

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MEETING OF THE COUNCIL

20TH APRIL 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, A. B. L. English, M. Glass, S. G. Hession, C.A. Hotham, R. J. Hunter, H. J. Jones, J. E. King, A. D. Kriss, L. C. R. Mallett, K.J. May, M. Middleton, P. M. McDonald, H. D. N. Rone-Clarke, 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, Mr J. Howse, Mrs. C. Felton and Mrs. J. Bayley-Hill

97\21 **TO RECEIVE APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors R. Jenkins, A. Kent, S. Robinson and M. Sherrey.

98\21 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

99\21 **TO CONFIRM THE ACCURACY OF THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COUNCIL HELD ON 23RD FEBRUARY 2022**

The minutes of the Council meeting held on 23rd February 2022 were submitted.

During consideration of this item, Councillor S. Douglas suggested that the record of the answer provided to the Question on Notice submitted by Councillor S. Robinson at the previous meeting should have been numbered throughout.

RESOLVED that, subject to the amendment detailed in the preamble above, the minutes of the Council meeting held on Wednesday 23rd February 2022 be approved as a true and correct record.

100\21 **TO RECEIVE ANY ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM THE CHAIRMAN AND/OR HEAD OF PAID SERVICE**

On behalf of the Council, the Chairman congratulated Councillor S. Robinson and her husband on the birth of their baby daughter, Aoife Josephine Robinson, in March 2022. Members were advised that both mother and baby were doing well.

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

101\21 **TO RECEIVE ANY ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM THE LEADER**

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

102\21 **TO RECEIVE COMMENTS, QUESTIONS OR PETITIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC**

The Chairman advised that no comments, questions or petitions had been received from members of the public for consideration at the meeting.

103\21 **URGENT DECISIONS**

Members were informed that two urgent decisions had been taken since the previous meeting of Council. These decisions related to the purchase of an asset located on Windsor Street from Worcestershire County Council, which had been undertaken as part of the Levelling Up project.

104\21 **OUTSIDE BODY APPOINTMENT**

Nominations were requested for the position of the Council's representative on the West Mercia Police and Crime Panel to replace Councillor A. Kent.

A nomination was received for Councillor H. Jones to be the Council's representative on the West Mercia Police and Crime Panel. This nomination was proposed by Councillor K. May and seconded by Councillor G. Denaro.

RESOLVED that Councillor H. Jones be appointed as the Council's representative on the West Mercia Police and Crime Panel.

105\21 **CONSTITUTION REVIEW WORKING GROUP RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Enabling presented a report detailing recommendations that had been made at a meeting of the Constitution Review Working Group held on 28th February 2022.

Council was informed that the recommendations in the report focused on three distinct areas: the introduction of parental leave guidance for Councillors, the proposal to introduce additional delegated powers for officers to act in emergencies, including a cyber incident, and a proposal not to hold Council meetings during a pre-election period.

In relation to the introduction of parental leave guidance for Councillors, Members were advised that the guidance would enable the Council to provide support and guidance to Councillors on maternity, paternity and

adoption leave. This subject had been reviewed by the Constitution Review Working Group, following receipt of a Motion on the subject submitted by Councillor S. Robinson in January 2022. The introduction of the Parental Leave Guidance at Bromsgrove District Council would match best practice arrangements in place at other local authorities in the country. However, Members were asked to note that, despite the introduction of the guidance, there would remain a legal requirement for Councillors to attend at least one meeting every six months.

On the subject of the proposed delegations to the Chief Executive, Members were informed that Officers already had some limited powers to act in an emergency. However, there was a risk that civil emergencies could occur at any point and the Council would need to be able to respond swiftly under these circumstances. Increasingly, the Council, like other modern organisations, was reliant on IT software and systems and it was important to ensure that the authority did everything possible to keep these systems safe and secure from attack. Unfortunately, a cyber security incident at Gloucester City Council in December 2021 had demonstrated that smaller district Councils could be subject to a cyber attack as well as the damage that this could cause. By granting additional officer delegations to the Chief Executive to act in the event of an emergency, including a cyber attack, Bromsgrove District Council would be ensuring that the authority was better prepared to act in the event of an emergency and to minimise disruption to the vital services the Council delivered.

