

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MEETING OF THE CABINET

15TH SEPTEMBER 2021, AT 6.00 P.M.

PRESENT: Councillors K.J. May (Leader), A. D. Kent (Deputy Leader),
G. N. Denaro, M. A. Sherrey, P.L. Thomas and M. Thompson

Observers: Councillor S. R. Colella (Chairman of the Library
Services Changes Task Group) and Councillor C. A. Hotham
(Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Board)

Officers: Mrs. S. Hanley, Mrs. R. Bamford, Ms J. Willis,
Mr O. Paparega, Ms. C. Flanagan and Mrs. J. Bayley-Hill

9/21

TO RECEIVE APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received on behalf of Councillor S. Webb.

10/21

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

During consideration of this item Councillors K. May and M. Thompson declared other disclosable interests in Minute Item No. 15/21 – Community Grant Scheme – as they had both supported an application for grant funding submitted by community groups based in their wards. For this reason, they did not participate in the debate in respect of this item or vote thereon.

Councillor M. Thompson also declared a pecuniary interest in Minute Item No. 18/21 – Zero Carbon Heat Network Route to Market - as his employer, Bromsgrove School, had been one of the organisations providing a financial contribution to support, and would benefit from, the Detailed Design Phase of the Project from the Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) Heat Network Delivery Unit (HNDU). He left the room during consideration of this item and took no part in the debate or voting thereon.

11/21

**TO CONFIRM THE ACCURACY OF THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING
OF THE CABINET HELD ON 7TH JULY 2021**

The minutes of the meeting of Cabinet held on Wednesday 7th July 2021 were submitted.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on Wednesday 7th July 2021 be approved as a correct record.

12/21

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD HELD ON 6TH JULY 2021

The minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board held on 6th July 2021 were submitted.

The Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Board, Councillor C. Hotham, was in attendance and explained that during the meeting of the Board held on 6th July 2021 Members had discussed the subject of air quality and had been surprised to learn that this was not considered to be too concerning for Bromsgrove District. The situation was being monitored and further action would be taken if needed.

A Motion in respect of car parking charges for Waseley Hill Country Park had also been discussed at this meeting. As agreed by the Board, the Chairman had subsequently written to Worcestershire County Council about the matter.

The Corporate Performance Scrutiny Working Group had been suspended during the period in which the Equalities Task Group investigation had been undertaken but as this had been completed the group would start to meet again. There had been a limited number of Members of the Board who had volunteered to serve on the group but at the latest meeting of the Board the terms of reference for the group had changed and this would create greater flexibility in terms of membership of the group.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board held on 6th July 2021 be noted.

13/21

IMPACT OF LIBRARY SERVICE CHANGES TASK GROUP

The Chairman of the Impact of Library Service Changes Task Group, Councillor S. Colella, presented the group's final report for Cabinet's consideration.

Members were informed that the investigation had been launched into the impact of changes to library services agreed by Worcestershire County Council. During the investigation, Members had interviewed the former Cabinet Member from Worcestershire County Council with responsibility for library services and had learned that Bromsgrove District Council was the only District authority reviewing the matter.

The Task Group had discovered that library services were very dynamic in Bromsgrove District and an excellent service was provided to the public. The review had also highlighted that the libraries served customers from a wide range of demographic backgrounds, including different age groups. Worcestershire County Council's review of library services had involved staff reorganisation and was likely to result in a reduction in financial costs.

The review of library services would potentially result in opportunities for Parish Councils to assist with the delivery of local library services. There was a balance that needed to be struck between meeting local needs and taking into account the impact of service changes on local communities. There was also a need for volunteers to ensure that there was continuity in the delivery of library services.

Councillor Colella concluded by commenting that the group had been reassured by news that there were no plans to close library services in Bromsgrove District. He thanked the Members of the Task Group for their hard work as well as the Democratic Services Officer for her support and the Officers and Members who had submitted evidence during the investigation.

The Portfolio Holder for Leisure, Cultural Services and Community Safety outlined a response on behalf of Cabinet by addressing each recommendation from the Task Group in turn.

In respect of recommendation 1, which proposed that Members should continue to receive up to date information in relation to proposed changes to libraries in their wards, it was noted that this would represent continuation of existing practice at Worcestershire County Council.

The second recommendation proposed that Members should be consulted on potential changes to Strategic Libraries in the District. Cabinet was informed that there was a statutory process that had to be followed by Worcestershire County Council, in terms of consulting with residents about such changes and Members would therefore already be consulted in their capacity as local residents.

The third recommendation proposed a publicity campaign in respect of the facilities available at the libraries in the District. Members commented that this could be brought to the attention of Worcestershire County Council but Bromsgrove District Council could not make this decision on behalf of the County Council.

The final recommendation from the group proposed that Worcestershire County Council should ensure that any grant funding that was received was distributed amongst libraries. Again, Cabinet was informed that this needed to be determined by Worcestershire County Council and Bromsgrove District Council could not influence the matter.

