

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MEETING OF THE COUNCIL

23RD FEBRUARY 2022, 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, M. Glass, C.A. Hotham, R. J. Hunter, R. E. Jenkins (from Minute Item 93/21), H. J. Jones, A. D. Kent (until Minute Item 92/21), J. E. King (from Minute Item No. 92/21), A. D. Kriss, K.J. May, M. Middleton, P. M. McDonald, S. A. Robinson, H. D. N. Rone-Clarke, M. A. Sherrey, C. J. Spencer, P.L. Thomas, M. Thompson, J. Till, K. J. Van Der Plank and P. J. Whittaker

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

84\21 **TO RECEIVE APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors A. English, S. Hession, L. Mallett and S. Webb.

85\21 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

The Monitoring Officer advised that at the meeting of the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee held on 15th July 2021 all Members were granted a dispensation to participate in the debate and vote on matters relating to the budget and Council Tax. Therefore, Members did not need to declare an interest and could participate in the debate and vote concerning the 2022/23 Budget and Medium Term Financial Plan 2022/23 to 2024/25, the alternative budgets and the Council Tax Resolutions 2022/23.

86\21 **TO CONFIRM THE ACCURACY OF THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COUNCIL HELD ON 26TH JANUARY 2022**

The minutes of the meeting of Council held on 26th January 2022 were submitted.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Council meeting held on Wednesday 26th January 2022 be approved as a true and correct record.

87\21 **TO RECEIVE ANY ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM THE CHAIRMAN AND/OR HEAD OF PAID SERVICE**

There were no announcements from the Chairman and Head of Paid Service on this occasion.

88\21 **TO RECEIVE ANY ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM THE LEADER**

There were no announcements made by the Leader at the meeting.

89\21 **TO RECEIVE COMMENTS, QUESTIONS OR PETITIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC**

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

90\21 **URGENT DECISIONS**

The Chairman advised that no urgent decisions had been taken since the previous meeting of Council.

91\21 **APPOINTMENT OF EXTERNAL AUDITORS**

The Vice Chairman of the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee, Councillor P. Whittaker, presented a recommendation from the Committee on the subject of the appointment of the Council's external auditors for the period 2023/24 to 2027/28. The appointment process had been discussed at a meeting of the Committee held on 2nd February 2022. The Committee had been advised that the Council could independently procure an external auditor, could work with other Councils to procure an external auditor or could join the Public Sector Audit Appointments' (PSAA's) national scheme for the appointment of external auditors. The Committee had concluded that the PSAA's national scheme would be the most appropriate option for the Council.

RESOLVED to accept the Public Sector Audit Appointments' invitation to opt into the sector-led option for the appointment of external auditors to principal local government and police bodies for a procurement period of five financial years from 1 April 2023 (that is to say from 2023/24 to 2027/28).

92\21 **RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE CABINET MEETING HELD ON 16TH FEBRUARY 2022 (TO FOLLOW)**

Sustainable Warmth Funding

The Portfolio Holder for Leisure, Cultural Services and Climate Change presented a report on the subject of Sustainable Warmth funding. Members were informed that the Council had received £429,000 funding from the Government to help local property owners improve the energy efficiency of their buildings. The funding was designed to assist

households on combined incomes below £30,000 per year and with an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) rating D – G.

There were two main forms of funding that could be made available at this stage:

- Home Upgrade Grants (HUGs) Phase 1 – for properties that were not connected to the mains gas.
- Local Authority Delivery (LAD) Phase 3 – for properties connected to the mains gas.

The amount of action required to improve the energy efficiency of properties and the costs entailed would vary between properties. However, it was anticipated that on average £10,000 would need to be spent from this funding per property.

The report had been pre-scrutinised at a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board and a number of questions had been raised. In response to the queries raised by the Board, the Portfolio Holder for Leisure, Culture and Climate Change commented that the Council was aware of the EPC ratings for 63 per cent of properties in Bromsgrove District. The Council would work with Act On Energy to target eligible properties for funding and a communications strategy had been developed to accompany this approach. In total, as discussed at the Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting, the Council was anticipating that approximately 40 properties would benefit from the funding.

