

**BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**MEETING OF THE COUNCIL**

**26TH JANUARY 2022, 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, R. J. Hunter, R. E. Jenkins, J. E. King, A. D. Kriss, 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

Officers: Mr. K. Dicks, Mrs. S. Hanley, J Howse, Mrs. C. Felton, Mr D Riley, Mrs. J. Bayley-Hill and J Gresham

70\21      **TO RECEIVE APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors S. Baxter, A. Kent, L. Mallett and S. Robinson.

71\21      **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor P. Whittaker declared a pecuniary interest in Minute Item No. 80/21 – Recommendations from the Cabinet – Council Tax Empty Homes Discounts and Premiums - as he owned a property that had been or would have been vacant for two or more years by 1<sup>st</sup> April 2022. He left the room during consideration of that item and took no part in the debate or vote thereon.

72\21      **TO CONFIRM THE ACCURACY OF THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COUNCIL HELD ON 1ST DECEMBER 2021**

The minutes of the Council meeting held on 1<sup>st</sup> December 2021 were submitted.

With reference to Minute Item No. 67/21, Councillor S. Douglas clarified that her question to the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Board, consideration of which had been postponed from the previous meeting of Council, was on the subject of fireworks.

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the Council meeting held on 1<sup>st</sup> December 2021 be approved as a true and correct record.

73\21      **TO RECEIVE ANY ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM THE CHAIRMAN AND/OR HEAD OF PAID SERVICE**

The Chairman advised that on Thursday 27<sup>th</sup> January 2022 there would be events dedicated to the international Holocaust Memorial Day. In

Bromsgrove, a service was scheduled to take place at 11am in Sanders Park. All Members were invited to attend this service, which would also be attended by the Queen's representative, Deputy Lieutenant Sir Nicholas Lechmere and representatives of a number of local schools.

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

74\21 **TO RECEIVE ANY ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM THE LEADER**

There were no announcements from the Leader on this occasion.

75\21 **TO RECEIVE COMMENTS, QUESTIONS OR PETITIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC**

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

76\21 **URGENT DECISIONS**

Members were informed that there had been no urgent decisions taken since the previous Council meeting.

77\21 **CHANGES TO COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP**

The Leader advised that Councillor M. Glass was replacing Councillor P. Thomas on the Planning Committee and Councillor P. Thomas was replacing Councillor A. Kent on the Worcestershire Regulatory Services (WRS) Board. Council was also informed that, as previously communicated to Members, Councillor G. Denaro had been appointed as Deputy Leader of the Council.

78\21 **INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL RECOMMENDATIONS 2022/23**

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Enabling presented the recommendations from the Independent Remuneration Panel (IRP) concerning Members' allowances in 2022/23 and in doing so thanked the Panel for their hard work in difficult circumstances during the pandemic.

Members were asked to note that, based on information provided by local authorities in Worcestershire, Bromsgrove Members were paid the lowest per head of population. However, when comparisons were made based on revenue expenditure by Council, Bromsgrove allowances ranked in the middle of the table.

Having considered the report in detail, the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Enabling was proposing to increase the basic allowance for Councillors by 1.75 per cent, as recommended by the IRP. This would increase the basic allowance to £4,732 per annum. In addition, he

proposed the IRP's recommendations that Members' travel allowances should be paid in accordance with the HMRC mileage allowance, that subsistence allowances and dependant carers' allowances should remain unchanged and that where paid, travel and subsistence allowances for Parish Councillors should be in accordance with those paid to District Councillors. However, Members were asked to note that the IRP's second recommendation, in respect of the Special Responsibility Allowances (SRAs) paid to particular Members for certain roles, would not be supported on this occasion.

The recommendations were proposed by Councillor G. Denaro and seconded by Councillor K. May.

**RESOLVED** that

- 1) the Basic Allowance for 2022-23 is £4,732, representing a 1.75% increase;
- 2) travel allowances for 2022-23 continue to be paid in accordance with the HMRC mileage allowance;
- 3) subsistence allowances for 2022-23 remain unchanged;
- 4) the Dependent Carer's Allowance remains unchanged; and
- 5) for Parish Councils in the District, if travel and subsistence is paid, the Panel recommends that it is paid in accordance with the rates paid by District Council and in accordance with the relevant Regulations.

79\21

**TO RECEIVE AND CONSIDER A REPORT FROM THE PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES AND COMMUNITY SAFETY**

Council received a report concerning the work that had been undertaken by the authority within the remit of the Portfolio Holder for Environmental Services and Community Safety. The Chairman advised that, due to the recent changes to Portfolio remits amongst members of the Cabinet, a decision had been taken to only present information in respect of Environmental Services at this stage. A further Portfolio Holder report would follow later in the year on the subject of Community Safety.

The Portfolio Holder for Environmental Services and Community Safety presented the report and in so doing highlighted the following points for Members' consideration:

- Staff employed at the depot had worked incredibly hard throughout the pandemic to ensure the continuation of service delivery. The Portfolio Holder for Environmental Services and Community Safety thanked them for their hard work at this difficult time.

