

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MEETING OF THE CABINET

24TH NOVEMBER 2021, AT 6.00 P.M.

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

Observers: Councillor C. A. Hotham and Dave Cove

Officers: Mr. K. Dicks, J Howse, Ms. C. Flanagan, Claire Green, Mrs. J. Bayley-Hill and Mrs. P. Ross

30/21 **TO RECEIVE APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

An apology for absence was received on behalf of Councillor A. Kent.

31/21 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

32/21 **TO CONFIRM THE ACCURACY OF THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE CABINET HELD ON 20TH OCTOBER 2021**

The minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 20th October 2021 were submitted.

The Chairman advised that Councillor A. Kent's apologies should have been reported at the previous meeting and asked for this to be noted.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of Cabinet held on 20th October 2021 be approved as a true and correct record.

33/21 **MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD HELD ON 18TH OCTOBER 2021**

The Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Board, Councillor C. Hotham, presented the minutes of the meeting of the Board held on 18th October 2021.

Cabinet was informed that Board had agreed to amend the minutes of the previous meeting, as requested by Councillor R. Hunter, to reflect slightly different wording in a recommendation on the subject of the Bromsgrove Town Centre Management Strategy. This amendment had reflected a proposal for relevant Officers to visit the town centres at the earliest opportunity with the ward Councillors and other interested parties. The recommendation had already been considered and approved by Cabinet under its previous wording.

The Board had received a presentation on the subject of the staff survey. Discussions had been held about the potential for feedback from staff employed by Bromsgrove District Council to be separated from feedback provided by staff employed by Redditch Borough Council. However, the Board had concluded that, due to the integrated shared services arrangements between the two authorities, this would not be feasible. Members had identified that there was limited information available about the costs of the staff survey and, although reassured by the Director of Resources that the staff survey was affordable, had concluded that the Cabinet should receive further information about the costs.

Concerns had been raised at the Board meeting regarding the additional and amended questions that the Corporate Management Team (CMT) could request, as it was suggested that this could skew the results, but Members had been reassured to learn that the circulation of any additional and amended questions would be co-ordinated by an independent organisation. Officers also clarified that additional questions would only be asked where it was considered that extra information on a particular subject would be appropriate.

Discussions had also been held amongst scrutiny Members regarding the budget preparation process. Local Government Finance training had subsequently been provided to Members, which had been well attended.

The Cabinet response to the Libraries Task Group's final report and recommendations had been considered by the Board. The Board had been keen for some action to be taken in respect of the Libraries Task Group's findings so it had been agreed that the Task Group should be reconvened. A meeting of the group had already taken place and the Leader and the Portfolio Holder for Leisure, Cultural Services and Community Safety had been invited to attend a meeting to discuss the matter further.

Councillor Hotham concluded by explaining that at the latest meeting of the Board, Members had discussed arrangements for performance scrutiny at the Council. Unfortunately, only a couple of Members had volunteered to be members of the Corporate Performance Working Group. Members had decided that a different approach should therefore be taken to performance scrutiny and in future reports would be presented to the Board on the performance of Council services every six months.

During consideration of this item, Members noted a typographical error in the Overview and Scrutiny Board minutes. Cabinet noted that Councillor P. Thomas should have been recorded as in attendance at the meeting to speak as Portfolio Holder for Leisure, Cultural Services and Community Safety on the Cabinet's response to the Libraries Task Group's final report.

RESOLVED that

- 1) The Cabinet are fully informed of the higher and lower cost of the staff survey; and
- 2) The minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting held on 18th October 2021 be noted.

34/21

FINANCIAL OUTTURN 2020/21 REPORT

The Executive Director of Resources presented the Financial Outturn Report 2020/21.

Cabinet was informed that the report focused on the Council's revenue position in the 2020/21 financial year. The figures remained to be audited. However, it was anticipated that in order to balance the budget £228,736 needed to be transferred from the general Covid grant to the general fund.