After the report had been presented Members discussed the following points in detail:

- The positive impact that the funding would have on the energy efficiency of properties occupied by eligible homeowners.
- The need for further action to be taken to support residents living in the District in properties with low EPC ratings.
- The potential for the Government to provide the Council with more funding to help support additional property owners in the District.
- The difficulties experienced by park homeowners, who would not be eligible to apply for this funding, and the delays to funding in terms of previous schemes that had impacted on mobile homeowners.
- The need for the Council to lobby the Government to provide more funding to enable park homeowners to improve the energy efficiency of their properties.
- The impact of a fall in the availability of HGV drivers on the speed with which action could be taken locally to improve the energy efficiency of properties in the District.
- The typographical error in the report which referred to a Borough rather than District for Bromsgrove.

The recommendations were proposed by Councillor M. Thompson and seconded by Councillor A. Kriss.

RESOLVED that

- 1) the Capital and Revenue Budgets are increased to receive Bromsgrove District Council's Sustainable Warmth scheme allocation of £429,000; and
- 2) delegated authority is granted to the Head of Community and Housing Services following consultation with the Portfolio Holders for Housing and Climate Change to administer the funding received in line with the grant conditions.

93\21

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE CABINET MEETING HELD ON 23RD FEBRUARY 2022 (TO BE TABLED)

The Chairman explained that recommendations had been made at the meeting of the Cabinet held earlier in the afternoon on Wednesday 23rd February 2022. A list of the recommendations that had been agreed at this meeting had been tabled for Members' consideration.

Pay Policy Statement 2022/23

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Enabling presented the Pay Policy Statement 2022/23. Members were informed that the Localism Act 2011 required Council to consider and approve a Pay Policy Statement by 31st March each year, for the following financial year. The report detailed the wages paid to the most senior staff as well as the most junior staff and explained the differences between the two. As Bromsgrove District Council shared many services with Redditch Borough Council, the costs of employing staff were generally shared equally and so the Council only had to pay 50 per cent of the costs.

Members discussed the report and in doing so questioned what was meant by a "statement" in this context. Officers clarified that the Pay Policy Statement was a factual statement of the remuneration provided to staff.

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

RESOLVED that the Pay Policy Statement 2022/23 be approved.

2022/23 Budget and Medium Term Financial Plan 2022/23 to 2024/25

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Enabling presented the 2022/23 Budget and Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) 2022/23 to 2024/25. In presenting the report, he explained that there were three main aims in the budget:

- Firstly, to maintain all the Council's services which had been achieved without any cuts and with a balanced budget.
- Secondly, to invest in the future, capitalising on the opportunities that the levelling up funding presented for the town and acknowledging the importance of engaging with the Council's customers digitally and in ways that supported service provision moving forward.
- Thirdly, to maintain the Council's general fund balances as a buffer for the future and to confirm the authority's financial stability as recognised by the External Auditors.

The 2022/23 budget and MTFP 2022/23 to 2024/25 was 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 Motion, Councillor McDonald explained that the alternative budget had been developed in a context in which people's living standards were increasingly under pressure. Inflation was likely to increase to 7 per cent by April 2022 and energy costs had already increased significantly. In addition, many residents were not experiencing increases to their wages in line with inflation, which impacted on people's ability to manage costs. Many residents were increasingly turning to food banks and this included key workers who had played an essential role during the pandemic. In these circumstances, Councillor McDonald commented that it would be inappropriate to increase Council Tax and instead the alternative budget proposed to reduce Council Tax by 1 per cent. The costs arising from this would be offset by not approving budget bids for a new Business Improvement Advisor for the Council, not agreeing to procure consultants to undertake work on the low carbon vehicle fleet for the Council and not continuing to work with the consultants Mott McDonald.