Cabinet subsequently discussed the Impact of Library Service Changes Task Group's final report and recommendations in some detail. Concerns were raised that Cabinet had been asked to resolve to approve the group's recommendations when a number were outside the remit of Bromsgrove District Council. Concerns were also raised about the length of time that had been taken to complete the scrutiny investigation.

RESOLVED that the Impact of Library Service Changes Task Group's final report be noted.

14/21

ADOPTION OF LAND BY BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL AND THE MANAGEMENT OF COMMUTED SUMS FOR OFF-SITE PROVISION.

The Head of Planning, Regeneration and Leisure Services presented a report on the subject of the Adoption of Land by Bromsgrove District Council and the Management of Commuted Sums for Off-Site Provision.

Members were informed that developers could opt to provide open space land to the Council to manage on behalf of the community. However, other options were available to developers, including the potential to request that Parish Councils managed open spaces or for open space land to remain privately owned. The policy that had been developed related to land that was adopted by the Council.

Reference was made to the report and policy and it was noted that inconsistencies had been identified in the report in terms of the length of time which would apply to the maintenance period under the terms of the policy. Officers confirmed that this would be a period of 30 years. Members requested that report authors clearly check the content of their reports in future to ensure that correct information was included in policy documents.

During consideration of this item, the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Board, Councillor C. Hotham, outlined the Board's conclusions in respect of the report, which had been pre-scrutinised at a meeting held on 13th September 2021. Members were advised that the Board had unanimously agreed a recommendation which proposed changes to the wording in the Objectives section of the policy. In proposing this recommendation, the Board had identified the need for clarity on the objectives of the Council in relation to this matter, in terms of the Council's preferred approach to managing open spaces. The Board's second recommendation proposed changes to the policy in order to recognise that another body, such as a Parish Council, might manage open spaces, not just Bromsgrove District Council. The Board had concluded that it would be preferable for a local democratic and publicly elected body to adopt open space land, if offered the opportunity.

Cabinet discussed the recommendations that had been made by the Overview and Scrutiny Board on this subject. In doing so, it was noted that the Council did not necessarily have a particular preference in relation to adopting and managing open spaces, which could have financial implications for the authority. In addition, concerns were raised that the proposal with respect to a preference for the authority had not been investigated in detail prior to the Cabinet meeting and there might be wider implications which had not yet been identified. The Council could adopt and manage land but this needed to be on the basis of a satisfactory agreement having been reached. Members noted that

landlords could not be required to involve the Council in the adoption of open space land, though policy clarified that the authority would enter into discussions with developers where appropriate funding would be available. Finally, concerns were raised that some Parish Councils would not have sufficient funds to enable them to assume responsibility for managing open space land and therefore an expectation that this could occur might not be appropriate. For these reasons, Cabinet concluded that the recommendations from the Overview and Scrutiny Board on this subject would not be supported.

RESOLVED that, subject to amending the policy to clarify application of the maintenance period for 30 years, the Adoption of Land by Bromsgrove District Council and the Management of Commuted Sums for Off-site Provision Policy be used if the Council should be offered open space land for adoption

15/21

COMMUNITY GRANT SCHEME

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Enabling Services, as Chairman of the Community Grants Panel, presented a report and recommendations in respect of the Council's Community Grant Scheme.

Cabinet was informed that the Community Grants Panel had considered a number of applications and had made recommendations regarding the funding that should be awarded to certain groups.

During consideration of this item, Members were advised that following on from the Panel meetings, the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Enabling had been made aware that some questions had been raised outside the meeting about the award of funding to the "To Catch a Thief" initiative in Rubery. The police had raised concerns that this initiative could lead to vulnerable people being locked in an old telephone box. In this context, an addition recommendation was made that Cabinet should delegate authority to the Head of Finance and Community Services, following consultation with the Chairman of the Community Grants Panel, to further consider and resolve on the grant funding for this project.

RESOLVED that

- 1) The grants, as detailed in the Summary of the Community Grants Panel Recommendations, be agreed with the exception of the proposed grant for "To Catch a Thief" in Rubery;
- 2) Delegated authority be granted to the Head of Finance and Community Services, following consultation with the Chairman of the Community Grants Panel, to determine the outcome of the award for the "To Catch a Thief" project; and
- 3) Should the scheme continue into 2022/23 then a full review of the process be carried out prior to the commencement in future years.

(Prior to consideration of this item Councillors K May and M. Thompson declared an other disclosable interest in the report as they had both supported applications for funding in the Community Grants Scheme from community groups based in their wards. For this reason, they did not participate in the debate on this item nor vote thereon.)

16/21

BROMSGROVE TOWN CENTRE MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

The Leader and Portfolio Holder for Economic Development, the Town Centre and Strategic Partnerships presented the Bromsgrove Town Centre Management Strategy Action Plan for the period April 2021 to March 2022.