- The Council was working closely with Wyre Forest District Council in respect of tackling fly tipping and taking legal action against people who committed fly tipping.
- There had been an increase in the overall tonnage of waste collected during the pandemic. This was primarily due to the fact that more people had been working from home and so the rubbish that would usually have been disposed of at work was being placed in residential bins.
- There had been an increase in the amount of items placed in recycling bins that had been rejected at the EnviroSort facility. However, the proportion of items that were rejected out of the total number of items recycled was broadly similar to previous years, at 14 per cent.
- Nationally, there was a rejection rate in respect of articles placed in recycling bins of between 5 and 25 per cent.
- The costs of handling items that had been rejected at EnviroSort were covered by Worcestershire County Council as the Waste Disposal Authority for the county.

During consideration of this item the following issues relating to Environmental Services were debated by Members:

- The action that was being taken to prosecute people who committed fly tipping and the extent to which the Council could publicise this action in order to deter other people from fly tipping. Members were advised that those found guilty of fly tipping would be named and shamed. This action had already started to have a positive impact, with the number of reported offences having declined from 196 in January 2020 to 60 in January 2022.
- The reasons why an external energy savings consultant had been used to review arrangements for procuring a new, decarbonised fleet and the potential for an outline report on this subject to be circulated for Members' consideration. The Portfolio Holder for Environmental Services and Community Safety requested that this question be put to her in writing and explained that a response would then be provided in writing. Members were asked to note that decarbonisation of the Council fleet had been discussed at a recent meeting of the Climate Change Working Group.
- The number of staff working at the depot who had received training to secure an HGV driving license. Members were advised that three members of staff had received training and there were other members of staff who already had an HGV driving license. It was confirmed that opportunities to obtain an HGV driving license were provided to staff in the waste collection team.
- The report in respect of water course maintenance referenced in the update. The Portfolio Holder for Environmental Services and Community Safety confirmed that this report would be shared with Councillor R. Hunter, Chairman of the Flooding Task Group. Members were also advised that this report would be pre-scrutinised at a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board.

- The possible changes that might be required to the Garden Waste Collection service, subject to forthcoming legislative changes that were being considered by the Government, and the potential for an update to be provided to Members on this subject as soon as possible.
- The relatively quick timescales in which staff acted to address reports of fly tipping in the District.
- The successful partnership bid with Wyre Forest District Council to the West Mercia Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) for support for landowners dealing with fly tipping on their land and the potential for information about this scheme to be shared with Members. Council was informed that it might be possible to share information on this subject at a later date.
- The potential for the Garden Waste Collection Service to be extended to operate for a longer period of time in the year. Members commented that the service had been provided in different months during the pandemic and it was noted that Members had received favourable feedback about this approach to service delivery from many residents. The Portfolio Holder for Environmental Services and Community Safety commented that Officers would be asked to investigate this matter further.
- The recent reports in the local press about items being placed in the recycling bins that could not be recycled and the financial costs associated with this. Members commented that often people placed items in recycling bins because they thought they could be recycled and it was important to note that Bromsgrove District Council did not need to cover the costs in these circumstances, because this was the responsibility of Worcestershire County Council.
- The information that was provided to the public on Bromsgrove District Council's website regarding the items that could be recycled and those articles that would be rejected, such as black plastic.
- The recent issues that had been reported in parts of the District, whereby some customers using the Garden Waste Collection service had received two bills for the service. Council was informed that two bills had been issued in error and had later been recalled. Customers had been sent updated invoices and an apology for the error.
- The increase in the tonnage of waste that had been reported in Bromsgrove District during the pandemic. Members were informed that this was consistent with increases nationally during the period.

80\21

### **RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE CABINET (TO FOLLOW)**

#### **Bromsgrove Response to South Staffordshire Preferred Option Local Plan**

The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Regulatory Services presented the Council's proposed response to South Staffordshire Council's Preferred Option Local Plan.

South Staffordshire Council had identified that there would be a need for a total of 4,000 houses to be developed in the Greater Birmingham and Black Country Housing Market Area (GBHMA). Whilst the figure was welcomed, Bromsgrove District Council would adopt a different method to calculate this figure when the Council's approach to the Bromsgrove Local Plan was published later in the year.

During consideration of this item, reference was made to the outcomes of the discussions that had been held with representatives of other Councils in the GBHMA area on 15<sup>th</sup> December 2021. Council was informed that there had been no further representations made as a result of that meeting and this had been reported for Members' consideration at a meeting of the Strategic Planning Steering Group.

The recommendation was proposed by Councillor P. Thomas and seconded by Councillor K. May.

**RESOLVED** that the Council endorse the officer response to the South Staffordshire Local Plan and that it is confirmed with South Staffordshire Council as such.

