



BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MEETING OF THE COUNCIL

WEDNESDAY 25TH JANUARY 2023

AT 6.00 P.M.

PARKSIDE SUITE - PARKSIDE

MEMBERS: 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, R. E. Jenkins, H. J. Jones, A. D. Kent, J. E. King, A. D. Kriss, L. C. R. Mallett, K.J. May, M. Middleton, P. M. McDonald, S. A. Robinson, H. D. N. Rone-Clarke, M. A. Sherrey, C. J. Spencer, P.L. Thomas, M. Thompson, J. Till, K. J. Van Der Plank, S. A. Webb and P. J. Whittaker

AGENDA

WELCOME

1. **To receive apologies for absence**

2. **Declarations of Interest**

To invite Councillors to declare any Disclosable Pecuniary Interests or Other Disclosable Interests they may have in items on the agenda, and to confirm the nature of those interests.

3. **To confirm the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 7th December 2022 (Pages 9 - 34)**

4. **To receive any announcements from the Chairman and/or Head of Paid Service**

5. **To receive any announcements from the Leader**

6. **To receive comments, questions or petitions from members of the public**

A period of up to 15 minutes is allowed for members of the public to make a comment, ask questions or present petitions. Each member of the public has up to 3 minutes to do this. A councillor may also present a petition on behalf of a member of the public.

7. **Urgent Decisions**

8. **Changes to Committee membership**

Members are asked to note that Councillor S. Colella has replaced Councillor K. Van Der Plank as a member of the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee representing the Independent Group.

9. **To receive and consider a report from the Portfolio Holder for Leisure, Cultural Services and Climate Change** (Pages 35 - 44)

Up to 30 minutes is allowed for this item; no longer than 10 minutes for presentation of the report and then up to 3 minutes for each question to be put and answered.

10. **Recommendations from the Cabinet**

To consider the recommendations from the meeting of the Cabinet held on 18th January 2023 (to follow).

11. **Background Information on the recommendations from the Cabinet**

(i) Final Council Tax Support Scheme 2023/24 (Pages 45 - 74)

(ii) Worcestershire Regulatory Services Board - Budget 2023/24 Recommendations (Pages 75 - 96)

12. **To note the minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 18th January 2023** (to follow)

13. **Questions on Notice** (to follow)

To deal with any questions on notice from Members of the Council, in the order in which they have been received.

A period of up to 15 minutes is allocated for the asking and answering of questions. This may be extended at the discretion of the Chairman with the agreement of the majority of those present.

14. **Motions on Notice** (to follow)

A period of up to one hour is allocated to consider the motions on notice. This may only be extended with the agreement of the Council.

15. **To consider any urgent business, details of which have been notified to the Head of Legal, Democratic and Property Services prior to the commencement of the meeting and which the Chairman, by reason of special circumstances, considers to be of so urgent a nature that it cannot wait until the next meeting**

K. DICKS
Chief Executive

Parkside
Market Street
BROMSGROVE
Worcestershire
B61 8DA

17th January 2023

**If you have any queries on this Agenda please contact
Jess Bayley-Hill and Jo Gresham**

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GUIDANCE ON FACE-TO-FACE MEETINGS

At the current time, seating at the meeting will be placed in such a way as to achieve as much space as possible for social distancing to help protect meeting participants.

Please note that this is a public meeting.

If you have any questions regarding the agenda or attached papers, please do not hesitate to contact the officer named above.

GUIDANCE FOR ELECTED MEMBERS ATTENDING MEETINGS IN PERSON

Members and Officers who still have access to lateral flow tests (LFTs) are encouraged to take a test on the day of the meeting. Meeting attendees who do not have access to LFTs are encouraged not to attend the meeting if they have common cold symptoms or any of the following common symptoms of Covid-19 on the day of the meeting; a high temperature, a new and continuous cough or a loss of smell and / or taste.

The meeting venue will be fully ventilated, and Members and officers may need to consider wearing appropriate clothing in order to remain comfortable during proceedings.

PUBLIC ATTENDANCE

Members of the public will be able to access the meeting in person to observe proceedings if they wish to do so. Seating will be placed in such a way as to achieve as much space as possible for social distancing to help protect meeting participants. It should be noted that members of the public who choose to attend in person do so at their own risk.

