

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MEETING OF THE COUNCIL

29TH SEPTEMBER 2021, AT 6.00 P.M.

PRESENT: Councillors A. J. B. Beaumont (Vice-Chairman, in the Chair), S. J. Baxter, R. J. Deeming, S. P. Douglas, A. B. L. English, C.A. Hotham, R. J. Hunter, R. E. Jenkins (from Minute Item No. 38/21), H. J. Jones, A. D. Kent, J. E. King, L. C. R. Mallett, K.J. May, M. Middleton, P. M. McDonald, S. A. Robinson, H. D. N. Rone-Clarke, P.L. Thomas, M. Thompson, J. Till, S. A. Webb and P. J. Whittaker

Observers: Mr M. Nock

Officers: Mr. K. Dicks, J Howse, Mrs. C. Felton and Mrs. J. Bayley-Hill

31\21 **TO RECEIVE APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors S. Colella, G. Denaro, M. Glass, S. Hession, A. Kriss, R. Laight, M. Sherrey, C. Spencer and K. Van Der Plank.

In the absence of the Chairman the Vice Chairman, Councillor A. Beaumont, chaired the meeting.

32\21 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor M. Thompson declared a pecuniary interest in Minute Item No.s 38/21 – 40/21 – Recommendations from the Cabinet, Background papers for Cabinet and minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 15th September 2021. This pecuniary interest related to his employer, Bromsgrove School, which had been one of the organisations providing a financial contribution to support, and would benefit from, the Detailed Design Phase of the Zero Carbon Heat Network project of the Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) Heat Network Delivery Unit (HNDU). He left the room during consideration of these items and took no part in the debate or voting thereon.

33\21 **TO CONFIRM THE ACCURACY OF THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COUNCIL HELD ON 14TH JULY 2021**

The minutes of the meeting of Council held on Wednesday 14th July 2021 were submitted.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of Council held on Wednesday 14th July 2021 be approved as a true and correct record.

34\21

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

The Vice Chairman advised that sadly former District Councillors, Katie Gall and Jean Hancox, had passed away during the summer. In addition, former Parish Councillor, Dean Smith, who had filmed many Council meetings over the years, had also died since the previous meeting of Council. The Vice Chairman led Members in paying tribute to the former District Councillors by observing a minute's silence.

During consideration of this item, the Vice Chairman explained that Council wanted to make reference to the recent Olympic and Paralympic Games in Tokyo and that he understood that all Group Leaders had met and wanted the Council to collectively acknowledge with pride the excellent achievements where Team GB came fourth and second respectively in the medal tables.

The Vice Chairman asked Council to resolve to congratulate all Olympians and Paralympians on their fantastic achievements at this year's games and to record the authority's particular pride in the contribution and achievements of all of the athletes and support team from the District who took part, including Paralympian, Ms Lauren Rowles, who achieved her second gold medal during the summer.

Members were advised that the Chairman would write to Ms Rowles extending the Council's congratulations.

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

35\21

TO RECEIVE ANY ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM THE LEADER

The Leader advised that she had no announcements to make on this occasion.

36\21

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

The Chairman informed Council that no questions, comments or petitions had been received from members of the public on this occasion.

37\21

URGENT DECISIONS

Members were advised that no urgent decisions had been taken since the previous meeting of Council.

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE CABINET

Zero Carbon Heat Network

The Portfolio Holder for Leisure, Cultural Services and Community Safety presented a report on the subject of the Zero Carbon Heat Network. Members were advised that the Council was in the process of working on the development of a heat network which would initially be sited in Bromsgrove town centre.

Council had previously agreed to launch a heat network in Bromsgrove in 2019 and in 2020 the Council had secured £227,500 towards the detailed design phase of the project from the Government. This had been matched by funding from Bromsgrove District Council, Bromsgrove School and the Worcestershire Health and Care NHS Trust. Since that time, the Government had made some changes to the process, including in respect of the requirement for a Zero Carbon Heat Network. The recommendations from Cabinet were designed to address these changes.