### **Bromsgrove District Council Car Parks – Adoption of Cashless Payments and Operational Procedures for Recreation Road South Car Park and Churchfields Multi-Storey Car Park**

The Leader presented a report on the subject of the adoption of a cashless payment system and operational procedures for this system in Council owned car parks in Bromsgrove. The residents who had taken part in the Council's survey on this subject were thanked for their time and contributions. Based on the feedback that had been received, a cash payment system would remain available to customers alongside a cashless option at all of the car parks except for Churchfields multi-storey car park, due to concerns about the potential for a machine to be the target of anti-social behaviour.

Reference was made to the potential for signage to be situated in the car parks to enable customers to locate the cash payment machines where required. Council was informed that clear signage would be made available in the car parks for this purpose.

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

**RESOLVED** that a reduced Budget, as shown in 3.1 - Budget Comparisons Table, be amended as part of the medium-term financial plan review.

### **Council Tax Empty Homes Discount and Premiums**

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Enabling presented a report on the subject of Council Tax Empty Homes Discounts and Premiums. Members were advised that the recommendation was proposing changes to the level of Council Tax discount, and the implementation of premiums for long-term empty properties. There were three areas where the Council had discretion, and the recommendation would determine the level of discount for each of these classes of property from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2022.

There were properties classified as second homes, which were dwellings which were furnished and which were no one person's sole or main residence. There were two classes of second home; Class A and Class B. No changes were proposed for second homes, and the Council would continue to apply a zero per cent discount, as had been the case since April 2013. However, the recommendation had been amended at Cabinet to reflect a typographical error in the report and to clarify that Class B referred to second homes with no planning restrictions.

Vacant Homes were those properties which were unoccupied and substantially unfurnished. There were two classes of vacant home – Class D which were properties that required major repair works to make them habitable and Class C which were all other vacant dwellings.

Under the proposals, Class D properties would continue to receive a 100% discount. However, the level of discount for Class C properties would be amended. The current discount applied to these homes was 50% for six months followed by zero per cent thereafter. For new homes, a graduated discount was applied of 100% for three months, followed by 50% for the following three months. Under the proposals, the graduated discount for new homes would be removed and these properties would receive the standard vacant home discount. The discount for vacant homes would be set at 100% for the first 30 days the property was empty. This recommendation was amended at Cabinet from 14 days to 30 days, following discussions at a meeting of the Finance and Budget Working Group, where concerns had been raised about the relatively short length of time available to property owners if 14 days applied. After 30 days, the discount would be zero per cent. A discount of 100% would be applied to vacant homes owned by a local housing authority and used for the provision of social housing.

The final area for which changes were recommended was the level of premium applied to long-term empty homes. Long-term empty homes were those which had been vacant for two years or longer. It was recommended that the full premium should be applied for these properties from April 2022.

Following the presentation of the report, Members noted that this subject had previously been raised in a Motion on Notice at Council. Members agreed that this was an area of concern because of the demand for housing in the District and Members agreed that it was important to

provide as many housing options as possible to meet the needs of local residents. There were over 400 properties in the District that were empty and therefore any action that could be taken to release these properties for housing would be welcomed.

During consideration of this item, Members noted that there had been a typographical error in the list of recommendations circulated in the supplementary pack for the Council meeting in relation to the discount for vacant homes. However, Members noted that Cabinet had agreed at a meeting held on 19<sup>th</sup> January 2022 that the discount should apply for 30 days and not 14 days.

Reference was made to the length of time that long-term vacant properties would need to be vacant in order for a premium to start to apply and questions were raised about whether it should be specified that a premium of 100 per cent would apply to properties that had been vacant for between two and five years. Members also suggested that a definition could be provided in the resolution in respect of what constituted a “long-term vacant property”. However, Officers explained that the legislative requirements with respect to both Council Tax discounts and premiums were very specific and technical. For this reason, it was suggested that the wording should remain as printed in the Cabinet minutes.

Consideration was also given to the types of properties that were classified as Class C vacant dwellings. It was suggested that people who owned properties in Class C might need to spend time making those properties fit for habitation and that the removal of a Council Tax discount after 30 days could disincentivise landlords from taking this action. However, it was also commented that a 100 per cent discount up to 30 days was more generous than the previous scheme.

Concerns were raised about the proportion of affordable houses available to residents living in the District. Whilst action to tackle vacant homes was welcomed, Members commented that further action needed to be taken to increase the availability of affordable homes in the District to meet demand.

The recommendations were proposed by Councillor G. Denaro and seconded by Councillor K. May.

**RESOLVED** that

- 1) From 1<sup>st</sup> April 2022 the level of Council Tax discount to be applied under Section 11A (4) and Section 11A (4A) for each class of dwellings as defined by The Council Tax (Prescribed Classes of Dwellings) (England) Regulations 2003 (as amended) will be:

Class A [“second homes with a planning restriction”] 0%: no discount



Class B ["second homes without a planning restriction"] 0%: no discount

Class C ["vacant dwellings"]

- a. Where the dwelling has been unoccupied and unfurnished for a continuous period of not more than 30 days - 100% discount
- b. Where the dwelling has been unoccupied and unfurnished for more than 30 days - 0%: no discount.
- c. Where the dwelling is
  - i. unoccupied and substantially unfurnished; and
  - ii. the owner of the dwelling is a local housing authority; and
  - iii. when next in use the dwelling will be occupied under the provisions of the Housing act 1985

100% discount.

