Kriss, R. Laight, K. May, M. Middleton, M. Sherrey, P. Thomas, M. Thompson, J. Till, K. Van Der Plank, S. Webb and P. Whittaker. (23)

Members voting AGAINST the Medium Term Financial Plan 2021/22 to 2023/24

Councillors L. Mallett, P. McDonald and H. Rone-Clarke. (3)

Members voting to ABSTAIN in the vote on the Medium Term Financial Plan 2021/22 to 2023/24

Councillors R. Hunter, J. King and S. Robinson. (3)

The vote on the Medium Term Financial Plan 2021/22 to 2023/24 was therefore carried.

RESOLVED that

- 1) The Unavoidable costs be approved:

2021/22 £524k
2022/23 £340k
2023/24 £409k

- 2) The Revenue Bids be approved:

2021/22 £65k
2022/23 £48k
2023/24 £25k

- 3) The Identified Savings be approved:

2021/22 £426k
2022/23 £474k
2023/24 £405k

- 4) The General Fund Capital Programme bids be approved:

2021/22 £578k
2022/23 £1.123m
2023/24 £1.018m

- 5) The General Fund capital programme be approved:

2021/22 £13.323m
2022/23 £4.867m
2023/24 £2.906m

- 6) The net general fund revenue budget be approved.

2021/22 £11.988m
2022/23 £11.673m
2023/24 £11.683m

- 7) The increase of the Council Tax per Band D at £5 for 2021/22 be approved; and

- 8) The transfer to Balances of £22k for 2020/21 be approved.

Pay Policy Statement 2021/22

Councillor G. Denaro, Portfolio Holder for Finance and Enabling, presented the Pay Policy Statement 2021/22 for Members' consideration. Council was advised that there was a statutory requirement for the Pay Policy Statement to be considered every year. Due to the shared services arrangements that were in place, 50 per cent of the costs would be covered by Redditch Borough Council.

The recommendation was proposed by Councillor G. Denaro and seconded by Councillor K. May.

RESOLVED that the Pay Policy Statement 2021/22 be approved.

74\20

TO NOTE THE MINUTES OF THE MEETINGS OF THE CABINET HELD ON 17TH FEBRUARY 2021 (TO FOLLOW)

The minutes of the meeting of Cabinet held on Wednesday, 17th February 2021 were noted.

75\20

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE CABINET MEETING HELD ON 24TH FEBRUARY 2021 (TO BE TABLED)

The Chairman introduced the item and in doing so explained that a meeting of Cabinet had taken place earlier in the day at which recommendations in respect of the Council Tax Resolutions and Council Tax Support Scheme had been considered. As the meeting had taken place that day it had not been possible to draft the minutes of the meeting for Members' consideration at Council. However, the recommendations from the meeting had been published in a supplementary pack for the meeting.

Council Tax Resolutions 2021/22

Councillor G. Denaro, Portfolio Holder for Finance and Enabling, presented the Council Tax Resolutions, as printed in a second supplementary pack for the meeting.

The recommendations in respect of the Council Tax Resolutions were proposed by Councillor G. Denaro and seconded by Councillor K. May.

In accordance with the Local Authorities (Standing Orders) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2014 the Council Tax Resolutions was subject to a named vote.

Members voting FOR the Council Tax Resolutions:

Councillors S. Baxter, A. Beaumont, R. Deeming, G. Denaro, S. Douglas, A. English, M. Glass, S. Hession, C. Hotham, H. Jones, A. Kent, A. Kriss, R. Laight, K. May, M. Middleton, M. Sherrey, P. Thomas, M. Thompson, J. Till, K. Van Der Plank, S. Webb and P. Whittaker. (22)

Members voting AGAINST the Council Tax Resolutions:

Councillors L. Mallett, P. McDonald and H. Rone-Clarke. (3)

Members voting to ABSTAIN on the Council Tax Resolutions

Councillors S. Colella, R. Hunter, J. King and S. Robinson. (4)

The vote in respect of the Council Tax Resolutions was therefore carried.