In seconding the alternative budget, Councillor Rone-Clarke commented that increasing costs were impacting on some of the most vulnerable members of society who were struggling to manage their household budgets. The alternative budget would help to take the pressure off some of the residents in this position without having a detrimental impact in the long-term on the Council's budget.

Members subsequently discussed the Labour Group's alternative budget in some detail and in doing so highlighted the following points:

- The financial challenges faced by the Council and the cumulative impact that a 1 per cent cut to Council Tax in 2022/23 would have on subsequent financial years.
- The need to provide support to the most vulnerable residents living in the District who were impacted by increases in the costs of living.

- The essential services provided by the Council to local residents and the impact that a cut in funding could have on the sustainability of these services.
- The discussions that had been held at meetings of the Finance and Budget Working Group regarding the Council's budget and challenges facing future funding for local government.
- The duty of care that the Council had to local residents.
- The need for the Government to undertake a review of the Council Tax system and to provide greater clarity to Councils about future funding arrangements moving forward.
- The level of expenditure by the Council on external consultants and the extent to which this work could be undertaken inhouse.

During consideration of the alternative Motion from the Labour Group, Councillor McDonald expressed concerns that Officers had added comments to the alternative budget text that had been included in the agenda for Members' consideration and he questioned whether this represented interference in the democratic process. Officers clarified that the Section 151 Officer had a statutory duty to provide Members with professional advice and this had occurred in this instance to aid Members with their decision-making. However, the content of the alternative budget had not been altered.

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 P. McDonald and H. Rone-Clarke (2).

Members voting AGAINST the alternative budget from the Labour Group:

Councillors S. Baxter, A. Beaumont, S. Colella, R. Deeming, G. Denaro, S. Douglas, M. Glass, C. Hotham, R. Hunter, R. Jenkins, H. Jones, J. King, A. Kriss, K. May, R. Laight, M. Middleton, S. Robinson, M. Sherrey, C. Spencer, P. Thomas, M. Thompson, J. Till, K. Van Der Plank and P. Whittaker. (24)

Members voting to ABSTAIN on the alternative budget from the Labour Group:

None (0).

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

Members subsequently considered an alternative budget submitted collectively by the Bromsgrove Independent East District Group, the Bromsgrove Independents West and Central District Group and the

Liberal Democrat Group. This alternative budget was proposed by Councillor C. Hotham and seconded by Councillor S. Robinson.

In proposing the alternative budget, Councillor Hotham commented that he agreed with 98 per cent of the leading group's proposed budget. However, there were some opportunities available to the Council, through the use of earmarked reserves, to undertake some actions in addition to the measures proposed in the administration's budget. Members were advised that, instead of returning £382,000 from earmarked reserves to balances, the Council could hold back £75,000 of these earmarked reserves. This could then be invested in the following areas:

- A Community Grants Scheme, using £55,000 of the earmarked reserve funds in 2022/23.
- A business case reserve of £20,000, to fund the development of business cases focusing on a rural minibus scheme and free car parking in the town centre car parks for blue badge holders.

Councillor Hotham highlighted that the Council's balances were projected to fall below the minimum levels that the Section 151 Officer considered to be acceptable by 2024/25. The actions proposed in the alternative budget would simply bring this stage forward by a few days and represented a small adjustment to the budget.

In seconding the alternative budget, Councillor Robinson explained that she recognised that the Council was in a challenging financial situation. However, the actions proposed in the alternative budget would help to benefit local residents. In particular, Members were asked to note that whilst blue badge holders paid to park in the town's car parks the same charge was not levied by some other Councils in the country. The removal of a charge for blue badge holders would also potentially help to reduce the number of blue badge holders who chose to park on double yellow lines, which could impact on traffic and residents. In relation to the Community Grants Scheme, Members were informed that the Council had funded a range of important Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) groups for projects that had benefited the local community over the years. There was a risk that these groups would struggle to continue to deliver these valuable activities should Council funding cease to be available.