Owner will be defined by reference to section 6(5) and 6(6) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 .

For the purposes of Class C when considering whether a dwelling falls within the description any period of occupation, not exceeding 6 weeks, during which it was not unoccupied and substantially unfurnished shall be disregarded.

Class D ["dwellings requiring major repair works"] - 100% discount

- 2) From 1<sup>st</sup> April 2022 the additional council tax premium applied under section 11B of the LGFA '92, for long-term empty dwellings will be
  - i) For a dwelling that has been a long-term empty dwelling for less than 5 years – 100% premium
  - ii) For a dwelling that has been a long-term empty dwelling for 5 years or more, but less than 10 years – 200% premium
  - iii) For a dwelling that has been a long-term empty dwelling for at least 10 years – 300% premium
- 3) The Head of Financial and Customer Services on a case-by-case basis may consider a reduction to the long-term empty premium.

(Prior to consideration of this item, Councillor P. Whittaker declared a pecuniary interest as he owned a property that had been or would have

been vacant for two or more years by 1<sup>st</sup> April 2022. He left the room and took no part in the debate or vote thereon.)

### **Worcestershire Regulatory Services Board – Budget Recommendations**

The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Regulatory Services presented recommendations that had been made at a meeting of the Worcestershire Regulatory Services (WRS) Board held in November 2021 on the subject of the service's budget in the 2022/23 financial year.

The recommendations were proposed by Councillor P. Thomas and seconded by Councillor G. Denaro.

**RESOLVED** that the following be approved for 2022/2023:

- a) the 2022/23 gross expenditure budget of £3,891k.
- b) the 2022/23 income budget of 634k.
- c) the revenue budget and partner percentage allocations for 2022/2023 onwards:

<b>Council</b>	<b>£'000</b>	<b>Revised %</b>
Bromsgrove District Council	475	14.55

- d) the additional partner liabilities for 2022/2023 in relation to unavoidable salary pressure:

<b>Council</b>	<b>£'000</b>
Bromsgrove District Council	12

- e) the additional partner liabilities for 2022/2023 in relation to hosting costs:

<b>Council</b>	<b>Increase in Rent £000</b>	<b>Increase in ICT Hosting £000</b>	<b>Increase in Support Hosting £000</b>
Bromsgrove District Council	1	2	1

- f) the additional partner liabilities for 2022/23 in relation to three Technical Officers.

<b>Council</b>	<b>Tech Officer Income Generation £000</b>	<b>Tech Officer Animal Activity £000</b>	<b>Tech Officer Gull Control £000</b>
Bromsgrove District Council	5	7	

### **Fees and Charges 2022/23**

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Enabling presented the Fees and Charges report 2022/23. In general, an increase of 5 per cent had been proposed for most of the Council's fees and charges, although there were some exceptions to this. The Finance and Budget Working Group were thanked for their hard work in scrutinising the proposed fees and charges. The group had interviewed Officers about the proposed fees and had made useful suggestions which had been taken into account.

Following the presentation of the report, reference was made to the fees and charges for gambling licenses and questions were raised about how these fees were set and whether this funding was allocated to the Council or directly to WRS. Council was informed that many of the fees for services provided by WRS were statutory and therefore the Council could not determine the level at which these were set. In addition, Members were informed that the income was allocated directly to WRS as part of Bromsgrove District Council's financial contribution to the shared service.

Consideration was also given to the fees for car parking and questions were raised about whether consideration had been given to phasing in these fees in order to encourage visitors to stay for longer in town. Council was advised that the fees for car parking had not been increased since 2010 and this would help to encourage people to continue to visit Bromsgrove.

Concerns were raised about increasing the Council's fees and charges by 5 per cent at a time when residents' household bills were also increasing. However, it was also noted that the income generated from fees and charges was reinvested in Council services and this benefited local residents.

The recommendations were proposed by Councillor G. Denaro and seconded by Councillor K. May.

**RESOLVED** that the proposed fees and charges 2022 – 23 be approved.

81\21

**TO NOTE THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE CABINET HELD ON 19TH JANUARY 2022 (TO FOLLOW)**

The minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 19<sup>th</sup> January 2022 were noted.

82\21

**QUESTIONS ON NOTICE**

The Chairman explained that six Questions on Notice had been received for consideration at the meeting and would be considered in the order in which they had been submitted. A maximum of 15 minutes was allocated to consideration of these questions and the answers provided and there were no supplementary questions.