RESOLVED that

- 1) The calculation for the Council Tax requirement for the Council's own purposes for 2021/22 (excluding Parish precepts) as **£8,664,624.08**.
- 2) The following amounts be calculated for the year 2021/22 in accordance with sections 31 to 36 of the Act:
 - (a) £43,940,922 being the aggregate of the amounts which the Council estimates for the items set out in Section 31A (2) of the Act (taking into account all precepts issued to it by Parish Councils) (*i.e.*, *Gross expenditure*);
 - (b) £34,224,101 being the aggregate of the amounts which the Council estimates for the items set out in Section 31A (3) of the Act. (*i.e.*, *Gross income*);
 - (c) £9,716,821 being the amount by which the aggregate of 1.2.2(a) above exceeds the aggregate at 1.2.2(b) above, calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 31A (4) of the Act, as its Council Tax requirement for the year. (Item R in the formula in Section 31B of the Act);
 - (d) £261.30 being the amount at 1.2.2 (c) above (Item R), all divided by Item T (1.1(a) above), calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 31B of the Act, as the basic amount of its Council Tax for the year (including Parish precepts);
 - (e) £1,052,198 being the aggregate amount of all special items (Parish precepts) referred to in Section 34 (1) of the Act (as per the attached **Schedule 3**);
 - (f) £233.00 being the amount at 1.2.2 (d) above less the result given by dividing the amount at 1.2.2 (e) above by Item T (1.1 (a) above), calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 34 (2) of the Act, as the basic amount of its Council

Tax for the year for dwellings in those parts of its area to which no Parish precept relates;

- (g) The amounts shown in Column 3 of **Schedule 1**. These are the basic amounts of the council tax for the year for dwellings in those parts of the Council's area shown in Column 1 of the schedule respectively to which special items relate, calculated by the Council in accordance with Section 34(3) of the Act. (District and Parish combined at Band D);
- (h) The amounts shown in Column 5 of **Schedule 1** being the amount given by multiplying the amounts at 2.2.2(g) above by the number which, in the proportion set out in Section 5(1) of the Act, is applicable to dwellings listed in a particular valuation band divided by the number which in that proportion is applicable to dwellings listed in valuation band D, calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 36(1) of the Act, as the amounts to be taken into account for the year in respect of categories of dwellings listed in different valuation bands;
- 3) It be noted that for the year 2021/22, Worcestershire County Council, Police and Crime Commissioner for West Mercia and Hereford and Worcester Fire Authority have issued precepts to the Council in accordance with Section 40 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 for each category of dwelling in the Council's area as indicated below:

	Valuation Bands							
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£
Worcestershire County Council	895.89	1,045.20	1,194.52	1,343.83	1,642.46	1,941.09	2,239.72	2,687.66
Police and Crime Commissioner for West Mercia	160.13	186.81	213.50	240.19	293.57	346.94	400.32	480.38
Hereford and Worcester Fire Authority	58.45	68.20	77.94	87.68	107.16	126.65	146.13	175.36

- 4) That having calculated the aggregate in each case of the amounts at 1.2.2(h) and 1.2.3 above, that Bromsgrove District Council in accordance with Sections 30 and 36 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 hereby sets the amounts shown in Schedule 2 as the amounts of Council Tax for 2021/22. for each part of its area and for each of the categories of dwellings;
- 5) The Executive Director Finance & Resources be authorised to make payments under Section 90(2) of the Local Government Finance Act 1988 from the Collection Fund by ten equal instalments between April 2021 to March 2022 as detailed below:

	Precept £	Deficit on Collection Fund £	Total to pay £
Worcestershire County Council	49,972,401.00	-183,950.00	49,788,451.00
Police and Crime Commissioner for West Mercia	8,931,837.44	-31,596.78	8,900,240.66
Hereford & Worcester Fire Authority	3,260,346.04	-12,065.05	3,248,280.99

- 6) The Executive Director Finance & Resources be authorised to make transfers under Section 97 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988 from the Collection Fund to the General Fund the sum of £9,681,240 being the Council's own demand on the Collection Fund (£8,664,623.06) and Parish Precepts (£1,052,197) and the distribution of the Deficit on the Collection Fund (£35,580);
- 7) The Executive Director Finance & Resources be authorised to make payments from the General Fund to Parish Councils the sums listed on **Schedule 3** by two equal instalment on 1 April 2021 and 1 October 2021 in respect of the precept levied on the Council;
- 8) The above resolutions to be signed by the Chief Executive for use in legal proceedings in the Magistrates Court for the recovery of unpaid Council Taxes;
- 9) Notices of the making of the said Council Taxes signed by the Chief Executive are given by advertisement in the local press under Section 38(2) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992; and
- 10) That authority be delegated to the Head of Finance and Customer Services (Interim S151) following consultation with the finance portfolio holder to amend the resolution should the Hereford and Worcester Fire Authority Service not approve the estimated figure that is being used in this report. This is due to the Hereford and Worcester Authority Service having their approval meeting after this resolution report has been brought to Council.