Members of the public who still have access to lateral flow tests (LFTs) are encouraged to take a test on the day of the meeting. Meeting attendees who do not have access to LFTs are encouraged not to attend the meeting if they have common cold symptoms or any of the following common symptoms of Covid-19 on the day of the meeting; a high temperature, a new and continuous cough or a loss of smell and / or taste.

Notes:

Although this is a public meeting, there are circumstances when Council might have to move into closed session to consider exempt or confidential information. For agenda items that are exempt, the public are excluded.



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- You can inspect minutes of the Council, Cabinet and its Committees/Boards for up to six years following a meeting.
- You can have access, upon request, to the background papers on which reports are based for a period of up to six years from the date of the meeting. These are listed at the end of each report.
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- Meeting Agendas
- Meeting Minutes
- The Council's Constitution

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BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MEETING OF THE COUNCIL

7TH DECEMBER 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, A. D. Kriss, L. C. R. Mallett, K.J. May, P. M. McDonald, S. A. Robinson, P.L. Thomas, M. Thompson, J. Till, K. J. Van Der Plank, S. A. Webb and P. J. Whittaker

Officers: Mr. K. Dicks, Mr P. Carpenter, Mrs. C. Felton, Mrs. R. Bamford and Mrs J. Gresham

58/22

TO RECEIVE APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors R. Jenkins, A. Kent, J. King, M. Middleton, H. Rone-Clark, M. A. Sherrey and C. Spencer.

Councillor A. English arrived at 6.10pm.

59/22

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor S. Baxter declared an 'other disclosable interest' in respect of Minute Item No 71/22 - Fees and Charges 2023/24 – due to being a member of the Royal Council of Parish Councils.

The Monitoring Officer confirmed that there was no need to declare an interest in this particular area as the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee had granted a dispensation to all Members when considering Budget setting items including Fees and Charges.

During consideration of Minute Item 70/22 – Motions on Notice, Councillor M. Thompson declared a pecuniary interest on the grounds that his employer, Bromsgrove School, may benefit financially from the implementation of Free School Meals. During this item, Councillor Thompson left the meeting and took no part in the debate or voting thereon.

60/22 **TO CONFIRM THE ACCURACY OF THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COUNCIL HELD ON 17TH OCTOBER 2022**

The minutes of the meeting of Council held on 17th October 2022 were submitted.

During consideration of the minutes Councillor C. Hotham indicated that the information requested at the last Council meeting in respect of the Bromsgrove Partnership, had not been received. It was confirmed that the relevant officers be contacted in respect of this matter and that the information be circulated to Members accordingly.

RESOLVED that, subject to the query detailed in the preamble above, the minutes of the meeting of Council held on 17th October 2022 be approved as a true and correct record.

61/22 **TO RECEIVE ANY ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM THE CHAIRMAN AND/OR HEAD OF PAID SERVICE**

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

62/22 **TO RECEIVE ANY ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM THE LEADER**

There were no announcements from the Leader at the meeting.

63/22 **TO RECEIVE COMMENTS, QUESTIONS OR PETITIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC**

There were no comments, questions or petitions from the public for consideration at this meeting.

64/22 **URGENT DECISIONS**

The Chairman confirmed that there had been no urgent decisions taken since the previous meeting in Council.

65/22 **TO RECEIVE AND CONSIDER A REPORT FROM THE PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR PLANNING AND REGULATORY SERVICES**

The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Regulatory Services presented an annual report which outlined the work that had been undertaken under his remit as portfolio holder over the preceding 12 months.

Council was informed that the report covered three main areas; Planning, Enforcement and Worcestershire Regulatory Services (WRS). It was reported that due to the unprecedented circumstances during Covid-19 there had been an increase in reports and challenges experienced in previous years.

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

- How the area of work contained within the report was assessed by the Portfolio Holder and the residents of Bromsgrove. It was reported that WRS had performed well throughout the municipal year. The effectiveness of Enforcement over the year was highlighted and it was confirmed that there had been an increase in the numbers of queries and complaints made during the Covid-19 lockdown in this area. Members were informed that this was being managed and that WRS were now overseeing Enforcement and as a result the numbers of queries were reducing. In respect of Planning, it was confirmed that the numbers were considered sound and stable. There was further discussion regarding whether the area of Planning was as effective as reported, particularly in respect of major applications and appeal processes.
- The Bromsgrove District Housing and Economic Development Needs Assessment (HEDNA) and the information regarding the housing needs of the District. Members queried, whether, in light of the recent announcement by Central Government regarding the flexibility of the housing targets and the use of brownfield sites would this mean that the HEDNA would be revisited to incorporate any changes. The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Regulatory Services confirmed that this may be the case, however as the announcement was made very recently this would need to be looked at once the consultation period for Central Government had been carried out which would not be completed prior to the end of 2022.
- The number of homes that had been provided for refugees from the Ukraine and Afghanistan. The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Regulatory Services undertook to contact the relevant officers and circulate the information as requested.
- The standards of Food Safety within the District and whether the information contained within the report was accurate. There was some discussion regarding specific locations within the District, and it was highlighted that it was not appropriate to consider specific Planning and Licensing matters at this meeting and