**Question submitted by Councillor S. Douglas**

“Can the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Board update council on the progress that has been made with the scrutiny of fireworks, which occurred following Councillor Hunter’s submission of a Motion on this subject in December 2020?”

The Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Board responded by explaining that the Motion from Councillor Hunter that was submitted to Council in December 2020 had been discussed initially at a meeting of the Board on 11<sup>th</sup> January 2021. During this meeting, Members had discussed the Motion and eventually agreed that further information should be requested from a relevant source before deciding whether or not further investigation was required. This proposal was seconded by Councillor Douglas. At the meeting of the Board held on 26<sup>th</sup> April 2021 there was a further discussion of this subject.

During the April meeting of the Board, Members received a report on the subject of fireworks. This reported that the Council was undertaking a procurement process and would take into account issues such as the noise of fireworks at Council-run events. The Board was also informed that the Council always issued communications in relation to any Council-run events and aimed to avoid holding fireworks events on the same night as other organisations to minimise disruption to the community.

There was no firework event in Bromsgrove Town Centre in 2021 due to concern about potential Covid-19 transmission and instead an Illuminating Autumn event took place in Sanders Park. The Board therefore had not discussed the matter again in 2021. However, the Board were due to discuss the matter further in March 2022. Councillor Douglas was advised that she would be very welcome to attend this meeting. The Chairman of the Board also offered to share copies of the minutes of the previous Board meetings with Councillor Douglas together with a copy of the report that was considered at the meeting held in April 2021.

**Question submitted by Councillor R. Hunter**

“Street Name Plates

What is Council’s policy on timescales for the replacement of missing street name plates? How long should the maximum waiting time be?”

The Portfolio Holder for Environmental Services and Community Safety responded by explaining that there had never been a timescale agreed for the replacement of Street Name Plates. The process that the Engineering Team followed was that once a report was received, an inspection was undertaken to establish what was required as it could mean re-erecting the existing sign or a completely new sign might be needed. If a new sign was found to be required, subject to the budget being available, an order was placed with the approved manufacturer. (At this stage delivery times could vary dependant on their workload). Once the sign had been delivered, the Council’s Minor Works Team could plan for the installation. (Again, at this stage the timing of this would depend on the volume of work that the Minor Works Team had and the urgency of that work).

Council was asked to note that during the Covid restrictions, this work was somewhat delayed, as the Minor Works Team were heavily engaged on other Health and Safety and Covid related issues and helping to ensure important Council Services were maintained. The Minor Works Team were concentrating on clearing the backlog of new street name plates awaiting erection, and all were programmed to be in place by the end of January. With a return to normality with the Council’s working arrangements, post Covid, any future issues with Street Name Plates could be addressed with greater efficiency.

**Question submitted by Councillor J. King**

“Local Heritage List

When will Council finalise and publish a local heritage list, which identifies the location of heritage assets valued by the community and defines their significance, in order to protect them from being lost or damaged?”

The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Regulatory Services responded by explaining that the conservation team were working on the Local List but progress had been delayed by the corporate land registry project, although Officers were in a position to now focus fully on the list. Unfortunately, one of the conservation officers had left the Council the previous Friday. The intention was to replace this officer as soon as possible. The primary focus of the new officer’s role would be to progress the list, splitting up the task on a parish-by-parish basis. Where there were no parishes, the Council would use the non-parishad area as if it were a parish to help better manage the task. Officers continued to work hard on identifying non-designated heritage assets

through the development management process, and this was helping to protect valuable assets from any harm.

**Question submitted by Councillor S. Robinson**

Councillor R. Hunter asked the following question on behalf of Councillor Robinson:

“This council declared a climate emergency over two years ago. Could the portfolio holder please update council on what steps have been taken to replace BDC’s diesel-fuelled vans and fleet with the far more sustainable electric alternative vans? Additionally, how will the legacy diesel vehicles be disposed of in a sustainable way, that also delivers value for money to the taxpayer?”

The Portfolio Holder for Leisure, Culture and Climate Change responded by commenting that Officers had been working with the Energy Savings Trust, which had undertaken an investigation and produced a general report on the Council’s current fleet considering both the possible savings in carbon emissions and funding. Alternative fuelled vehicles were an emerging technology and with the information available currently, it was worth noting that electric vehicles might not be the best option for all elements of the Council’s fleet.

The next step would be to engage with a specialist consultant who could undertake a detailed investigation looking at each vehicle within the fleet and consider; the task undertaken by a vehicle and where this was, vehicle availability, alternative fuel options that were suitable for the task and what was the right fuel for that vehicle. In addition, they would also advise on the right time to invest, grant funding availability, infrastructure and energy suppliers. The consultant had confirmed that due to the high level of demand for their services, they would not be able to start work until July 2022 and the review itself would take several months to complete.

Once the Council had received the detailed review, officers would produce a report towards the end of the following financial year providing a ‘Blueprint’ of the Council’s proposed fleet replacement for the following 5 years. It was vitally important that the authority should get this right due to the high level of future investment required to replace the Council’s fleet and to ensure that the authority’s services could operate efficiently and effectively.