In respect of the proposal not to hold Council meetings during a pre-election period, Council was advised that it was important to note that it was not appropriate to set Council policy during a pre-election period. At Bromsgrove, there were elections every four years, and it was suggested that whichever administration was in control should have set Council policy prior to the start of the pre-election period at the end of those four years. Whilst a Council meeting had been booked in the 2022/23 calendar of meetings to take place in the pre-election period, if this recommendation was approved then officers would review the potential to reschedule the meeting prior to the start of the pre-election period. Members were also asked to note that the recommendation as printed, would provide an option to hold a Council meeting in a pre-election period should the Proper Officer conclude that a meeting was needed at that time.

Following the presentation of the report, Members discussed the proposals that had been made by the Constitution Review Working Group in detail. In doing so, Members welcomed the introduction of Parental Leave Guidance for Councillors. They noted that the guidance would help to provide clarity about the rules that would apply in the event that Councillors went on maternity, paternity or adoption leave.

However, concerns were raised about the proposal to not hold Council meetings during a pre-election period. Members commented that every Council meeting provided an opportunity for Councillors to express their

different political views. Concerns were raised about the extent to which it would be appropriate for the Proper Officer to be involved in determining whether a Council meeting should be held during a pre-election period, although it was noted that meetings would only take place in these circumstances where urgent business needed to be considered. Members also raised concerns that there might be a risk that this arrangement could be extended to a decision not to hold Council meetings during the pre-election period for elections at Worcestershire County Council or at Parish Councils. Members commented that, should this occur, the frequency of Council meetings would reduce significantly.

Questions were also raised about the proposal to introduce further delegated authority for the Chief Executive to act in the event of an emergency. Members commented that this delegated authority would potentially help the Council to manage the impact of an emergency effectively. However, Members noted that these powers should only be used in exceptional circumstances where an emergency occurred and if this was the case, the report to Council should not just be to the next meeting of full Council but to an extraordinary meeting of Council that would need to take place as soon as possible.

At the end of the debate, separate votes were taken in respect of each of the recommendations in turn. In accordance with Procedure Rule 18.3 a recorded vote was taken on the third recommendation, in respect of holding Council meetings during a pre-election period, and the voting was as follows:

Members voting FOR the recommendation:

Councillors A. Beaumont, R. Deeming, G. Denaro, M. Glass, S. Hession, R. Hunter, H. Jones, J. King, A. Kriss, K. May, M. Middleton, C. Spencer, P. Thomas, M. Thompson, J. Till, K. Van Der Plank, S. Webb and P. Whittaker (18).

Members voting AGAINST the recommendation:

Councillors S. Baxter, S. Colella, S. Douglas, A. English, C. Hotham, L. Mallett, P. McDonald and H. Rone-Clarke (8).

Members ABSTAINING in the vote:

No Councillors (0).

The vote was therefore carried.

RESOLVED that

- 1) The Council should introduce Parental Leave Guidance for Councillors;

- 2) The Chief Executive should be granted delegated authority to act in the event of an emergency, including a cyber security attack on the Council; and
- 3) as a general rule there should be no full Council meetings in the pre-election period before a District Council election, unless the Proper Officer determines that a meeting is required.

106\21

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

The Chairman explained that, in the absence of the Portfolio Holder for Environmental Services and Community Safety, the Portfolio Holder's report on the subject of Community Safety would be postponed for consideration at a Council meeting in June 2022. In the meantime, Members were urged to contact the Portfolio Holder for Environmental Services and Community Safety in writing regarding any urgent questions so that a response could be provided as soon as possible.

During consideration of this item, Members questioned the reasons why another Portfolio Holder could not present the report and answer questions in the absence of the Portfolio Holder for Environmental Services and Community Safety. Members were informed that the Portfolio Holder for Environmental Services and Community Safety had been keen to present the report but had unfortunately unexpectedly become poorly the night before Council.

Questions were also raised about the reasons for the report addressing only one part of the Portfolio. The Leader clarified that the Portfolio Holder for Environmental Services and Community Safety had presented a report on the subject of Environmental Services only at the Council meeting held in January 2022. This was because she had only very recently been appointed as the lead Portfolio Holder for Community Safety at that time. The Portfolio Holder report that had been included in the agenda for the meeting in April 2022, and which had been postponed to June 2022, would address the outstanding Community Safety element of her Portfolio.