confirmed that Officers would contact the relevant Members to discuss the matter further.

- The number of houses in developments that needed to be social housing and the extent to which sufficient numbers of social houses were being built in the District. The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Regulatory Services informed Council that this could be considered as part of the Local Plan and Members could be involved in this as part of the Strategic Planning Strategic Group (SPSG) meetings.
- The Enforcement data contained within the report was queried by some Members and clarification was requested on the number of injunctions noted within the report. In addition to this, there was a discussion regarding the decisions made by the Court to overrule the Council's Planning Committee decisions and any subsequent appeals. It was confirmed that, in this instance, and as there was some confusion regarding the specific Planning application being referred to, it would be more appropriate to further the discussions at the SPSG.
- The robustness of the Climate Change agenda for the Council including environmental growth and rehabilitation.
- The Air Quality Management and the positive impact the Council was having in this area particularly as a result of the funding that had been agreed by Cabinet regarding new Air Quality monitoring equipment.
- The Blue Bird Confectionery Development including the number of affordable housing units included within the development. It was confirmed that, as had happened on many developments of brownfields sites, a large amount of clean-up work would be needed prior to the development of the site. This would inevitably have an impact on the number of affordable homes allocated on that site.
- The duty to cooperate with local Councils in respect of the development of Green Belt land surrounding the District.
- The status of the difficult contamination work being undertaken by the Environment Agency (EA) in respect of the Windsor Street Fire Station site. It was thought by some Members that this issue had already been resolved and that a tender process was already underway. It was confirmed that the works were on target and that this was being monitored at Levelling Up Board meetings.
- The information regarding the emergency prohibition order in respect of a hidden room at a business within the District. It was confirmed that as this was likely to be a confidential matter, information could not be provided at this public meeting.

- The cost effectiveness of using WRS Enforcement Officers rather than looking to employing enforcement officers within the Council. It was confirmed by the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Regulatory Services that this was being looked into. However, at the time of the meeting, no decisions had yet been made. Further queries were made in respect of the recruitment of Planning Officers. Council was informed that the majority of Local Authorities were experiencing difficulties in recruiting to Planning Officer vacancies and that recruitment to these vacant positions was ongoing.

RESOLVED that the report be noted

66/22

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE AUDIT, STANDARDS AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 9TH NOVEMBER 2022

Section 24 Report

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Governance presented the Recommendations from the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee as a result of their consideration of the Section 24 Notice and External Auditor's Interim Annual Reports at the meeting held on 9th November 2022.

During consideration of this item, reference was made to the financial issues that had led to the non-delivery of the Statement of Accounts for 2020/21. In addition to this, the delivery of in-year monitoring for 2021/22 and Government Returns were also considered.

Council was informed that detailed updates had been provided to Members at a number of Committee meetings during 2022. It was clarified that during these updates, specific issues encountered during the implementation of the new Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system in February 2021 during Covid-19 had been highlighted. Furthermore, it was reported that the issues that had impacted on staffing levels and staff retention had also been raised.

Members were advised that discussions in respect of the issues outlined above had taken place at the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee meetings in July and October 2022, at the Cabinet meeting in September 2022 during consideration of the Finance Recovery Report, and at the Full Council meeting on 17th October 2022 during consideration of the report from the Portfolio Holder for Finance and

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Governance. It was noted that the majority of these issues had now been resolved or were in the process of being resolved. This included the recruitment of the new Finance Team and the delivery of monitoring and compliance reporting in 2022/23.

Members were advised that at the time of issuing of the Section 24 Notice Report, the Council had still not completed the 2020/21 Statement of Accounts and therefore the external auditors had concluded it was appropriate for them to use their powers to make written recommendations under Section 24 of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014. The key reason for the Statutory Recommendation being the non-delivery of the Statutory Accounts for 2020/21.