Replaced vehicles were sold via a compliant bidding process to achieve best value. Vehicles that had little or no resale value were sold as scrap and disposed of correctly.

**Question submitted by Councillor K. Van Der Plank**

“More and more details are being uncovered on a daily basis, about the alleged behaviour of the Prime Minister and leading government

officials. It's clear this is having a hugely negative impact on public trust which not only affects national government but impacts local government too. This Council worked hard to navigate the problems presented throughout the pandemic and I would ask the Leader what she and her administration will be doing to try to maintain faith and confidence in public life here in Bromsgrove?"

In response to the question, the Leader provided an update on the actions that the Council had been taking during the Covid-19 pandemic, in addition to continuing service delivery. This included the following:

- Leading a District Incident Management Team alongside local partner organisations. The objectives of this team were; to explore district specific issues and outbreaks, examine the drivers of Covid-19 transmission, generate population specific mitigations and solutions and problem solving across all sectors.
- Working with Worcestershire County Council and NHS data specialists to develop a list of clinically vulnerable residents in the District in order to target support.
- Playing a leading role in participation and escalation of issues where required to the Health Protection Board, Local Resilience Forum and other local groups.
- Taking part in community engagement work, including the vaccine hesitancy survey.
- Organising for a team of Covid Advisors to work in the District to support businesses and the community.
- Providing operative support, marshalling and car parking space at testing sites.
- Issuing staff bulletins and frequently asked questions (FAQ) guidance.
- Co-ordinating a communications programme with messages disseminated via social media, local media and colleges.
- Carrying out a comprehensive review of business continuity and service-based risk assessments.
- Working with Bromsgrove District Housing Trust (BDHT) on an ongoing basis to ensure that there was nobody rough sleeping in the District.
- Supporting Worcestershire County Council with work to establish Here to Help.
- Facilitating staff into volunteer roles that supported the community, such as door knocking vulnerable residents.
- Supporting Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) organisations to obtain Government grant funding.
- Enhancing youth work provision in the District.
- Offering the flu vaccination to Council staff.

The Leader commented that she intended for the Council to continue operating in this manner moving forward.

**Question submitted by Councillor A. English**

“With news that the energy price cap is going to increase by 51% on 1st April, what is this Council going to do to mitigate the impact of spiralling energy costs on the poorest and most vulnerable people in our communities?”

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Enabling responded by explaining that the benefits section at Bromsgrove District Council were committed to supporting residents who were struggling financially both in the short and long term. The Council had a dedicated Financial Independence Team (FIT) who could help with; income maximisation, benefit take up and budgeting advice as well as being able to signpost to other specialist agencies and partners. The Council administered a range of benefits to support residents, Housing Benefit, Council Tax Support, Discretionary Housing Payments and Council Tax Hardship Payments. The authority also had an Essential Living Fund (ELF) scheme which could help with utility costs, food parcels and supermarket vouchers.

The Council’s teams also promoted the Worcestershire Household support fund which was running via Act on Energy. This included winter fuel payments, fuel debt payments and physical interventions such as boiler replacements. Full details and how to apply could be found via the Act on Energy web site.

In addition, the Council funded an energy advice service, currently delivered by YES Energy. Householders could call the energy advisors to receive guidance on how best to reduce their fuel bills, with support on a range of topics including:

- Finding the best tariff and energy deals
- How to best use heating controls
- Lifestyle changes that could make significant savings

Funding was also available for eligible residents to support the installation of a range of energy and money saving home improvements such as insulation and heating. This included the Council funded Bromsgrove Energy Efficiency Fund, which acted as a safety net for vulnerable low-income owner occupiers needing new heating systems and simple insulation.

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### **MOTIONS ON NOTICE**

The Chairman opened this item by explaining that four Motions on Notice had been submitted for consideration at this meeting of Council. However, Councillor S. Robinson, who had submitted one of these Motions, had agreed that her Motion could be referred on for consideration at the following meeting of the Constitution Review Working Group and it would not therefore be debated at Council. There were therefore three Motions for debate at the meeting.



## **Ethical Banking**

Members considered the following Motion on Notice submitted by Councillor H. Rone-Clarke:

“Ethical banking – divesting from the big polluters

In doing business with banks such as Lloyds, who are profiting from climate breakdown, Bromsgrove District Council is itself having a negative impact on our environment, as well as failing to ‘walk the walk’ on climate change. This hurts our credibility when we call upon residents to make necessary changes to their own lifestyles in order to lessen their carbon footprint.

Therefore, Council resolves to divest from the offending banks in favour of institutions with an ethical policy that refrains from investing in fossil fuel firms.”

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

In proposing the Motion, Councillor Rone-Clarke explained that it was calling for the Council to divest from financial institutions that profited from climate change. The Council used Lloyds Bank, and for this reason it had been referenced in the wording of the Motion. However, there were other banking options available to the local authority, including banks that did not invest in fossil fuels, such as The Co-operative Bank and The Unity Trust Bank.