After the presentation of the alternative budget, Members discussed the content in detail and in so doing noted the following matters:

- The important role of VCS groups in addressing some of the negative outcomes of the Covid 19 pandemic.
- The value added by the Community Grants Scheme in recent years.
- The need for the Council to have a balanced budget and to return funding to balances to help achieve this.

- The opportunity to review charges for blue badge holders in local car parks holistically as part of a wider review of car parking arrangements.
- The bid for funding that had been submitted by Worcestershire County Council to the Department of Transport for public transport and the action that was being taken to encourage the Council to invest some of this funding in a rural transport service in the District.
- The fact that no announcement had yet been made about whether Worcestershire County Council would receive this funding.
- The potential for the Demand Response bus service to be extended to rural areas of the District.
- The discussions that had been held at meetings of the Finance and Budget Working Group in respect of some of the ideas in the alternative budget.
- The inclusion of a £5 increase to Council Tax within the alternative budget.
- The benefits of investing in business case reviews that could help to clarify the exact costs of withdrawing charges from blue badge holders for car parking and of determining the costs of operating a minibus service in rural locations.
- The need for the Council to receive a long-term financial settlement from the Government in order to secure greater certainty about service sustainability moving forward.

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

Members voting FOR the alternative budget from the Bromsgrove Independent East Group, the Bromsgrove Independent West and Central Group and the Liberal Democrat Group:

Councillors S. Baxter, S. Colella, S. Douglas, C. Hotham, R. Hunter, R. Jenkins, J. King, S. Robinson and K. Van Der Plank (9)

Members voting AGAINST the alternative budget from the Bromsgrove Independent East Group, the Bromsgrove Independent West and Central Group and the Liberal Democrat Group:

Councillors A. Beaumont, R. Deeming, G. Denaro, M. Glass, H. Jones, A. Kriss, R. Laight, K. May, M. Middleton, P. McDonald, H. Rone-Clarke, M. Sherrey, C. Spencer, P. Thomas, M. Thompson, J. Till and P. Whittaker. (17).

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

None (0).

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

Members subsequently returned to discussing the proposals in respect of the 2022/23 Budget and MTFP 2022/23 to 2024/25 detailed in the agenda. Councillor Denaro, Portfolio Holder for Finance and Enabling, reintroduced the report and explained that the 2022/23 Budget and MTFP 2022/23 to 2024/25 report had been drafted in a new format, which was designed to ensure that background information was provided to give Members a clear picture of the Council's position. The Council had gone through difficult times and in many ways the budget was transitional, inasmuch as it took the authority from the battle with the pandemic to a situation whereby the Council and community would be living with Covid. It was hoped that a clearer understanding of the implications of this for the Council would be available by February 2023.

The unexpected receipt of £700,000 from the Government for the 2022/23 budget had transformed the authority's financial challenges from a deficit of over £1 million to approximately £300,000, which had finalised at £411,000. Nevertheless, with no guarantee for future years, the Council had to continue to look at every means of reducing costs and improving income across all areas. The figures provided for the Council's general fund showed that this work was urgent and the Council aimed to start without delay.

On a positive note, in addition to maintaining business as usual throughout the pandemic, as frontline service officers continued to deliver in the most difficult circumstances, the Council had delivered grants to local businesses, supported the most vulnerable in the local community and supported health organisations to enable a vaccination site and a testing site to be made available in the town for the benefit of local residents. The Council's Facilities Management team had supported these sites throughout the pandemic and continued to do so for the benefit of local residents. In the face of these challenges, the Council had been able to complete this budget without any reduction in services.

An increase in the Council Tax charge for Band D equivalent properties of £5 per annum, or under 50p a month, was considered to be a small contribution that would enable the Council to maintain the provision of all of the authority's much needed and valued services.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Enabling thanked the Finance and Budget Working Group and Overview and Scrutiny Board for their hard work and support in delivering the budget. Members had worked together to ensure that all Councillors were cited and had an opportunity to feed into the budget setting process.