In concluding the discussions on this item, reference was made to an issue that had been reported with dog fouling in Rock Hill ward, which had been raised by residents on a number of occasions. The Leader requested that further information should be provided to her in writing on this subject so that the matter could be raised with the relevant Officers.

107\21

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE CABINET

Members considered recommendations arising from the Cabinet meeting held on Wednesday 30th March 2022.

Land Drainage Watercourse Maintenance Operation

The Leader presented a report on the subject of the Land Drainage Watercourse Maintenance Operation.

Members were asked to note that this report was being presented in a context in which the climate was changing and there had been an increase in the number of flooding events. To help mitigate this and maintain healthy water courses, North Worcestershire Water Management (NWWM) had been working on a maintenance schedule for all the water courses within Bromsgrove District.

The Council owned approximately 8 km of watercourses, primarily through recreational areas and adopted open spaces. In addition, NWWM, on behalf of the Council, inspected and maintained several un-registered stretches of watercourses. This brought the total length of watercourses maintained for Bromsgrove to over 9 km. Keeping these watercourses well maintained would benefit the community and create an excellent habitat for wildlife including protected species, such as native crayfish, water voles, great crested newts, and nesting birds.

The aim of the plan was to proactively schedule routine inspections and maintenance of each section of a watercourse, to improve both the flood risk and the ecology. The first year was to be viewed as a pilot where there was likely to be more emphasis on inspections. Some activities might need to be undertaken more or less frequently, depending upon the season, and this could be refined over time.

The contractor would not replace the Parks and Place teams, who would still be responsible for wider landscaping maintenance and litter picking. In addition, NWWM would continue to routinely inspect sites on a frequency determined by the potential flood risk of each site. The estimated cost to the Council would be in the region of £45,000 per year.

The Leader concluded by commenting that she believed that the implementation of this plan would significantly improve the flood risk from water courses in the District and also benefit the wildlife that depended on them.

Members subsequently discussed the report in detail and in so doing welcomed the proposed action to address flooding in the District. It was noted that this followed flooding in recent years in parts of the District, including Wythall, which had had a devastating impact on the local community. The extension of the NWWM's work to undertake inspections of additional sites, including in Beoley and Hagley, was also welcomed and Members commented that flooding was increasingly a risk in areas that had not previously been affected by the phenomena.

During consideration of this item, Members noted that flooding had been the focus of a recent scrutiny Task Group. The report had also been pre-scrutinised at a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board. Members

noted that it was important to ensure that action was monitored. For this reason, the Overview and Scrutiny Board would be revisiting the subject in a year's time when the impact of the planned works would be considered alongside the potential for the work to be delivered by Council staff rather than external contractors.

Reference was made to the responsibility that landowners had to take for flooding on their land, even in cases where this flooding had been caused by land mismanagement further upstream. Questions were raised about the extent to which this was morally acceptable. However, Members were advised that there were specific legal guidelines in relation to this matter and the Council and NWWM needed to work within this framework.

At the end of the debate in respect of this report, Members commented that the Oakalls had been spelt incorrectly within the plan. A request was made for this spelling to be addressed in the final plan.

The recommendations were proposed by Councillor K. May and seconded by Councillor A. Kriss.

RESOLVED that

- 1) an additional budget of £45,000 for Land Drainage – Watercourse Maintenance Operations be included in the general fund for the 2022/2023 financial year; and
- 2) a budget of £45,000 for Land Drainage – Watercourse Maintenance Operations be included in the Medium Term Financial Plan for future years.

Equality Strategy 2022 to 2026

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Enabling presented the Equality Strategy 2022 to 2026.

Council was informed that Bromsgrove District Council was committed to eliminating unlawful discrimination, promoting equal opportunities and fostering good relations between people from all of the communities it served. By listening to and considering the different needs of residents and customers, the Council was better placed to design and deliver appropriate, coordinated, and relevant services to the people of Bromsgrove.

To this end, the Equality Strategy had been updated to support the organisation in the effective delivery of its equality work over the following four years, including the Equality Objectives, which were a requirement under the Public Sector Equality Duty. The strategy described how the Council would fulfil its moral, social and legal obligations and what the authority would do to make Bromsgrove a place where people got along with each other and treated each other with dignity and respect.

The strategy also set out the Council's corporate approach to equalities, which would be delivered by:

- supporting all sectors of the local community;
- carrying out internal equalities work;
- providing equalities training and;
- conducting legally required monitoring.