Council was informed that under Schedule 7 of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014, the Council must consider the Section 24 Statutory Recommendation at a meeting held before the end of the period of one month, beginning with the day on which it was sent to the Council. In this instance, it was clarified that this was taking place 14 days after the issuing of the report. Council were being asked to decide whether the recommendations should be accepted and what, if any, action should be taken in response to these recommendations. It was reported that the external auditors had noted in their Interim Annual Auditor's Report 2020/21, also due to be considered at this meeting, that progress in respect of the Statutory Recommendation had already been made.

During consideration of this item, reference was made to the Council's disappointment in having received the Section 24 Recommendation, particularly in light of the work that had already been undertaken. However, it was accepted that the Council must provide the external auditors with accounts for 2020/21 that they were satisfied with.

Council was informed that the draft Statement of Accounts for 2020/21 were currently in the process of final validation by the Finance Team. This would ensure compliance across all legislative requirements. Once the validation had been completed, the draft accounts would be considered at the additional Audit, Standards and Governance Committee meeting due to take place on Wednesday 14th December 2022. Once this had taken place, the external auditors would be able to commence their work on the Statement of Accounts 2020/21. Clarification was provided to Members that following the completion of the 2020/21 accounts, the Finance Team would move straight on to the delivery of the 2021/22 accounts.

Council was advised that during a detailed update on the Section 24 Notice report at the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee meeting held on 9th November 2022, Officers had reported that, following substantial testing, the issues arising in the Cash Receipting system had been rectified. As a result, the Cash Receipting module had been moved into the live environment over the weekend of 5th and 6th of November 2022. Also confirmed at this meeting, was that the frequency of Audit, Standards and Governance Committee meetings would increase to bi-monthly. This would allow Members to review progress on the Statutory Recommendation to ensure all items set out in the recommendation and associated management actions were implemented. Following the detailed update provided by Officers at this meeting, the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee recommended that the Section 24 Statutory Recommendation be accepted, and that Council endorse the actions included in the Management Response to rectify the position. This recommendation was endorsed by Cabinet at its meeting held on 23rd November during consideration of the Section 24 Notice Report.

The recommendations from the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee meeting held on 9th November 2022 in respect of the Section 24 Notice report were proposed by Councillor G.N Denaro and seconded by Councillor P. Whittaker.

Following the presentation of the report, Councillor L.C.R Mallet addressed Council in his role as Chairman of the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee. In doing so, he announced that he wished to resign as Chairman of the Committee and outlined his reasons for doing so. He stated that the information contained within the Section 24 Notice report was not new information and had been raised several times previously by the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee and the external auditors. Reference was made to the implementation of the new ERP system and the significant failures that had been experienced in this area, which had resulted in the loss of staff, across all levels of the Finance Team.

Concerns were also raised regarding Risk Management at Bromsgrove District Council and the lack of risk reporting that had taken place in previous municipal years resulting in a 'No Assurance' audit conclusion by Internal Audit. Frustration was expressed by the response of the Corporate Management Team (CMT) in order to address the issues highlighted within this Internal Audit report. It was requested that Officers contact the Council's insurance provider to check the validity of its

insurance policy in light of the 'No Assurance' audit conclusion received from Internal Audit in relation to Risk Management.

In terms of financial issues and the transparency of the Council's Budget position and Risk Management, it was queried when the issues had been highlighted by Officers, particularly in light of the lack of financial monitoring and performance monitoring. In addition to these issues, the Council's Savings Plan was highlighted as a further area of concern.

All Members were then invited to comment on the report and in doing so it was noted that work needed to be undertaken in order to fully understand how the Council had arrived at the Section 24 Notice. With this in mind, Councillor S. Colella proposed an additional recommendation to the one contained within the report. The recommendation read as follows:

'that the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee carry out a root and branch investigation on how the Council arrived at the Section 24 Notice.'

In proposing the additional recommendation, Councillor Colella requested that, if agreed, it be included as an urgent item of business at the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee meeting due to take place on 14th December 2022. This additional recommendation was seconded by Councillor S. Baxter.

Following this recommendation, Councillor Mallett stated that he wished to propose an additional action to the recommendation included in the report. This action read as follows:

'that Bromsgrove District Council refers itself into Special Measures and to the Ombudsman.'