Members were informed that there were a number of key aspects impacting on the content of the budget. This included a decline in income from car parking charges and in the contribution from Leisure Services as a result of the impact of the pandemic. In 2019, car parking income was in the region of £95,000 to £100,000 per month. By contrast, the Council received £74,650 from car parking income in December 2021, highlighting the gap that needed to be addressed. Covid had also had an enormous impact on the income that had been forecast from the delivery of local leisure providers and this challenge was ongoing. This situation was mirrored nationally, but it was felt that the Council should continue to support leisure services to help residents maintain their health and wellbeing.

The Council had received some Covid grant funding from the Government during the pandemic. The figures available showed a projected remaining balance of £397,000 by 31st March 2022 which was likely to be fully utilised to cover shortfalls in income.

The Council continued to encourage residents to return to the town centre and for this reason a decision had been taken not to increase car parking charges.

A difficult decision had had to be taken regarding the Council's previous Community Grants Scheme, which had previously been funded from the New Homes Bonus (NHB). The Council had received £363,000 in NHB funding for 2022/23, which was almost half of the receipts in 2021/22. With such pressure on the Council's General Fund balances, the conclusion had been reached that the Council could not have topped up the £16,000 which would have been available for a scheme. There would therefore be no Community Grants Scheme in 2022/23.

The Council had embraced the opportunities that had been presented as a result of the pandemic. The budget included revenue bids to provide funding for IT in support of the authority's Digital Strategy and the Council's desire to enable residents to access services in multiple ways. The pandemic had enabled a move organisationally to hybrid working and this in turn had created new and exciting opportunities for the use of Council accommodation. Additional IT support would also ensure the authority could continue to enable residents to access popular meetings remotely when necessary. This much needed evening cover was vital in enabling these changes.

There had been a review of the Council's Earmarked Reserves and £382,000 had been identified which could be returned to the General Fund, following completion of the year end for the 2021/22 financial year.

In conclusion, the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Enabling commented that this was a budget that protected services going forward but recognised the difficulties faced by the Council. The Executive Director

of Finance and Resources and the Financial Services team were thanked for producing the report under difficult circumstances.

In seconding the 2022/23 Budget and MTFP 2022/23 to 2024/25, Councillor May thanked both officers and the Finance and Budget Working Group for their hard work in respect of the budget. Members were asked to note that the pandemic had been one of the greatest challenges faced by the country since World War II. In this context, the allocation of £14.5 million Levelling Up funding to the Council would be really helpful for Bromsgrove District. The funding would be invested in the regeneration of two brownfield sites. Bromsgrove District would also be receiving funding from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. In addition to this, the redevelopment of the Burcot Lane site would result in the introduction of much needed affordable housing in the town.

In concluding her remarks, Councillor May commented that the 2022/23 Budget was balanced and robust. The proposals detailed in the 2022/23 Budget and MTFP 2022/23 to 2024/25 also supported the Council's strategic purposes. There remained financial challenges for local government but the Council would continue to lobby the Government for a fairer funding deal and action would start immediately on preparing the 2023/24 Budget for the authority.

The content of the 2022/23 budget and MTFP 2022/23 to 2024/25 was subsequently discussed in detail and in doing so Members raised the following matters:

- The important roles of the Finance and Budget Working Group and the Overview and Scrutiny Board in reviewing the budget.
- The Finance and Budget Working Group's debate earlier in the municipal year in respect of the introduction of Council Tax premiums on empty homes and the potential impact of the subsequent introduction of these premiums.
- The need for the Finance and Budget Working Group to be involved earlier in the budget setting process in future years.
- The reasons why the 2022/23 Budget and MTFP 2022/23 to 2024/25 included a £5 increase in Council Tax, which was considered crucial to help ensure that services remained financially sustainable moving forward.
- The extent to which a £5 increase in Council Tax for the Council could be considered to be a relatively small contribution, in a context in which the costs of general goods and services were increasing.
- The number of alternative budgets that had been put forward by opposition groups in recent years.
- The need for the Council to fund actions that would have a beneficial impact on climate change.
- The need for urgent action and potentially difficult decisions to be taken to ensure that the Council's budget remained sustainable moving forward.

