

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MEETING OF THE CABINET

WEDNESDAY, 18TH JANUARY 2023, AT 6.00 P.M.

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

Officers: Mr. K. Dicks (via Microsoft Teams), Mrs. S. Hanley,
Mr P. Carpenter, Mrs. C. Felton (via Microsoft Teams),
Ms M. Howell, Mrs L. Berry and Mrs J. Gresham

57/22 **TO RECEIVE APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors M. Sherrey and P.L. Thomas.

58/22 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

59/22 **TO CONFIRM THE ACCURACY OF THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING
OF THE CABINET HELD ON 23RD NOVEMBER 2022**

The minutes of the meeting of Cabinet held on 23d November 2022 were submitted.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of Cabinet held on 23d November 2022 be approved as a true and correct record.

60/22 **MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY
BOARD HELD ON 21ST NOVEMBER 2022**

The Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Board, Councillor C. Hotham, presented the minutes of the meeting of the Board held on 21st November 2022.

Cabinet was informed that during the meeting, Members had received an update on the Performance Dashboard and the Fuel Poverty Task Group. Councillor Hotham took the opportunity to thank Councillor S. Webb for her work alongside the Task Group.

At this meeting the Board had also received an update on the CCTV Digitalisation Upgrade where Members had learned that, although most CCTV transmission lines within the District were now digital, three camera locations in the District remained on analogue transmission. It was with this in mind, that the Overview and Scrutiny Board had made a recommendation to Cabinet that the CCTV digitalisation upgrade project be completed and that the three outstanding camera locations in Brook Road (Rubery), Wythall and Alvechurch be upgraded. Cabinet was informed that the cost of the completion of the upgrade would be £48,600, to be included in the Capital Programme and a further £6,030 per annum would be needed for maintenance costs from the revenue budget.

During consideration of this item, there were some queries regarding the impact of analogue transmission of these cameras given that they were digital and of good quality. It was noted that there may be an impact on the quality of transmission of images, however it did not appear that there were significant gaps in the transmission through the analogue lines.

Reference was also made to Recommendation 2, which proposed that that all options for obtaining external funding for CCTV system upgrades be pursued. Officers confirmed that currently there was no indication that any additional funding would be available from the Police and Crime Commissioner fund for this project.

Cabinet agreed that they were happy to support this recommendation and therefore it was

RECOMMENDED that

- 1) £48,600 be included in the Capital Programme and £6,030 per annum in the revenue budget as part of the review of the Medium Term Financial Plan for the upgrade of CCTV cameras at Brook Road (Rubery), Wythall and Alvechurch.

RESOLVED that

- 2) all options for obtaining external funding for CCTV system upgrades be pursued.

61/22

BROMSGROVE CENTRES STRATEGY

The Bromsgrove Centres Manager presented the Bromsgrove Centres Strategy for Members' consideration.

Members were informed that the Bromsgrove Centres Strategy covered a three-year period for Bromsgrove High Street and the seven outlying centres within Bromsgrove District.

Cabinet was advised that the Bromsgrove Centres Strategy was a high-level document that outlined the work to be undertaken in order to make all Bromsgrove Centres more attractive to businesses, shoppers, workers, residents and visitors. It was hoped that this would result in a varied and eclectic mix of outlets and venues.

In addition to this it was also reported to Members that the purpose of the Bromsgrove Centres Strategy was to understand the baseline performance of the Centres and to identify any opportunities for change. This included the following:

- Outlining a vision for the Centres that was supported by key objectives.
- Identifying the priorities for improvement and regeneration in the Centres in line with the key objectives.
- Developing an action plan that outlined the priorities needed and the mechanisms for delivery.

Cabinet was informed that the Bromsgrove Centres Strategy focussed on the key themes which were linked to specific outputs. These key themes were outlined as follows:

1. Accessibility
2. Safety and Security
3. Marketing and Promotion
4. Markets
5. Business Support
6. Public Realm
7. Historic Environment
8. Future

Members were advised that the outputs listed under these key themes were not exhaustive and may change as dialogue progressed with Ward Members, Parish Councils and Community Groups.