During consideration of this item, an amendment was proposed to the fourth recommendation on the subject of the Zero Carbon Heat Network. The amendment was proposed by Councillor P. McDonald and seconded by Councillor L. Mallett.

The amendment was as follows:

“To ensure that the membership of the Zero Carbon Heat Network project board is truly representative, the state schools in Bromsgrove town centre and Bromsgrove District Housing Trust (BDHT) should have representatives on the board.”

In proposing the amendment, Councillor McDonald commented that he welcomed news about the Zero Carbon Heat Network. However, he expressed concerns that no state schools would be represented alongside the private Bromsgrove School on the project board. Members were also asked to note that it was important to ensure that residents' housing needs were met in delivering the project and BDHT would therefore be an invaluable partner on the board.

In seconding the amendment, Councillor Mallett commented that it was important to ensure that the most appropriate organisations were represented on the project board at the feasibility study stage. Councillor Mallett raised concerns about the rationale for a representative being appointed from Bromsgrove School to the project board. He suggested that it would be sensible to appoint representatives from a state school and BDHT to the project board.

Members discussed the amendment in some detail and in so doing commented on the following:

- The rationale for the original choice of organisations that would be represented on the project board. Members noted that Bromsgrove School was represented because the school grounds would be the site of the bore hole for the network.
- The organisations that had contributed funding to the project and whether they were all represented on the project board.
- The extent to which the Zero Carbon Heat Network would benefit houses in the initial stages of the project.
- The role of the project board. Council was advised that the project board would oversee the work of the project manager and the feasibility study and ensure that the project was delivered in budget.
- Members were advised that any proposals for a Zero Carbon Heat Network which might arise from the feasibility work would be subject to a full business case and recommendations to Cabinet and Council as appropriate.
- The previous discussions in respect of the Heat Network that had taken place at meetings of the Climate Change Working Group and the extent to which proposals in respect of the project board differed from what had been discussed by that group.
- The discussions in respect of the Heat Network that had been held at a previous meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board. Members noted that this discussion had not taken place in recent months.

In accordance with Procedure Rules 18.3 a recorded vote was taken and the voting was as follows:

Members voting FOR the amendment:

Councillors S. Douglas, A. English, C. Hotham, J. King, L. Mallett, P. McDonald and H. Rone-Clarke (7).

Members voting AGAINST the amendment:

Councillors S. Baxter, A. Beaumont, R. Deeming, R. Hunter, H. Jones, A. Kent, K. May, M. Middleton, S. Robinson, P. Thomas, J. Till, S. Webb and P. Whittaker (13).

Members voting to ABSTAIN on the amendment:

Councillor R. Jenkins (1).

On being put to the vote the amendment was therefore lost.

The proposals detailed in the report and recommendations from Cabinet were subsequently discussed. Members commented that it was important for the project board to seriously consider how engagement would be undertaken with interested parties whilst working on the project. It was suggested that there would be significant value attached to engaging with the wider community at the business case stage.

Council was informed that the project board would be engaging with partners and took this very seriously.

The recommendations were proposed by Councillor P. Thomas and seconded by Councillor K. May.

RESOLVED that

- 1) The Zero Carbon Heat Network (ZCHN) project pursues the concession route to market;
- 2) Delegated authority be given to the Head of Community and Housing Services and the Head of Legal, Democratic and Property Services to procure and agree the Concession Agreement with qualifying energy companies;
- 3) Green Heat Network Funding is utilised to fund this route to market; and
- 4) A project board, to assist the Project Manager, be established under the terms of reference.

(Prior to the debate on this item, Councillor M. Thompson declared a pecuniary interest on the grounds that his employer, Bromsgrove School, had been one of the organisations providing a financial contribution to support, and would benefit from, the Detailed Design Phase of the Project from the Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) Heat Network Delivery Unit (HNDU). He left the room during consideration of this item and took no part in the debate or voting thereon.)