The strategy covered inequality in terms of age, disability, gender reassignment (transgender), marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation and was aimed at those who lived, worked and visited the District, as well as elected Councillors and employees of the Council.

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

RESOLVED that the Equality Strategy 2022 to 2026 be endorsed.

Equality Annual Report 2021

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Enabling presented the Equality Annual Report 2021 for Members' consideration.

Council was informed that this report had been proposed by the Equalities Task Group in 2021. The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Enabling explained that he had been delighted to read the report and to learn about the amount of work that the Council had undertaken during the year.

Members welcomed the report and the good work that had been recorded in the document and it was noted that this had occurred at a challenging time in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Reference was made to the information that had been provided in the report in respect of the Household Support Fund, which noted that the fund had been oversubscribed. Members suggested that it would be helpful to receive further information about the number of people the fund had been oversubscribed by, the number of people who had been eligible to apply and the number of people who had received support through the fund. Members were advised that this information would be provided after the meeting.

The inclusion of information about food banks and the provision of food parcels was also discussed during the meeting. Concerns were raised about residents' need to access food banks, including residents who worked. It was suggested that action needed to be taken to ensure that food banks were not needed in the future.

Consideration was given to the information that had been provided about the Starting Well Partnership's Family Hubs and Members noted that volunteers had been recruited to support these hubs. Questions were

raised about whether the volunteers had received any training and qualifications to enable them to fulfil these roles effectively. Council was informed that Worcestershire County Council had been undertaking work in respect of this initiative, which was designed to enable communities to become more sustainable and to help prevent referrals to Adult Social Care. Bromsgrove District Council had been working closely with Worcestershire County Council in respect of this matter.

Members discussed the appointment of Community Builders in Catshill and Rubery. Questions were raised about whether a tendering process had been carried out to procure a service provider for this. Members were advised that the Council had sought to progress Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) once the Council had successfully bid for Community Builder funding.

A range of community events had been listed within the report. Questions were raised about the reasons why no reference had been made to £5,000 funding that had been collected by residents in Rubery to support an upgrade of the BMX track. The Leader requested that further information on this subject be provided to her in writing so that the matter could be investigated accordingly.

The content and layout of the report were briefly discussed. Members welcomed the narrative that had been included in the report, which helped to provide useful background information. However, Members commented that in future editions it would be helpful for more figures and metrics to be provided to help clarify the context.

Reference was also made to the Equalities Small Grants Scheme. Members commented that, following the end of the Community Grants Scheme, the Equalities Grant Scheme was of increasing importance to local Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) organisations. Officers were urged to provide more information to elected Members about this scheme in future so that it could be promoted accordingly to local community groups. The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Enabling explained that an email had been sent to all Members on this subject.

During consideration of this item, Members noted that in addition to the Council's equalities duties, the authority had a moral responsibility to act to address health inequalities. The potential for a report to be provided in future which focused on the work undertaken in Bromsgrove to address health inequalities was therefore suggested.

Consideration was given to the information that had been provided in the appendix to the report in respect of census data from 2011. Questions were raised about the reasons why figures had not been provided for people aged over 74 in the age categories. Members also queried the data that had been provided in respect of employment figures and whether this accurately reflected the number of households with dependent children that were in employment in the District. It was agreed

that Officers from the Policy Team should contact relevant Members to clarify the figures provided.

In concluding their discussions of this matter, Members thanked the officers that had contributed evidence during the course of the Equalities Task Group investigation. Officers were also thanked for acting on the recommendations from the group that had been endorsed by Cabinet.

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

RESOLVED that the Equality Annual Report 2021 be endorsed.

108\21

TO NOTE THE MINUTES OF THE MEETINGS OF THE CABINET HELD ON 23RD FEBRUARY AND 30TH MARCH 2022

The minutes of the Cabinet meetings held on Wednesday 23rd February and Wednesday 30th March 2022 were submitted.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Cabinet meetings held on Wednesday 23rd February and Wednesday 30th March 2022 be noted.

109\21

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

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

Question Submitted by Councillor S. Robinson

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

“Do you agree with me that the levelling up funds awarded to Bromsgrove should stay in Bromsgrove and will you lobby Worcestershire County Council to invest the proceeds from the sale of the former Bromsgrove Library and fire station site into regenerating Bromsgrove High Street?”