In accordance with the Local Authorities (Standing Orders) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2014 the 2022/23 Budget and MTFP 2022/23 to 2024/25 was subject to a named vote.

Members voting FOR the 2022/23 Budget and MTFP 2022/23:

Councillors S. Baxter, A. Beaumont, S. Colella, R. Deeming, G. Denaro, S. Douglas, M. Glass, C. Hotham, R. Jenkins, H. Jones, A. Kriss, R. Laight, K. May, M. Middleton, M. Sherrey, C. Spencer, P. Thomas, M. Thompson, J. Till and P. Whittaker (20).

Members voting AGAINST the 2022/23 Budget and MTFP 2022/23 to 2024/25:

Councillors R. Hunter, P. McDonald, S. Robinson, H. Rone-Clarke and K. van Der Plank (5).

Members voting to ABSTAIN in the vote on the 2022/23 Budget and MTFP 2022/23 to 2024/25:

Councillor J. King (1).

The vote on the 2022/23 Budget and MTFP 2022/23 to 2024/25 was therefore carried.

RESOLVED

- 1) To approve the overall net general fund revenue budgets of:

2022/23:	£12.069m
2023/24:	£11.947m
2024/25:	£12.076m

- 2) To approve the unavoidable costs:

2022/23:	£0.250m
2023/24:	£0.016m
2024/25:	£0.016m

- 3) To approve the Revenue Bids:

2022/23:	£0.148m
2023/24:	£0.107m
2024/25:	£0.086m

- 4) To approve the Identified Savings:

2022/23:	£0.176m
2023/24:	£0.176m
2024/25:	£0.176m

- 5) That an increase of the Council Tax per Band D equivalent of £5 for 2022/23 be approved;
- 6) That the transfer from General Fund Balances of £0.411m for 2022/23 be approved;
- 7) That the planned reallocation of £0.382m from Earmarked reserves to General Fund Balances be approved;
- 8) To approve the General Fund capital programme:

2022/23:	£2.410m
2023/24:	£1.390m
2024/25:	£1.946m
- 9) the 2020/21 Capital Outturn be noted; and
- 10) the Chief Financial Officer's (CFO) Opinion on Estimates and Reserve Levels be noted.

Council Tax Resolutions 2022/23

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Enabling presented the Council Tax Resolutions 2022/23 for Members' consideration. Council was informed that this was a technical report that had to be approved on an annual basis.

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

Members voting FOR the Council Tax Resolutions 2022/23:

Councillors S. Baxter, A. Beaumont, S. Colella, R. Deeming, G. Denaro, S. Douglas, M. Glass, C. Hotham, R. Hunter, R. Jenkins, H. Jones, J. King, A. Kriss, R. Laight, K. May, M. Middleton, P. McDonald, S. Robinson, H. Rone-Clarke, M. Sherrey, C. Spencer, P. Thomas, M. Thompson, J. Till, K. Van Der Plank and P. Whittaker (26).

Members voting AGAINST the Council Tax Resolutions 2022/23:

None (0).

Members voting to ABSTAIN in the vote on the Council Tax Resolutions 2022/23:

None (0).

The vote on the Council Tax Resolutions 2022/23 was therefore carried.

RESOLVED that Council approve

- 1) the calculation for the Council Tax requirement for the Council's own purposes for 2022/23 (excluding Parish precepts) as **£8,937,309.38**;
- 2) the following amounts be calculated for the year 2022/23 in accordance with sections 31 to 36 of the Act:
 - (a) £43,846,702 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) £33,847,101 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) £9,999,601 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) £266.58 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) £1,071,812 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) £238.00 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 2022/23, 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	931.19	1,086.38	1,241.58	1,396.78	1,707.18	2,017.57	2,327.97	2,793.56
Police and Crime Commissioner for West Mercia	166.44	194.18	221.92	249.66	305.14	360.62	416.10	499.32
Hereford and Worcester Fire Authority	59.60	69.53	79.47	89.40	109.27	129.13	149.00	178.80