39\21

BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON THE RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE CABINET

Council noted the background information that had been provided in respect of the Zero Carbon Heat Network report which had been considered at the Cabinet meeting held on 15th September 2021.

40\21

TO NOTE THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE CABINET HELD ON 15TH SEPTEMBER 2021

Members considered the Minutes of the meeting of Cabinet held on Wednesday 15th September 2021.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of Cabinet held on Wednesday 15th September 2021 be noted.

41\21

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

The Vice Chairman explained that 3 Questions on Notice had been received for consideration at the meeting. These questions would be considered in the order in which they had been received. A total of 15 minutes had been allocated to consideration of the Questions on Notice

and answers to these questions and no supplementary questions would be permitted.

Question submitted by Councillor J. King

“Refugees in Bromsgrove

We all welcome the very generous support which Bromsgrove residents are giving to the newly arrived refugees from Afghanistan and other countries. The response to a recent Collections Day was magnificent with sufficient donations of new items of clothing, toiletries and toys received to make up hundreds of welcome packs.

The biggest challenge now is to find good quality affordable private rented accommodation for our resettled Afghani refugees. How is the council

supporting the call for suitable housing and work with local private landlords and the refugee unit led by Natasha White at Worcestershire County Council to find the accommodation which is needed?”

The Portfolio Holder for Housing and Health and Wellbeing responded by explaining that the Council was working proactively with Worcestershire County Council and all the other Worcestershire Districts with regard to refugees.

Worcestershire Leaders had signed up to:

- The UK Resettlement Scheme (UKRS) – and were committed to resettling a further 50 people into the community over the following 12 months.
- The Afghan Relocation and Assistance Policy (ARAP) – this included local allies’, such as interpreters’, priority relocation to the UK. Worcestershire Leaders had committed to resettling 30 people, with the first family arriving the week commencing 13th September 2021.
- A new scheme: the Afghan Citizens’ Resettlement Scheme (ACRS). The Government had committed to relocating up to 20,000 people nationally over the following 5 years, subject to continued funding under this scheme.

In addition, the Leaders had pledged a commitment to the ACRS scheme to resettle some 200 people over the following 5 years, which mirrored the previous percentage commitment for the other programmes. Initially this would amount to 2 properties per district, depending on the number of family members.

Officers in Strategic Housing were working closely with colleagues at Worcestershire County Council and BDHT to identify suitable and appropriate properties to accommodate refugees.

Question submitted by Councillor R. Hunter

“Please could you explain how the new Bromsgrove on Demand bus service is funded and how you plan to ensure its long term sustainability?”

The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Regulatory Services explained that in respect of the sustainability of the service the timing of the question was apt. At a recent meeting of Worcestershire County Council's Cabinet Members had considered a report on the subject of improving bus services in the county. This report, on the subject of the Bus Improvement Plan, would help to ensure that services in Worcestershire met the needs of local residents.

Public transport had historically been a challenge in terms of providing a service to rural communities. However, there was a need to reduce carbon emissions and public transport could help to achieve this objective. The new Worcestershire on Demand Service, which was being trialled in Bromsgrove District and funded by Worcestershire County Council, was helping to address this challenge. The original concept for the Worcestershire on Demand Service had been to provide a bus service directly between Bromsgrove Railway Station and Bromsgrove town centre. However, since the launch of the service, the potential had far exceeded this initial vision. Over 1,000 customers had signed up to the scheme and a lot of positive feedback had been received, with the service having achieved a 4.7 star rating. The Worcestershire on Demand Service had helped customers travel to and from rural locations into Bromsgrove town centre. Elderly customers and people with physical disabilities could be collected by the service from the bottom of their drives. Young people had also made use of a relatively affordable form of transport to travel to and from work and college.

Future ideas under consideration included the introduction of cycle racks on the buses. Bromsgrove District Council had a budget that could be used to invest in the future infrastructure of local bus services. However, to ensure its sustainability, it was important for residents to continue to use the service. Members could assist by helping to promote the service to their residents.