Furthermore, it was reported to Members that a detailed Action Plan sat alongside the Bromsgrove Centres Strategy and that performance indicators were included within this Action Plan. Members were advised that the Action Plan would be presented to Members annually in order to monitor progress and review for the following year. The Bromsgrove Centres Manager reported that the review of the Action Plan would help to support the vibrancy of the Centres and that communication with the both the Portfolio Holder, Members and external stakeholders remained key throughout the process in order to enable businesses to thrive.

Members were advised as part of the presentation that the Bromsgrove Centres Strategy would complement and support the work of the Parish Councils, Business and Trader Associations and other key stakeholders in each of the Centres with a focus on developing shared ambitions and actions.

Following the presentation, Members stated that they were excited with the new Bromsgrove Centres Strategy and that it would be a catalyst to reinvigorate Bromsgrove High Street and the seven outlying Centres within the District.

During consideration of this item, there was some discussion with regard to potentially including the smaller Centres in order to ensure that event clashes across the District were not experienced. Members were informed that Officers were currently working on establishing an Events Calendar for the District in order to avoid any potential event clashes and that this would also be a useful tool in highlighting the vibrancy of Bromsgrove District.

RESOLVED that the Bromsgrove Centres Strategy & Action Plan 2023-2026 as attached at Appendix 1 be approved.

62/22

COUNCIL TAX BASE REPORT

The Interim Section 151 Officer presented the Council Tax Base report.

Cabinet was advised that this was a standard report that was provided as part of the Council Tax setting process for Bromsgrove District Council and the precepting authorities. It was reported that the data included within the report was information available as of 1st December 2022.

Members were informed that the Council Tax Base had increased from 37,511.05 to 37,919.44 and that the report took into account the revised

Council Tax Support Scheme, due to be considered later at this meeting. In addition to this, the Interim Section 151 Officer stated that the proposals had been included in the Medium Term Financial Plan.

During consideration of this item, a query was raised regarding the figures detailed in the report, which appeared not to be consistent with those detailed in Appendix 1 of the report. Officers confirmed that the figures included in Appendix 1 were for both the 2022/23 year and the previous municipal year.

RESOLVED that the amount calculated by Bromsgrove District Council as the Council Tax Base for the whole area for 2023/24 be approved at 37,919.44 as detailed in Appendix 1 to include the individual parish elements.

63/22

COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME

The Interim Section 151 Officer presented the Council Tax Support Scheme report.

Members were reminded that the Council Tax Support Scheme had previously been presented to Cabinet at the meeting held in October 2022, whereby it was agreed that Option B be put out for consultation. Officers explained that Option B had included changes to income level and introduced disregards to childcare charges and critical payments. It was expected that the increase in costs would be £140k and that Bromsgrove District Council would be responsible for £13-14k of these costs.

Cabinet was informed that the consultation period was completed in December 2022 and that there had been 87 respondents. Of these responses, 65% had agreed with the changes to income level changes, 72% of respondents had agreed with the disregard to childcare allowances and 80% had agreed with the critical payment disregards.

A response was also received from one of the preceptors, Worcestershire County Council (WCC) who had indicated they were not supportive of the revisions due to the impact on WCC budgets.

Members were advised that it was considered that if Council Tax Support was not given to those identified within the report, it may result in an increase in default payments ultimately impacting on future Council Tax payments.

Following the presentation of the report, Members noted that these were positive revisions particularly at a time when residents were facing significant financial challenges.