The Leader responded by commenting that she regularly lobbied for Bromsgrove at the County level as did all Members who were both District and County Councillors. It was as a result of this lobbying at both the County Council and the Fire and Rescue Authority that the Council was able to secure the deal in very short timescales.

Question Submitted by Councillor R. Hunter

“Can you confirm what your plans are for the Stourbridge Road car park now that it is being decommissioned as a covid testing centre and what the timescales will be for returning the site to a car park?”

In response to this question, the Leader commented that the mobile units were still on site and not likely to be removed until May 2022. Once they had been removed, officers would survey the site and ensure that all reinstatement work was carried out. At this point, it would return to use as a car park.

Question Submitted by Councillor J. King

“What are your plans for regenerating the vacant plot of land on School Drive formerly occupied by the Sports Hall? Will you commit to putting it back in to use as a public space for the benefit of the local community and explore whether it could also make a contribution to enhancing the natural environment?”

The Leader explained that from the Council’s perspective as landowner, information considered to date, suggested that this would be an ideal site for housing development. A business case was being developed that would be reported to Members in due course.

110\21

MOTIONS ON NOTICE (TO FOLLOW)

The Chairman advised that four Motions on Notice had been received for consideration at the meeting. An hour had been allocated to the consideration of the Motions.

In advance of the meeting, group leaders had agreed that the Motion submitted by Councillor G. Denaro, on the subject of remote meetings, should be agreed without debate. That Motion would not therefore be discussed during the meeting.

Prior to the debate in respect of the Motions, a request was received for the Motion in respect of the 144 bus route to be the first to be debated, to ensure that it could be considered within the time available for the consideration of Motions. The Chairman advised that, out of respect for the Councillors who had submitted Motions on Notice, they would be considered in the order in which they had been received. However, should it be necessary, the time dedicated to the discussion of Motions could potentially be extended.

Televising Council Meetings

Council considered the following Motion on Notice that was submitted by Councillor P. McDonald:

"A great number of local authorities televise their council meetings allowing residents to watch local democracy from the comfort of their homes. This opens the council to full scrutinisation of its actions in the council chamber and shows local democracy at work. Therefore, we call upon officers to present options as to how meetings of full Council can be televised by the next Council meeting."

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

In proposing the Motion, Councillor McDonald commented that since the Covid-19 pandemic, Councils had undertaken a lot of remote working and had made use of far more technology than in previous years. Many local authorities were live streaming their Council and Committee meetings and this enabled their residents to access meetings in a range of ways as well as to engage with the local democratic process, which helped to hold Members to account. For many people, it was more convenient to watch a Committee meeting at home on their personal devices, rather than to attend a meeting in person at Parkside. Live streaming also enabled people who had work, caring and other commitments to learn about the decisions that the Council was making. By televising Council meetings, Bromsgrove District Council would be taking action suitable for local democracy in the twenty-first century.

In seconding the Motion, Councillor Rone-Clarke advised that he had raised the possibility of live streaming Council and Committee meetings in 2019. There were many Councils that already live streamed their meetings and the Council had managed to live stream remote meetings when these were held in the 2020-2021 municipal year. By live streaming Council meetings, Bromsgrove District Council would be in a better position to enable certain groups within the local community to engage in the democratic process, including people with physical disabilities and residents who worked shifts.

In response to the Motion, the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Enabling explained that Bromsgrove District Council had already had some success with the live streaming of some Committee meetings. Generally, the decision to live stream a meeting was based on the likelihood of there being significant public interest in the business due to be conducted at that meeting. In particular, this had meant that the Council had live streamed a number of Planning Committee meetings in recent years, which had tended to attract more public interest than other meetings. Bromsgrove District Council had also successfully live streamed a number of Council meetings, particularly during the pandemic, when public access was restricted for safety reasons.

However, it was recognised that there were a number of different systems available in the wider marketplace. To this end, officers had been tasked with investigating what options were available to the Council. This was to ensure that arrangements continued to offer best value for the authority and for the communities it served, as well as providing opportunities for

members of the public to observe some meetings, should they choose to do so. As this work progressed, Members would be kept fully engaged in discussions about the available options through consideration at meetings of the Constitution Review Working Group.