Councillor Rone-Clarke commented that a number of Councillors had taken a decision to stand back from the Climate Change Working Group, which might have tackled this subject. However, many of the Councillors who had decided not to participate in the work of that group were meeting privately to discuss climate change matters. The action proposed in the Motion was one that could be taken by the Council to address climate change.

In seconding the Motion, Councillor McDonald reminded Members that the Council had declared a climate emergency some years previously. Action to tackle climate change was also considered to be a priority at both the local and national level and there was more that could be done to address this. The Council could exert influence by banking with an institution that did not invest in fossil fuels. Councillor McDonald also commented that the Council could have a greater impact on tackling climate change if a Climate Change Strategy was developed for the authority.

The Leader responded to the Motion by commenting that banking facilities were of tremendous importance to a local authority. Credible banking suppliers which were in practice available to the Council, given the broad level of service required and level of creditworthiness required,

were quite limited. In 2020, the Group Sustainable Business Director of Lloyds Bank PLC had stated that they were delighted to be the highest-ranking UK bank and second overall in the latest ShareAction Banking on a low carbon future report that recognised the significant progress made over a number of years by the bank. Lloyds Bank had worked hard to be transparent in their efforts to manage both the risks and opportunities associated with climate change. Lloyds Bank was respected for the work they were doing in this area and were also welcomed as a key business on the High Street.

Members subsequently discussed the motion in detail and in doing so raised the following points:

- The work of Lloyds Bank to address climate change and to actively encourage their customers to take action to tackle climate change.
- The need for Council investments to be appropriately considered and the potential for the staff pension fund to avoid investing in the fossil fuel industry.
- The banks utilised by local Parish Councils and the potential to influence climate change at a Parish level.
- The extent to which it was appropriate to highlight a single bank in the wording of the Motion when many banks invested in the fossil fuel industry.
- The benefits of an ethical investment policy for a local Council.

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

Members voting FOR the Motion:

Councillors A. English, R. Jenkins, P. McDonald, H. Rone-Clarke and K. Van Der Plank. (5)

Members voting AGAINST the Motion:

Councillors A. Beaumont, R. Deeming, G. Denaro, M. Glass, S. Hession, R. Hunter, A. Kriss, K. May, M. Middleton, M. Sherrey, C. Spencer, P. Thomas, M. Thompson, J. Till, S. Webb and P. Whittaker. (16)

Members voting to ABSTAIN:

Councillors S. Colella, S. Douglas, C. Hotham and J. King. (4)

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

**Parking Enforcement**

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

*"In view of the lack of and in many cases no enforcement officer operating out of the Town Centre, that at least three enforcement officers of the total employed are fully committed to operating outside of the Town Centre. Therefore, reducing the amount of illegal, dangerous and inconsiderate parking, to encourage sensible and safe parking, to cut congestion and improve road safety."*

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

In proposing the Motion, Councillor McDonald commented that there was a focus of enforcement activity in the District on Bromsgrove town centre. This had implications for parts of the District located outside Bromsgrove town centre and residents were reporting concerns about problem parking involving HGVs parking on double yellow lines and drivers urinating outside residential properties. There had been Civil Enforcement Officers (CEOs) operating in outlying areas in December 2021 but Councillor McDonald expressed concerns that this had only occurred because there was free parking at the car parks in the town centre in the build up to Christmas. Members were asked to note that where issues had been reported to CEOs, they had not always felt able to act, having reported that an observation period had to pass before a ticket could be issued to a driver.

In seconding the Motion, Councillor Rone-Clarke raised concerns that residents living in areas outside Bromsgrove town centre were potentially not receiving their fair share of support in terms of enforcement action. Councillor Rone-Clarke further commented that enforcement action seemed to only take place in areas outside Bromsgrove town centre when the CEOs were not needed there.

In responding to the Motion, the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Enabling commented that there were six CEOs working on a shift rota pattern covering seven days per week and they covered both on and off-street enforcement. Taking into account annual leave and sickness, it was not possible to permanently allocate three officers to operate outside of Bromsgrove Town Centre every day. CEOs operated different shifts each week, not only covering enforcement within the town and outer areas of the District and also monitored the Pay on Foot system.

However, with the proposal to change the Pay on Foot system to a Pay and Display model of operation, an additional CEO would become available to support the enforcement activity both in the town of Bromsgrove and across the wider District on a needs and intelligence led basis.

It was also worth noting that On-Street Enforcement was a County Council responsibility that was passed on to the District to manage via a Service Level Agreement (SLA) with no specific funding, which meant that any expansion of the team would rely on income from enforcement that could not be guaranteed. Alternatively, expansion of the team could

be funded by Bromsgrove District Council, as had already been done with the additional funding allocated to support enforcement around schools in the district.