- 4) 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 2022/23. 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 2022 to March 2023 as detailed below:

	Precept £	Deficit on Collection Fund £	Total to pay £
Worcestershire County Council	52,394,684.00	991,717.00	53,386,401.00
Police and Crime Commissioner for West Mercia	9,365,008.74	177,384.00	9,542,392.74
Hereford & Worcester Fire Authority	3,353,491.52	65,913.06	3,419,404.58

- 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 £10,171,181 being the Council's own demand on the Collection

Fund (£8,927,789.21) and Parish Precepts (£1,071,812) and the distribution of the Deficit on the Collection Fund (£171,580);

- 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 2022 and 1 October 2022 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;
- 10) 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.

(At the start of this item Councillor A. Kent left the meeting. He was therefore not present during the votes in respect of the alternative budgets, the 2022/23 Budget and MTFP 2022/23 to 2024/25 or the Council Tax Resolutions 2022/23 and as such his name does not appear in the record of the named votes on these items).

94\21

TO NOTE THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE CABINET HELD ON WEDNESDAY 16TH FEBRUARY 2022 (TO FOLLOW)

The minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on Wednesday 16th February 2022 were submitted.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 16th February 2022 be noted.

95\21

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

The Chairman explained that four Questions on Notice had been received for consideration at the meeting and would be taken in the order in which they had been included on the agenda. A maximum of 15 minutes had been allocated to the consideration of Questions on Notice and the answers provided to those questions and no supplementary questions would be permitted.

Question Submitted by Councillor R. Hunter

“What actions are the Cabinet taking to lobby Government to provide a much needed longer term financial settlement for councils such as BDC?”

The Leader responded by explaining that the Council continued to work through the Local Government Association (LGA) and District Councils' Network (DCN) to add the authority's voice to the sector's request for a multi-year financial settlement. On the Council's behalf, the LGA were campaigning for local services to be provided with a long-term, sustainable future which gave Councils clarity and certainty over their funding. In the recent collective response to the one-year settlement, the DCN also called on the Government to deliver a multi-year financial settlement for district Councils.

In addition, Members were advised that the Leader continually raised this issue in discussions with the Bromsgrove MP, who then reported these concerns on to central government.

Question Submitted by Councillor J. King

“In 2019 this Council declared a climate emergency and set up a working group to drive efforts to decarbonise our activities. Yet despite all the work that has been done, a recent scorecard of UK local authorities' climate change progress, compiled by Climate Emergency UK, put Bromsgrove very close to the bottom of our peer group, with a 10% achievement score. What are you doing to restore our reputation and ensure Bromsgrove is recognised as a leader in tackling climate change?”

In response to the question, the Portfolio Holder for Leisure, Culture and Climate Change advised that the scorecard rating referred to, was undertaken by Climate Emergency UK using a methodology of only scoring local authorities' climate change strategies and action plans. This did not consider any actions the Council was already undertaking in tackling climate change. The Council fully appreciated that it had a great deal to do and would use the tools and data arising from this survey and that of Sustainability West Midlands to learn and inform the authority's Climate Change Strategy and action plan. This would ensure that a strong and robust strategy and action plan was developed and regularly reviewed to demonstrate the authority's progress.

The Council was in the process of developing its Climate Change Strategy and a detailed Action to Reduce Carbon (ARC) Plan to have progressive longer-term plans in place and address the areas where improvements were needed.

There were nine identified themes for the ARC.