In proposing this action, Councillor Mallett once again raised his concerns in the areas of 'Limited' and 'No Assurance' audits that had taken place in previous years, the Savings Plan, the amount of the Council's reserves and his lack of confidence in the current leadership of the Council.

Following the proposals outlined above, it was raised by some Members that there had been an opportunity for all Members of the Council to attend the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee meeting that took place on 9th November 2022. Members were advised that some of the issues raised at the Council meeting had been addressed during the

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robust debate by the Committee. It was confirmed that the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee took these issues very seriously and it was disappointing that more Members had not been present at the meeting on 9th November 2022. Although it was noted that some Members did have a number of other commitments separate from their Council duties which made it difficult to always attend additional meetings.

In response to some of the points outlined above, Councillor Mallett stated that he had not been notified of the date of the additional Audit, Standards and Governance Committee meeting that took place in November 2022. In response, the Monitoring Officer explained that she had been informed that both the Interim Section 151 Officer and Democratic Services Officers had made attempts to contact Councillor Mallett regarding the date of the additional Audit, Standards and Governance Committee meeting, however all attempts had been unsuccessful. Further to this response, Councillor Mallett provided clarification that he was on leave at the time contact was attempted. He highlighted that he had contacted Officers on his return regarding his unavailability for the date of the next meeting, due to be held on 14th December 2022. However, at this time it had been clarified that due to Officer availability, this was the only suitable date for the meeting to go ahead. It was agreed that discussion of this matter would be continued outside of the meeting in order to resolve any issues in the future.

During consideration of this item, it was reiterated that the Council had experienced a 'perfect storm' in respect of the issues it had encountered. In addition to the issues during the implementation of the ERP system, Members were advised that Bromsgrove District Council was not unique in its experiences of staff retention within its Finance Team and that this had been seen throughout the Finance sector at a local and national level. Furthermore, the additional pressures of work undertaken in the administering of grants during Covid-19 had impacted on the delivery of the Statement of Accounts 2020/21.

In returning to the additional recommendation proposed by Councillor Colella earlier in the meeting, it was suggested that it was hugely important, given the findings of the external auditors, that a detailed and transparent investigation be undertaken by the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee. This would ensure that the Council understood the issues that had been identified and had the correct measures in place to rectify them going forward. It was confirmed that questions had been previously asked regarding the implementation of the ERP system

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at the Finance and Budget Scrutiny Working Group, however the responses had not always been clear.

Council was reminded of the wording of the additional recommendation proposed by Councillor Colella as detailed earlier in the meeting. On being put to the vote this recommendation was carried.

Following this vote, Members returned to the action proposed by Councillor Mallett earlier in the meeting and were reminded of the proposed action as detailed in the preamble above. Councillor Mallett reported to Members that he wished to move this as an amendment to the recommendation as detailed in the Section 24 Report and put on notice that should the amendment not be carried, he would deem it necessary to call an emergency meeting of the Council and call for the recruitment of an Independent Person. This amendment was seconded by Councillor P. McDonald.

At this point in the meeting, an adjournment was requested.

[The adjournment took place between 7.30pm and 8.00pm].

On reconvening the meeting, the Interim Section 151 Officer stated the following for Members' attention:

'Following discussion, the Council, through the Leader, would commission a Corporate Peer Review by the Local Government Association (LGA) to look into Corporate Governance linked to the Section 24 Notice report and the draft External Audit Report for 2020/21. The Review would then be reported back to the Chief Executive and the Leader of the Council, who in turn would discuss the outcomes with the other Group Leaders'.

It was clarified by Councillor Mallett that, as a result of the statement made by the Interim Section 151 Officer, his earlier action and amendment to the recommendation had been withdrawn.

On being put to the vote the statement presented by the Interim Section 151 Officer was carried.

RESOLVED that

- 1) the Section 24 Statutory Recommendation be accepted, and that Council review the recommendation, endorse the actions included

in the management responses which form the rectification process required as per legislation and;

- 2) the Council, through the Leader, commission a Corporate Peer Review by the Local Government Association (LGA) to look into Corporate Governance linked to the Section 24 Notice report and the draft External Audit Report for 2020/21. The review would then be reported back to the Chief Executive and the Leader of the Council, who in turn would discuss the outcomes with other Group Leaders.
- 3) the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee carry out a root and branch investigation on how the Council arrived at the Section 24 Notice.