There had been a number of variations in the budget during the year. The overall position was consistent with the budget projections in quarter 3 of the financial year, although the position had slightly improved. The main variations related to the increases in costs arising from inflation, waste service costs, planning costs and the loss of income from car parking. There remained funding in the Council's general Covid grant and it was anticipated that this would be used to help cover any financial pressures arising in the 2021/22 financial year.

Members discussed the report and questioned the timescales for the Council to meet the additional costs in the planning process that had arisen during the year. Officers clarified that the Development Control department had been overspent by £270,000 and £200,000 of this had been due to the costs associated with the Council losing a planning case at appeal, including substantial legal costs. The exact timescales for this payment to be settled would need to be clarified but the Council was committed to making this payment.

During consideration of this item, the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Board was invited to speak on behalf of the Board on this matter. Cabinet was advised that scrutiny Members had discussed the potential for the general Covid grant funding to be incorporated into the Council's balances and reserves. However, the Director of Resources explained that there were no increased risk that the Council could lose this funding if it was retained in a separate general Covid grant account and therefore no action needed to be taken at present to transfer the funds to a different budget.

RESOLVED that the outturn financial position in relation to the revenue budgets for the year April 2020 – March 2021 be noted.

RECOMMENDED that £228,736 be transferred from the General Covid Grant to the Council's general fund to balance the outturn position for 2020/21.

35/21

MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN 2022/23 TO 2024/25

The Director of Resources presented an update to Cabinet on the Medium Term Financial Plan 2022/23 to 2024/25.

Members were advised that the financial position for the Council, similar to many local authorities, was challenging. There was a need to maintain sufficient balances moving forward whilst also setting the budget in the Medium Term Financial Plan. The majority of local government funding at a District Council level derived from Council Tax and business rates. However, there was a lot of uncertainty about local government finances and future funding arrangements and this would need to be taken into account when setting the budget.

Cabinet was informed that this presentation followed the provision of more detailed information to Members at the local government finance training session that had been delivered earlier in the month. Details would also be shared with scrutiny Members at meetings of the Finance and Budget Working Group.

RESOLVED that the presentation be noted.

36/21

OUTSIDE BODIES - CABINET APPOINTMENT

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Enabling presented a report on the subject of the Cabinet's appointment to the Worcestershire Health Improvement Group (HIG). Members were advised that it had been understood that a single representative of the Councils in north Worcestershire should be appointed to the HIG. However, clarification had subsequently been provided by Worcestershire County Council that each District Council in Worcestershire could appoint a representative to the HIG.

Cabinet's nomination to the HIG would be Councillor S. Webb, as the lead Portfolio Holder for Health and Well Being. Officers confirmed that this appointment could be approved by Cabinet as Councillor Webb would be appointed to the role in an ex officio capacity.

RESOLVED that the Portfolio Holder for Strategic Housing and Health and Well Being, be approved as the Council's representative on the Health Improvement Group.

37/21

FINANCIAL UPDATE REGARDING LEISURE SERVICES

The Executive Director of Finance and Resources presented a report that provided a financial update regarding Leisure Services.

Cabinet was informed that across the country leisure services had been impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic. The situation in respect of Leisure Service provision in Bromsgrove District represented a financial risk to the Council. Action was being taken in respect of risk management to help mitigate the risks. As part of this process, the Council aimed to secure additional grant funding, such as funding from Sports England, to help cover costs.

During consideration of this item, the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Board explained that the Board had pre-scrutinised the report in detail at a meeting held on 22nd November 2021. All of the options available to the Council in relation to Leisure Services had been considered by the Board, which had concluded that the resolutions detailed in the report represented the best way forward for the Council.

RESOLVED that

- 1) The impact of Covid-19 on Council's contracted Leisure service and the steps taken to mitigate the financial risks in this regard are noted;
- 2) the financial context and the financial impact in this regard are noted;
- 3) the options available to the Council are noted; and
- 1) the proposal to negotiate a 2021/22 deed of variation to the contract is approved.

The meeting closed at 6.29 p.m.

Chairman