- Theme 1: Sustainable Buildings and Workplaces
- Theme 2: Renewable Energy

- Theme 3: Transport and Travel
- Theme 4: Planning / Building Control and Retrofit
- Theme 5: Community
- Theme 6: Waste
- Theme 7: Biodiversity
- Theme 8: The Low Carbon and Circular Economy and Resources
- Theme 9: Procurement

Whilst the strategy and action plan were in the process of being developed, the Council had, and continued to undertake, some significant carbon reduction projects such as the Electric Vehicle Chargers for Taxis, the District Heat Network scheme, development of low carbon homes on the Burcot Lane development and Carbon Literacy training for Members and Officers. In addition to these significant projects, the Energy Savings Trust had produced a free report for Bromsgrove Council in respect of potential electrification of the Council's fleet of vehicles with a recent presentation given to the Climate Change Working Group. The Council had allocated additional funds to commission expert consultants to assess the right fuel type for every vehicle to enable the authority to draw up a revised fleet replacement programme and infrastructure plan.

Question Submitted by Councillor S. Robinson

“Is there a future for district councils such as BDC given the Government's Levelling Up White Paper sees us as merely being ‘non-constituent members’ of the new regime for local decision making?”

The Leader responded by commenting that the simple and straight forward answer to the question was “yes”. In explaining the justification for this answer, the Leader advised that there was no new regime for decision making proposed under the White Paper. This applied only if an area was looking to pursue a “County Deal” or some other form of devolution deal. There was no change to the sovereignty of District Councils or any other type of Council.

The Leader subsequently explained that District Councils would play a big role in delivering the White Paper's four key aims:

1. Fostering economic prosperity

- The Council had secured £14.5m from the Levelling Up Fund (focusing on Windsor Street and Hanover Street). There was also work on other key strategic sites in the Town (including Burcot Lane), and the 2040 vision for the Town Centre, the work in local centres and utilisation of the Welcome Back fund. The Council would also be reviewing the Centres Strategy. All of these actions would help to achieve the overall levelling up aim to “Boost productivity, pay, jobs and living” standards.

Spreading opportunity

- District Councils were fundamental to achieving at least two of the main Levelling Up White Paper missions of health and wellbeing and the Council was working closely with colleagues in the health sector, as well as other partners.

Restoring a sense of community

There were three missions here which were:

- Pride in Place
- Housing
- Crime

District Councils had a crucial role in terms of addressing all of these missions.

Empowering local leaders.

- The mission here was to empower local leaders and communities. District Councils were working closely with partners through such initiatives such as ABCD work to identify and empower people.

In addition to the Levelling Up Fund White Paper, the Council had received high level details of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund which would be allocated to District Councils.

The Leader expressed disappointment that the white paper made the reference to non-constituent membership of a potential county deal for District Councils. Members were advised that the Leader would continue to lobby the Government, alongside District Council colleagues, to address this.

In conclusion, the Leader commented that there was a future for District Councils and she expressed the view that the role of District Councils would be an even more important one than before moving forward.

Question Submitted by Councillor S. Baxter

“I congratulate the Council on being awarded the levelling up grant of £14m and recognise that there will be an indirect benefit of having a prosperous town centre for the whole district, however, bearing in mind that Bromsgrove’s grant equates to one of the largest per capita awards in the country, please can the leader explain how delivering the project will achieve a levelling up to those areas of greatest need across the district?”

The Leader responded by explaining that the Levelling Up Fund grant had very stringent criteria and there was a need to focus on brownfield sites.

The proposed commercial and cultural hub at the former Market Hall site would provide support for businesses across the District, not just the town centre. Also, the employment opportunities envisaged to be generated by the businesses supported by the hub would be open to all residents in the District, not just residents living close to the town centre. Indirectly, this investment would act as a catalyst for further private sector investment, which in turn would generate supply chain and further employment opportunities in the district.

96\21

MOTIONS ON NOTICE

The Chairman advised that one Motion on Notice had been received for consideration at the meeting. Prior to the meeting, group leaders had agreed that the subject of the Motion should be a standing item on the agenda for consideration at group leaders' meetings. In this context, the Councillor who had submitted the Motion, Councillor S. Colella, had agreed that the Motion should not be debated at the meeting.

The meeting closed at 8.09 p.m.

Chairman