Council Tax Support Scheme 2021/22

Councillor G. Denaro, Portfolio Holder for Finance and Enabling, presented the Council Tax Support Scheme 2021/22 for Members' consideration.

Council was informed that the proposed Council Tax Support Scheme 2021/22 would include 100 per cent relief for residents who were eligible for this support. By contrast, the existing scheme required every resident to make a contribution. Under the new scheme the relief would be tapered, calculated on the basis of household income.

The proposed changes would impact on some residents who were already in receipt of support under the existing Council Tax Support Scheme. In total, 82 per cent of those who were impacted would receive an increase in support; 3 per cent would not be affected; 15 per cent would experience a reduction in support. Residents who were negatively affected by the changes could apply for additional support under the Council's Hardship Scheme.

During consideration of this item, Members discussed the proposed scheme and, in doing so, questioned how many residents would be impacted negatively and the amount of support they would lose. The exact amounts that each individual affected by the changes might lose could not be clarified at the meeting. However, Councillor Denaro explained that in total the lost support for that 15 per cent of affected residents was equivalent to £88,000. There was £85,000 available through the Hardship Scheme to support people and therefore it was anticipated that where necessary those affected could be helped.

As the full impact on each individual affected by the proposed changes could not be confirmed at the meeting, a deferral in respect of determining this matter was proposed by Councillor R. Hunter. This proposed deferral was seconded by Councillor S. Robinson.

In proposing the deferral of this item, Councillor Hunter commented that it would be helpful for Members to have access to this information before reaching a decision on the subject. Councillor Hunter suggested that the report should be referred back to Cabinet in order for Portfolio Holders to have an opportunity to consider the figures for all of the affected residents.

The proposed deferral was subsequently discussed in detail. On the one hand, Members commented that this would provide an opportunity to consider the number of people impacted by the changes to the scheme, the extent to which they would be impacted and the likely implications for demand for support from the Hardship Scheme moving forward. On the other hand, concerns were raised that changes to the Council Tax Support Scheme needed to be approved prior to 1st April 2021 and there would be limited time available to revisit the matter prior to that date. Reference was made to the potential to hold extraordinary meetings of both Cabinet and Council to consider the matter further, but concerns were raised about the delay that this might cause. Members were advised that the scheme would need to be reviewed again in 12 months' time and the issue raised by Members in respect of the number of people impacted by changes to the scheme could be investigated further at that time.

On being put to the vote, the proposal in respect of deferring a decision on the Council Tax Support Scheme was lost.

The recommendation in respect of the Council Tax Support Scheme was proposed by councillor G. Denaro and seconded by Councillor K. May.

RESOLVED that the introduction of a new income banded / grid scheme for working age applicants with effect from 1st April 2021 to implement a modern, future proofed scheme and reduce the administrative burden placed on the Council by the introduction of Universal Credit.

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QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

The Chairman advised that 6 questions had been submitted for consideration at the meeting. There would be no subsidiary questions.

Question Submitted by Councillor S. Robinson

“Can the portfolio holder please update the council on how many tonnes of garden waste we have collected from households this winter and whether or not there are plans for this to continue next year?”

The Portfolio Holder for Environmental Services responded by explaining that since April 2020 the Council had collected 6,855 tons of garden waste up until the end of January 2021. There had been a reasonable usage of the Council’s garden waste service through the extension in December and January, but with low tonnages of material collected (30% of average monthly tonnage in December, and 18% in January). The service would normally start again at the end of February.