Members were asked to note that there were financial implications to consider if the Council purchased a dedicated live streaming system. The costs entailed varied between suppliers and types of system, with different packages being available, depending on the needs of the authority and local community. On this basis, the Council would need to carefully consider the most efficient and cost-effective option for the authority.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Enabling concluded by explaining that, whilst he supported the general aim to live stream Council meetings moving forward, he had some reservations about the potential for the available options to be investigated in time to report back to the following meeting of Council in May 2022. In this context, an amendment was proposed to the last five words of the Motion, to read as follows:

"A great number of local authorities televise their council meetings allowing residents to watch local democracy from the comfort of their homes. This opens the council to full scrutinisation of its actions in the council chamber and shows local democracy at work. Therefore, we call upon officers to present options as to how meetings of full Council can be televised and *refer this to the Constitution Review Working Group.*"

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

The extent to which the proposed changes to the wording of the Motion represented a legitimate amendment was briefly discussed. Officers clarified that the Council had previously agreed to refer the subject of a Motion for the consideration of another Council body. Therefore, the amendment was acceptable from a constitutional perspective.

Members subsequently debated the amendment in some detail and in doing so commented that the Constitution Review Working Group could only consider and debate the options available to the Council. A final decision on this subject would need to be taken by Council.

Consideration was given to the financial implications of the various options available. In order to achieve best value for the Council, Members suggested that consideration should be given to procuring a live streaming option jointly with Redditch Borough Council, in line with the two authorities' existing shared service arrangements.

In responding to the proposed amendment, Councillor McDonald questioned the extent to which the arrangements for live streaming meetings would be financially expensive. Members were advised that residents could and had recorded Council meetings directly from their

phones onto social media. Council was also asked to note that, given meetings had been live streamed when held remotely during the 2020 – 2021 municipal year, there would already be some familiarity amongst Officers with the options available.

On being put to the vote, the amendment was carried.

In concluding the discussions in respect of this Motion, Members discussed the extent to which it would be appropriate for the Constitution Review Working Group to review the options available to the Council in order to live stream meetings. Given the financial implications, the suggestion was made that it might be more appropriate for this matter to be considered further by the Finance and Budget Working Group. However, Members were advised that the Constitution Review Working Group had previously requested further investigation of this matter.

On being put to the vote the amended Motion was carried.

RESOLVED that a great number of local authorities televise their council meetings allowing residents to watch local democracy from the comfort of their homes. This opens the council to full scrutinisation of its actions in the council chamber and shows local democracy at work. Therefore, we call upon officers to present options as to how meetings of full Council can be televised and refer this to the Constitution Review Working Group.

Support for Ukraine

Council also considered the following Motion on Notice that was submitted by Councillor K. May:

“Bromsgrove District Council is saddened and disturbed by the aggression against Ukraine, which has caused horrific devastation, and created an escalating humanitarian crisis with millions displaced or affected. In light of this, and as a way of expressing support for the people of Ukraine and members of our communities who are from or who have ties with Ukraine this Council;

- a. Condemns the invasion of Ukraine and stands in solidarity with the people of Ukraine and their families and friends.
- b. Stands ready to provide support and assistance to innocent people displaced and affected.
- c. Will work with and support the efforts of our local communities to provide help, support and comfort to those in need.”

The Motion was proposed by Councillor May and seconded by Councillor C. Hotham.

In proposing the Motion, Councillor May noted that on 24th February 2022, Russia invaded Ukraine. Councillor May expressed the view that it was

important to demonstrate the Council's support for the Ukrainian population at this time. The support was echoed by local residents, many of whom had offered their homes to temporarily rehouse Ukrainian refugees. In providing this support, Members would be recognising that Ukrainian refugees had been displaced from their homes and livelihoods as a result of the war.

In seconding the Motion, Councillor Hotham commented that he welcomed the fact that this was a Motion that had received cross party support. Ukraine was in a desperately sad predicament. Ukrainian citizens had moved in the period of a few weeks from peace and relative stability to war. Unfortunately, there were reports of civilians suffering due to instances of bombings, rape and murders perpetrated by members of the Russian Army. In this context, there was a need to do everything possible to support Ukrainians and to stand up to Russia.

Council subsequently discussed the Motion and there was agreement that it was important to demonstrate solidarity with the people of Ukraine. Members expressed sympathy for the situation in which Ukrainian citizens had been placed. It was noted that many people in the UK had contributed to the humanitarian aid offered to Ukraine. Unfortunately, there had been some delays in terms of the provision of this aid and Members expressed hopes that this would be rectified soon. Members noted that there would be economic consequences to the war and the sanctions imposed on Russia as a consequence, however, people would be willing to make sacrifices.