Members subsequently discussed the Motion in detail and in doing so considered the following points:

- The volume of complaints that Councillors received from local residents about parking infringements in the District.
- The six CEOs that were available to operate in the District and the extent to which half of these resources could be realistically allocated to locations outside Bromsgrove town centre.
- The potential for the CEO who would become available once the Pay on Foot system was replaced with Pay on Display to be allocated specifically to working in areas outside Bromsgrove town centre.
- The extent to which this CEO would be expected to concentrate on working in Bromsgrove town centre at night.
- The SLA that the Council had for the civil enforcement service, which was due for renegotiation. Council was informed that a mapping exercise was due to be undertaken regarding the work of the CEOs and demand for the service.
- The need for flexibility in the parking enforcement system in the District to meet changing demand.
- The potential for Members to report any concerns regarding problem parking directly to relevant senior officers when these problems occurred.

During consideration of this item, Councillor C. Hotham proposed that the wording of the Motion could be amended to state that “...*the extra Civil Enforcement Officer should be fully committed to operating outside of the Town Centre.*” However, this amendment was not seconded.

In concluding the discussions in respect of this Motion, Councillor McDonald commented that he would be prepared to amend the wording of the Motion. This amendment to the end of the first sentence of the Motion stated “...*surplus capacity will be used in the outlying districts.*” Councillor McDonald stated that the amendment was being made on the understanding that the surplus capacity in the Civil Enforcement team would operate in the outlying areas of the District and that Members could report parking concerns directly to officers.

On being put to the vote the Motion was carried.

**RESOLVED** that

In view of the lack of and in many cases no enforcement officer operating out of the Town Centre, that surplus capacity will be used in the outlying districts. Therefore, reducing the amount of illegal, dangerous and inconsiderate parking, to encourage sensible and safe parking, to cut congestion and improve road safety.

## **Promoting Cycling**

Members considered the following Motion on Notice submitted by Councillor R. Hunter:

“Promoting cycling through our leisure offer.

Council is committed to promoting cycling wherever possible to help prevent climate change and encourage healthy lifestyles. Council notes significant progress has already been made, with recent improvements including a new cycle route through Sanders Park. However, there is still much more work to do.

Council calls on the Cabinet Member and officers to explore using general covid recovery grant to invest in a more ambitious recreational cycling offer for young people across our District's parks as part of the development of our new Leisure and Culture Strategy. This will include a children's cycling training area, which imitates road features to help young riders learn to cycle safely, and cycling trails and pump tracks for more experienced young riders."

The Motion was proposed by Councillor R. Hunter and seconded by Councillor J. King.

In proposing the Motion, Councillor Hunter commented that the Motion was asking the Council to investigate doing something positive for the District. There was flexibility available to the Council in respect of how the Covid grant funding that had been awarded by the Government to the authority was used. Should any of this funding remain available, the Motion was proposing that it could be invested in something that would constitute a positive covid legacy. An innovative cycling scheme had already been introduced in Stratford-on-Avon District and a similar scheme could potentially benefit residents living in and visiting Bromsgrove District. This type of scheme would also particularly benefit young people who had been impacted significantly by the pandemic.

In responding to the proposed Motion, the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Enabling explained that a lot of the Covid grant funding had already been allocated. It was likely that only £400,000 remained available, once existing allocations were calculated, and it was possible that this would need to be used to offset any losses in terms of income from car parking, which was likely to be lower than in previous years. Therefore, it was unlikely that there would be much Covid grant funding available to use for other purposes. Further information about the Council's use of the Covid grant funding would be available to view in the Medium Term Financial Plan 2022/23 to 2024/25.

During consideration of this item, the Portfolio Holder for Strategic Housing and Health and Well Being advised that the Council had commissioned Leisure and Culture Strategy Development Consultants.

By the date of the meeting, they were consulting with residents, stakeholders and Parish Councils about many aspects of the Council's Leisure provision. This included finding out about current and future needs and demands for the authority's parks and open spaces and recommending viable improvements for inclusion in a proposed future parks management plan. The suggestion of a cycle training area had been passed to the consultants to consider for possible inclusion in the future management plan. Amongst other things, the consultants would consider need, demand, costs, viability and land use.

In the interim, the Portfolio Holder for Strategic Housing, Health and Well Being commented that, with the wider pathways in Sanders Park, it was hoped that young cyclists would be encouraged to cycle within the safety of the park.

Members subsequently discussed the Motion in detail and in doing so noted a number of points:

- The consultation event that had taken place on 17<sup>th</sup> January 2022 which had been attended by some Members and the difficulties that other Members with work commitments had had in respect of attending this session.
- The need for Covid grant funding to be utilised appropriately and the difficult decisions that needed to be taken by the Council when identifying which areas to prioritise for funding.
- The potential for a cycling route to be supported using alternative sources of funding.
- The scale of the potential cycling route for Bromsgrove, which would be significantly smaller than that in place in Stratford.

On being put to the vote the Motion was lost.

The meeting closed at 8.38 p.m.

Chairman