Question submitted by Councillor S. Robinson

“Could the portfolio holder please agree to look into the possibility and associated costs of providing 2 hours free car parking for Blue Badge holders in BDC car parks, with a view of making a change to the current parking order and car parking strategy for financial year 2022-2023?”

The Leader responded by advising that the Council already offered all Blue Badge holders an extra hour of free parking at the authority's car parks in addition to the length of stay purchased on their ticket. The charge for Blue Badge holders helped to fund the cost of the

Shopmobility service. Previous work undertaken on this showed that the estimated loss of income for the Council could be up to £85,000 per year. Given the challenging financial situation, the Leader explained that she did not believe that this was something that the Council could consider at the present time.

42\21

MOTIONS ON NOTICE

The Vice Chairman explained that 2 Motions on Notice had been received for consideration at the meeting. Prior to the meeting, the Group Leaders had met and agreed the first Motion that had been submitted by Councillor Till. Therefore, the Motion would not be debated during the meeting.

Cabinet – Size and Composition

Members considered the following Motion on Notice submitted by Councillor P. McDonald:

“Recognising the financial challenges facing the Council and its communities and the additional financial pressures that Covid presents I would like to call on the leader to reconsider the size and make up of her Cabinet in the coming budget round to ensure that the Councils is effectively allocating its resources.”

The Motion was proposed by Councillor P. McDonald and seconded by Councillor H. Rone-Clarke.

In proposing the Motion, Councillor McDonald commented that since the previous meeting of Council, a new Portfolio Holder position, taking a lead on tackling climate change, had been introduced on the Cabinet. Councillor McDonald noted that it was important for the Council to take action to tackle climate change, however, he expressed the view that climate change should underpin the work of all Portfolio Holders in relation to every service area. Members were asked to note that Portfolio Holders received Special Responsibility Allowances (SRAs) for their position of £6,045, in addition to the basic allowances of £4,650 which all Members received, so the introduction of this new post had financial implications for the Council. In addition, Councillor McDonald commented that instead of this appointment, the Council could be investing in charging points for electric vehicles, solar panels for Council buildings and electric or hybrid vehicles that could be used for Council business. He concluded by commenting that he did not feel comfortable with the way that the appointment had been announced outside of a formal meeting environment.

In seconding the Motion, Councillor Rone-Clarke detailed the reasons for his opposition to the appointment of an additional Portfolio Holder serving on the Cabinet. Councillor Rone-Clarke expressed concerns about the way in which the appointment had been made. He questioned whether this indicated that the Portfolio Holder for Environmental

Services, who previously had responsibility for tackling climate change, had had too much to do and, if so, the reasons why it had taken 2 years for this to be addressed. Members were asked to note Councillor Rone-Clarke's support for measures that tackled climate change, but he commented that he would prefer a radical green new deal to the appointment of a Portfolio Holder for Climate Change.

The Leader responded to the proposed Motion by explaining that the Council was required by law to have a Cabinet. As Leader, she was responsible for making arrangements to discharge functions which fell to the Cabinet. Legally, the Leader could appoint up to 8 Members on her Cabinet and she was responsible for determining the number of areas of political responsibility or 'portfolios' that she believed were needed. Council had determined a number of strategic priorities within the Council Plan and the Leader had chosen to align the Portfolios to mirror this decision. Unless the Council determined that the priorities that the authority had set needed to change, the Leader was not minded to alter the focus in delivering them.

During consideration of this item, a Point of Order was raised by Councillor L. Mallett questioning whether the Portfolio Holder for Climate Change should remain present during the debate. The Monitoring Officer explained that the Motion was in respect of the number of members on the Cabinet not the individual Cabinet members. In this context, no Members were considered to have a conflict of interest in terms of their participation in the debate on this subject.

On being put to the vote the Motion was lost.

The meeting closed at 7.18 p.m.

Chairman