Officers were still awaiting the February data, which was also part of the current extension to the service. This data would be reviewed, involving consideration of the carbon impact of the extension of the scheme against the benefit, the operational impact of continuing the service through this part of the year, and the financial considerations for residents as well as the Council. A report would be produced summarising the outcomes and any proposals for changes to the service later in the year. A decision would then be required on whether the service could be extended in future years. However, it was too early to say by the date of the meeting whether this would be possible, based on tonnage data.

Question Submitted by Councillor H. Rone-Clarke

“After announcing plans for the city to be carbon neutral by 2030, myself and Cllr McDonald met with the relevant Birmingham City portfolio holders and identified half a dozen areas of cooperation between our two authorities, including: buses, active transport and country parks. Soon, transport into Birmingham by car will be heavily regulated, meaning residents of Bromsgrove may struggle to get to work. Similarly, citizens of other districts will be incentivised to shop local, due to active transport schemes; this would squeeze our already struggling high street to breaking point.

We don't wish to hear that the council 'already engages' with our neighbours, as our Birmingham counterparts agree that Bromsgrove is failing to keep up.

So, in terms of a promise of concrete action, here and now, how does the administration plan to engage more robustly with our neighbours (including but not limited to Birmingham) in order to ensure Bromsgrove is not left behind?"

The Leader responded by commenting that officers and members sat on many groups across the county and the region where engagement happened, including the Greater Birmingham and Solihull and Worcestershire Local Enterprise Partnerships (GBSLEP and WLEP).

It had recently been announced that there would be £250,000 investment into further bus provision in Bromsgrove to ensure, that the bus and rail networks would work together to allow faster and easier access to the town centre and surrounding areas. The service would make it easier for many residents to access more sustainable modes of transport. This investment in a demand response transport system, followed 2 years of work by the Leader and Deputy Leader, in conjunction with Worcestershire County Council.

Further investment of £17.4 million had been made in the new Bromsgrove Train Station as well as £3.4 million investment in cycling and walking. In addition, there was over £50 million being invested into the A38 improvements for road, cycling and walking in Bromsgrove. In conclusion, the Leader commented that other areas needed to keep up with Bromsgrove.

Question Submitted by Councillor S. Colella

"Can the Leader confirm that BDC is part of both the Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership (GBSLEP) and the Worcestershire Local Enterprise Partnership (WLEP) and whether this is not in contravention of the terms of reference for each LEP?"

The Leader confirmed that the Council was a member of both of these Local Enterprise Partnerships and that this was not in contravention of either organisation's terms of reference.

Question Submitted by Councillor P. McDonald

"With Birmingham City becoming a low emission city what action is being taken by this Council to ensure residents who travel into the city for work and have to use their own transport, will not lose their jobs because of falling foul of the regulations?"

The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Regulatory Services explained that the Council engaged with other authorities on a wide range of matters. The authority, working with Worcestershire County Council, was

investing in a Strategic Transport Assessment which would look at issues such as what was occurring in Birmingham. It was key for the district to make sure that there were opportunities for housing and employment locally to prevent the need for people to travel longer distances to Birmingham and beyond every day. More people living and working locally, using the town and village centres in the District, spending locally and keeping local centres viable and vibrant, was something the Council was committed to. Reducing the number of people who needed to work elsewhere was part of the solution.

Following the Council's recent announcement regarding demand response transport, new cycle ways and walkways, action would be taken to ensure that Bromsgrove residents could access the new train station for a commute into Birmingham.

Birmingham City Council had introduced a levy on vehicles which was designed to address emissions. As a consequence of this, some businesses that were based in Birmingham might consider relocating and there was the possibility that some of these businesses would choose to establish a base in Bromsgrove District.

Question Submitted by Councillor R. Hunter

“How many applications has Bromsgrove District Council received for the £500 Test and Trace Support grant to help people who need to self-isolate? How many of these applications were successful and what were the reasons for any applications being turned down?”

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Enabling explained that there had been a total of 457 applications. For the main scheme in Bromsgrove, 68 applicants had been successful and under the discretionary scheme 68 applicants had been successful. Unfortunately, the majority of applicants had not been successful because they had not met the criteria.

Question Submitted by Councillor J. King

“I wish to congratulate the council on the award of a grant for £50,000 from the Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership (GBSLEP) for use in our town centre. May I ask the leader to outline how it will be spent or, if not decided, to invite creative and positive suggestions from members and other interested parties?”