Members were advised that the previous Bromsgrove Town Centres Manager had departed the authority and unfortunately it had not been possible to recruit a replacement by the date of the meeting. In the interim period, an events company, Blackberry Productions, were working on managing the town centres on the Council's behalf. The report therefore provided an update on interim measures that would remain in place until a new Bromsgrove Town Centres Manager was recruited.

The Head of North Worcestershire Economic Development and Regeneration explained that a Business Advisor had been recruited who would cover the business engagement duties usually undertaken by the Bromsgrove Town Centres Manager. There were an increasing number of online retailers operating in Bromsgrove District and the Business Advisor would assist these companies with matters such as non-Covid grant applications and the adoption of digital technology. In addition, there had been recent investments in the former St John's Wine Rooms, which indicated that there were signs of confidence in Bromsgrove town centre.

Members discussed the report and in so doing noted that Aston Fields had been added to the list of town centres that were managed by the Council. Members noted that Aston Fields was an important strategic link for Bromsgrove, as Bromsgrove Train Station was located in that ward.

During consideration of this item, reference was made to the Overview and Scrutiny Board's pre-scrutiny of the report at a meeting held on 13th September 2021. The Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Board explained that Members had raised concerns that the loss of staff had had an impact in the town centres. The Board had agreed that the situation in a number of the town centres had changed since the Action Plan was developed and, therefore, as well as approving the strategy, the Board had recommended that the relevant lead officer should visit all of the town centres to observe the conditions and then subsequently update the Action Plan.

The Overview and Scrutiny Board's recommendation was discussed and it was noted that this proposal would add value to the management of the town centres in Bromsgrove District. For this reason, the recommendation was approved.

RESOLVED that

- 1) The Bromsgrove Centres Management Action Plan (April 2021 – March 2022) be approved; and
- 2) At the earliest opportunity the relevant officers revisit the Town Centres to update the plan and offer support.

17/21

CABINET OUTSIDE BODY APPOINTMENTS

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Enabling presented a report outlining appointments to Outside Bodies made by the Cabinet. Members were advised that many of these appointments were made in an ex officio capacity, to reflect the particular roles held by Portfolio Holders.

RESOLVED that the nominations to outside bodies detailed at Appendix 1 to the report be approved.

18/21

ZERO CARBON HEAT NETWORK - ROUTE TO MARKET

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Enabling Services presented the Zero Carbon Heat Network – Route to Market report for Cabinet's consideration.

Members were informed that the Council was in the process of developing a zero-carbon heat network project to supply zero-carbon heat to homes, businesses and public buildings in Bromsgrove town centre. A report had previously been considered on this subject by Cabinet when Members had concluded that it would be appropriate to continue with the project through to the Detailed Project Design (DPD) stage. A feasibility study had been produced in respect of this matter in 2019.

In 2020, the Council had secured £227,500 towards the DPD phase of the heat network project from the Government. This had been matched by some additional funding from Bromsgrove District Council, Bromsgrove School and the Worcestershire Health and Care NHS Trust.

In April 2021, a specialist Project Manager had been appointed. The Project Manager had identified that, since the original scheme was approved, there had been a number of changes to the Government's decarbonisation plans. These changes affected the heat network project and therefore required Member endorsement.

Combined heat and power was due to be phased out for new heat networks during 2025. Therefore, the first recommendation in the report

proposed that the Heat Network should become a Zero Carbon Heat Network.

Members were asked to note that the Government had recently consulted on how Planning Authorities could have the powers to encourage both existing and new developments to connect to the network within a zone. The third recommendation in the report therefore proposed that a Heat Network zone should be pursued for the town centre project.

A new concession route to market was now available and there had been acknowledgement that not all local authorities wanted to directly invest in heat networks or to take on the associated risks. The concession approach enabled local authorities to procure a partner organisation in the private sector via a concession model to deliver the heat network. Therefore, the fourth recommendation proposed that the concession route to market should be pursued for Bromsgrove town centre. This route would need to be negotiated and therefore the fifth recommendation proposed that authority should be delegated to relevant officers to negotiate a Concession Agreement.

To ensure appropriate oversight of the project, a further recommendation had been made that a Project Board should be established to oversee the Zero Carbon Heat Network project.

RESOLVED that

- 1) In line with Government Policy, the Heat network becomes a Zero Carbon Heat Network (ZCHN);
- 2) The title "Bromsgrove Zero-Carbon Heat Network" be adopted;
- 3) A Heat Network Zone is pursued for the Town Centre to support and compliment the ZCHN; and

RECOMMENDED that

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

(Prior to consideration of this item, Councillor M. Thompson declared a pecuniary interest as his employer, Bromsgrove School, had been one of the organisations providing a financial contribution to support, and would benefit from, the Detailed Design Phase of the Project from the Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) Heat

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Network Delivery Unit (HNDU). He left the room during consideration of this item and took no part in the debate or voting thereon.)

The meeting closed at 6.50 p.m.

Chairman