RECOMMENDED that

- 1) Council be asked to approve the introduction of a revised and more supportive Council Tax Reduction scheme for working age applicants with effect from 1st April 2023, in line with 1.2 below

RESOLVED to note that

- 2) the scheme was designed to assist the lowest income households and to allow the Council to operate the scheme more flexibly by:
 - (a) increasing the maximum level of support for working age applicants in certain income bands and to increase the income levels within the 'income - grid' scheme. Both of these changes were designed to provide more support to low income households;
 - (b) disregarding certain childcare charges where an applicant (and their partner if they have one) was working more than 16 hours per week;
 - (c) disregarding certain payments paid to taxpayers under special schemes (Local Welfare Provision);
and
 - (d) where the Government makes emergency increases to national welfare benefits to assist in a crisis, the scheme would give the Council the discretion to disregard those increases if they were to have a negative effect on of Council Tax Reduction.
- 3) all other parts of the existing scheme to remain unchanged.

64/22

FINANCIAL OUTTURN REPORT

The Interim Section 151 Officer presented a report on the Updated Position to the Financial Outturn 2020/21 following submission of the Draft Accounts for the consideration of Members.

Cabinet was informed that following the closure of the 2020/21 Accounts, Officers had felt it prudent to rerun the Financial Outturn Report for 2020/21. This had resulted in an overspend of £228,736, which was previously reported to Members, being corrected and that the

position was now an underspend of £50,005. In addition to this, it was reported that General Fund Reserves were at £4.502m and Earmarked Reserves at £13.289m. Members were advised that the Earmarked Reserves included approximately £5m received from Central Government for non-collection of tax income in 2021, which would decrease over three years.

Members were advised that some reserves had not changed over a number of years and that the Corporate Management Team (CMT) had met in December 2022 to look at the applicability of the current reserves. Members' attention was drawn to the information included within the report regarding the amount of Covid-19 Grant funding received from Central Government during the pandemic. It was highlighted that £29m worth of grant funding had to be administered during 2020/21 which was a huge increase from the usual £15m received in grant funding.

During consideration of the report, the significant amount of work undertaken by the Finance Team, at a time when there were lower staffing levels, was acknowledged by Members.

Reference was made to the work currently being undertaken with the external auditors, Grant Thornton. It was reported that the Council had been presented with a list of 84 deliverables by Grant Thornton, all of which were currently being worked through. In addition to this, it was confirmed that Officers were meeting regularly with Grant Thornton, both face-to-face and virtually.

Members queried whether it would be usual for external auditors to carry out hybrid meetings. It was confirmed that as hybrid working arrangements were embedded within Council, Grant Thornton were content to undertake work in this way. However, it was reported that Grant Thornton had not requested training on the Council's Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system, which could potentially result in a large amount work being carried out by Officers over the coming months. Members requested that they be kept informed of matters in this area.

Reference was also made to the administering of the grant funding and whether this would form part of the external audit; particularly in light of fraud being identified nationally during the administering of Covid-19 grant funding. Members were informed that regular returns had been made by the Council to Government in respect of the Covid-19 Grant funding and these returns had been accepted. Officers reported that a combination of the Council's use of BACS payments and the measured

way in which the grants were initially administered had limited potential fraudulent activity in this area.

RESOLVED that

- 1) the revenue outturn position, which was reported as an overspend of £228,736 be corrected to a position of an underspend of £50,005;
- 2) the final Covid-19 Grant position was £766k;
- 3) the final level of General Fund and Earmarked Reserves were £4.502m and £13,289m respectively;
and
- 4) the final capital position for the year was an underspend of £1.616m.

65/22

MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN 2023/24 TO 2025/26 - UPDATE

The Interim Section 151 Officer presented the update in respect of the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) 2023/24 to 2025/26.

Members were reminded that Tranche 1 of the Medium Term Financial Plan had identified £1.6m of savings against a budget deficit of £1.6m. However, additional pressures including inflation had resulted in the identification of the “real gap” which amounted to £1.58m.

Cabinet was advised that confirmation on the Local Government Settlement had been provided on 19th December 2022 and the Council received £1.198m, significantly more funding than had been anticipated. The Settlement had included New Homes Bonus funding of £127k, a Services Grant of £68k, a Funding Guarantee of £1.27m and a reduction in the Council Tax Base of £24k. As a result of the Settlement, it was reported that the funding gap would be reduced.