The Leader responded by advising Council that the bid included several work streams and outputs that had to be delivered in accordance with the grant guidance. Details would be considered once the Funding Agreement was issued by the GBSLEP.

One of the key outputs was for local creative businesses to be commissioned to deliver art and cultural activities in Bromsgrove town centre and the local centres. This aspect of grant guidance was more

flexible. Suggestions from officers in accordance with the grant guidance would be included in the Bromsgrove Centres Action Plan 2021-2022 that was in the process of being drafted by Officers in the North Worcestershire Economic Development Unit (NWEDR), for inclusion in the Cabinet Work Programme. There would be an opportunity for Members to input into this.

The Leader concluded by commenting that the Council welcomed a creative industries and culture led economic recovery that would support the recovery of Bromsgrove town centre and other local centres.

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MOTIONS ON NOTICE

Climate Change

Members considered the following Motion on Notice, submitted by Councillor S. Robinson:

This Council calls on officers to present a report to the Climate Change Working Group by the end of 2021 which shows how Bromsgrove District Council can become carbon neutral by 2030, 2035 and 2040, along with a cost analysis for each proposal.

The Motion was proposed by Councillor S. Robinson and seconded by Councillor R. Hunter.

In proposing the Motion, Councillor Robinson explained that 2 years' previously she had suggested that a Climate Change Working Group should be established at the Council. At the time, Councillor Robinson had chosen not to set a target in respect of reducing emissions in the District and instead it had been agreed that Members would work together to ensure that this was achieved. However, since then, whilst proud of what the Council had already achieved, Councillor Robinson had concluded that targets should have been set.

Councillor Robinson commented that many members of the Climate Change Working Group felt that the group was not doing as much as it could. The group had not been provided with a budget and whilst well intentioned, Councillor Robinson suggested that it could be achieving more than at present. The Motion was not designed to remove the need for the group, or to cut it out from the process. Instead, the Motion compelled officers to work with the group to bring forward options, including information about the financial implications, that could be used to help the Council move forward. The Motion did not commit the Council to a particular date for action but would enable the authority to make changes in the future. Councillor Robinson concluded that the Motion, should it be approved, would provide Bromsgrove District with a useful plan to address climate change moving forward.

In seconding the Motion, Councillor Hunter commented that it was designed to be constructive and to support the work of the Climate

Change Working Group. Councillor Hunter commented that he was proud of all of the work that the Council had already undertaken to tackle climate change; he suggested that the Motion, if approved, would help to accelerate that progress. Officers would be supported by the proposals, as clear timeframes would be provided setting out when particular actions should be taken and milestones achieved. Members were advised that the Climate Change Working Group would benefit from a bit more direction and this Motion would provide that direction. Furthermore, Councillor Hunter suggested that the group needed to meet more frequently in order to have a greater impact on tackling climate change.

Members subsequently discussed the Motion in detail and during this debate the following points were raised:

- The role of the Climate Change Working Group and recent efforts to ensure that the group would meet more frequently than had been the case when it was first established.
- The extent to which the Motion could be considered to undermine the role of the Climate Change Working Group.
- The possibility that the issues raised in the Motion could be addressed at a meeting of the Climate Change Working Group.
- The Government's work to address climate change and the need to reduce emissions by 2030 in order to keep temperature rises at 1.5° C.
- The hard work of the Climate Change Officer and other staff working to address climate change in the District.
- The Council's previous decision to declare a climate emergency and the need to take action to demonstrate the authority's commitment to tackling climate change.
- The approach that had been adopted by other Councils in respect of setting targets to tackle climate change.
- The recent urgent decision that had been taken in respect of decarbonisation funding for the Artrix.
- The other action that was already being taken by the Council to address climate change, including funding for electric vehicle charging points and the introduction of an electric bus service operating between Bromsgrove town centre and the railway station.
- The role and responsibilities that the Council had invested in the Climate Change Working Group.
- The cross-party arrangements in place for the Climate Change Working Group.
- The potential benefits arising from having a plan in place in respect of tackling climate change.

On being put to the vote the Motion was lost.

The meeting closed at 9.30 p.m.

Chairman