Members praised the work of families and individuals living in the District who had already offered accommodation to Ukrainian refugees. In some cases, Ukrainian families were waiting for visas to be issued in order to travel to the UK. Members noted that hosts would be committed to providing accommodation to Ukrainians for up to six months. After this point, there was the possibility that alternative housing options might be required and the Council would need to work closely with Bromsgrove District Housing Trust (BDHT) to support people accordingly.

On being put to the vote the Motion was carried.

RESOLVED that Bromsgrove District Council is saddened and disturbed by the aggression against Ukraine, which has caused horrific devastation, and created an escalating humanitarian crisis with millions displaced or affected. In light of this, and as a way of expressing support for the people of Ukraine and members of our communities who are from or who have ties with Ukraine this Council;

- a. Condemns the invasion of Ukraine and stands in solidarity with the people of Ukraine and their families and friends.
- b. Stands ready to provide support and assistance to innocent people displaced and affected.

c. Will work with and support the efforts of our local communities to provide help, support and comfort to those in need.

144 Bus Service

The following Motion on Notice was submitted by Councillor H. Rone-Clarke for consideration at the meeting.

“Bromsgrove District Council condemns the proposal to cut the 144 bus service.

Council acknowledges how vital this service is to many of our residents, who use it to commute to Worcester and Birmingham.

Council therefore resolves to make known our support for this service and commits to lobby the relevant authorities to ensure its survival.”

The Motion was proposed by Councillor Rone-Clarke and seconded by Councillor K. May.

In proposing the Motion, Councillor Rone-Clarke commented that the 144 bus service had been in operation since early in the twentieth century. Like many residents, Councillor Rone-Clarke had utilised the service in his youth. Many local residents relied on the service to travel to and from college, to provide care in the community and to travel to and from work. A petition had been launched on this subject which was receiving a lot of support. Without access to the service, many vulnerable residents would be required to pay for a taxi or to spend extra on fuel for their own vehicles.

In seconding the Motion, Councillor May advised that she, like other colleagues, had been actively lobbying Worcestershire County Council on this subject. The Worcestershire County Council Cabinet Member with responsibility for Highways and Transport had sent the Leader the following statement, that day, on this subject:

“Worcestershire County Council are engaged in talks with two operators to offer possible timetables and costings to replace the 144 service. The deadline for these operators to come back to us is 3pm Friday 22nd and they will be discussed as priority on Monday 25th when the Transport Network Development Manager at Worcestershire County Council returns from leave.

With regards to the school children that would normally use the 144 into Bromsgrove, First have confirmed they will operate their existing S45 school service along the route of the 144 from 2nd May.”

The Leader expressed the view that this statement demonstrated that things were moving in the right direction. At a time when the Council was trying to encourage people to use their cars less frequently in order to

reduce carbon emissions, it was important to ensure that public transport met the needs of local residents.

Members welcomed the cross-party support for the Motion and agreed that the action proposed in the Motion would benefit the local community. It was noted that Councillors needed to set an example in their communities and using public transport to travel around the District was a key element of this. The public transport options needed to be available to enable Members and the public to choose to travel in this way, rather than relying on personal vehicles.

Reference was made to the particular needs of elderly and vulnerable residents who might be unable to drive their own vehicles. Many residents in this position relied on public transport and it was therefore important to ensure they could access bus services at different times to attend hospital appointments, socialise and do essential shopping. Many Members noted that they had been contacted by local residents about this issue prior to the Council meeting, which had helped to raise awareness of the impact that the end of this service would have in the local community.

During consideration of this item, Members noted that there were parts of the District that were not served by a bus service. Residents living in these areas had limited incentives to encourage them to use public transport instead of their own vehicles. However, a reduction in car use would have a beneficial impact on carbon emissions. Members suggested that in order to achieve this, bus connectivity in rural areas needed to be addressed.

On being put to the vote the Motion was carried.

RESOLVED that Bromsgrove District Council condemns the proposal to cut the 144 bus service.

Council acknowledges how vital this service is to many of our residents, who use it to commute to Worcester and Birmingham.

Council therefore resolves to make known our support for this service and commits to lobby the relevant authorities to ensure its survival.

The meeting closed at 8.05 p.m.

Chairman