Reference was made to the allocated £700k (200%) reserves for Utilities and it was highlighted that as a result of the review undertaken by CMT in December 2022, it was proposed that in Tranche 2 of the MTFP some of the reserves would be reallocated and the Utilities reserves would be set at £1m and drawn down annually if needed.

In respect of the Local Government Pension Scheme, it was reported that an additional saving in contributions of £356k would result in an improvement for the Council’s budget in the future.

However, in spite of the Settlement and savings identified, Officers informed Members that there were still additional pressures facing the Council in the future, which included the existing Leisure contract, the refurbishment of the Fleet, the staff pay award received in September 2022 and the increased costs of Worcestershire Regulatory Services.

A key area of focus moving forward was staffing, including the use of apprentices and introducing more career graded roles within the Council. In addition, it was proposed that a Data Analyst position be created in order to identify areas of improvements across the Council.

Following the presentation of the report, Members discussed the Utilities reserves and that it seemed sensible to amend these reserves as it currently appeared unlikely that the charges for Utilities would increase so significantly.

During consideration of this item, Members commented on the cost of LED lighting within the High Street and that Officers should ensure that an updated, unmetered consumption reading on these lights be provided by the supplier. Officers undertook to make enquiries in this area.

Following the detailed discussion, Members noted that they were happy with the progress being made and hoped that this would continue moving forward.

RESOLVED that

Officers continued to work on additional options now the “real gap” for the 2023/24 budget was known, as outlined in the Strategy section of the Tranche 1 Report for presentation to Cabinet in February 2023 as Tranche 2 of the Budget.

66/22

QUARTERLY RISK MONITORING UPDATE REPORT

The Interim Section 151 Officer presented the Quarterly Risk Monitoring Update Report for Members’ consideration.

Members were reminded that Internal Audit had concluded no assurance in respect of Risk Management Strategies at the Council in March 2022. This had resulted in the implementation of an action plan by CMT in order to embed effective risk management across the Council. The action plan included the formation of an Officer Risk Board and regular Directorate Management Team meetings.

Cabinet was advised that the number of risks had decreased from those identified initially from 100 departmental risks to 55 departmental risks at the time of the meeting. It was highlighted that an additional risk would be added regarding damp and mould issues in Private Sector Rentals. However, there was no confirmation at the current time as to which operation department would be the lead for this risk.

In terms of Corporate Risk, Members were informed that there were currently 10 Corporate Risks with a further risk in respect of Cost of Living likely to be added in the near future.

Following the presentation Members were pleased with the progress being made in the area of Risk within the Council.

RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

67/22

WORCESTERSHIRE REGULATORY SERVICES BUDGET
RECOMMENDATIONS

The Interim Section 151 Officer provided an update in respect of the Worcestershire Regulatory Services Budget (WRS) Recommendations report.

Prior to the presentation, an error contained within the report was highlighted for Members' attention. It was confirmed that the increase in contributions for 2022/23 to WRS would be £18,861 not £167,843 as stated in the report.

Cabinet was advised that at a WRS Board meeting held on 17th November 2022 Members considered the pressures facing WRS including the staff pay award and increased hosting charges. As a result, it was proposed that contributions be increased for 2022/23 by £18,861.

In addition to this, and as a result of future salary pressures, it was proposed that WRS contributions be increased to £510,000 in 2023/24, which Members were informed was an increase of £39k from last year's contributions.

Following consideration of this report, Members noted that WRS provided an excellent service, and that Bromsgrove District Council did an excellent job in hosting the service.

RECOMMENDED that

- 1) WRS contributions be increased by £18,861 in 2022/23 due to the national pay award of £1,925 per pay point and increases in hosting costs due to the “cost of living” crisis;
- 2) WRS Budget contributions be increased to £510,000 in 2023/24 to take account of pay awards and the impact of the “cost of living” crisis.

The meeting closed at 6.52 p.m.

Chairman