External Auditor's Interim Annual Report

Following the robust debate regarding the Section 24 Notice recommendation from the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee meeting held on 9th November 2022, the second recommendation regarding the External Auditor's Interim Annual Report was considered by Members. In doing so, the following was highlighted:

- The report covered arrangements that the Council had in place up to the 31st March 2021.
- The External Auditors, Grant Thornton, began their work in February 2022 and were pleased to see that officers had responded positively to the ongoing discussions and had begun to address many of the key concerns. The External Auditors noted that the changes made would still need to be embedded.
- The key recommendations contained within the report were highlighted in the Finance Improvement Recovery Plan report considered by Cabinet on 12th October 2022.
- There were five key recommendations set out in the External Auditor's Interim Annual Report. These recommendations were:
 1. The Council needed to ensure that the Medium Term Financial Plan presented to Members was completely transparent regarding the financial challenge and that any savings schemes included were fully established and approved by Members in advance.
 2. The Council needed to improve management of key projects, such as the financial ledger implementation, to ensure that expected benefits were realised. As part of this, the Council needed to undertake a comprehensive

review of the financial ledger implementation and ensure lessons were learned for future key projects.

3. The Council review and implement effective governance arrangements in respect of performance monitoring to allow Members to make informed decisions. In order to achieve this the Council should reinstate public reporting on performance, linking this to the Council Plan and the related strategic objectives, allowing Members to scrutinise performance. This should be done at least twice per year.
4. The Council should review and implement effective governance arrangements in respect of risk monitoring to allow Members to make informed decisions. In order to achieve this the Council should make Risk Management reporting a standing item on the Audit, Governance and Standards Committee agenda, with Members considering the Corporate Risk Register and Risk Management arrangements in an appropriate forum.
5. The Council should ensure timely and relevant financial monitoring reporting be undertaken and presented to the appropriate public forum.

The Council's view in respect of these five Key Recommendations was that management actions were in place to mitigate all of them. These mitigations included:

- A fully staffed Finance Team in order to ensure correct capacity for delivery of the Key Recommendations.
- Delivery of the 2023/24 Medium Term Financial Plan in two Tranches.
- Holding a monthly Cross Council Assurance Review meeting in order to assess priorities and the delivery of other cross cutting meetings.
- Integrating Performance and Financial monitoring in one report. It was reported that the first of these reports (Q1) was considered by Cabinet on 6th September 2022. The second report (Q2) was considered by Cabinet on 23rd November 2022.
- Risk Monitoring Governance had been updated and reporting was now considered by the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee on a quarterly basis.

Grant Thornton had also commented on the Council's arrangements to secure economy, efficiency, and effectiveness in its use of resources. The majority of these points were included in the 13 Improvement Recommendations. As with the Key Recommendations, it was the

Council's view that the process of integrating these recommendations into normal processing had already commenced as set out in the management responses contained within the External Auditor's Interim Report.

The Council was informed that the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee would be reviewing implementation of both Key and Performance Recommendations going forward.

The recommendations from the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee meeting held on 9th November 2022 in respect of the External Auditor's Interim Annual Report were proposed by Councillor G.N Denaro and seconded by Councillor K. May.

Prior to the vote, there was a query as to whether the recommendations could be split into two recommendations. However, it was confirmed that the Auditors were supportive of the responses provided by the management team and were unsure of the reason why the recommendation would need to be split.

As a result of the detailed consideration of the Recommendations from the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee meeting held on 9th November 2022 it was

RESOLVED that

- 1) the 5 Key Recommendations and 13 Improvement Recommendations within this report be agreed.
- 2) Council agree that the Management Actions contained within this report will rectify these issues

67/22

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE CABINET

The Chairman advised that one recommendation had been made at the meeting of the Cabinet held on 26th October 2022 and three recommendations had been made at the meeting held on 23rd November 2022, which had been highlighted for Council's consideration.

Fees and Charges 2023/24

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Governance presented a report on the subject of the Fees and Charges 2023/24. Members were advised that the Medium Term Financial Plan was being prepared on the basis

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that additional income would be generated from Fees and Charges. It was clarified that the process being followed for the review of income to be realised from 1st April 2023 included an assessment of each fee to identify how it met the Council's Strategic Purposes and the level of increase that was proposed as well as taking account of present economic conditions, including current inflation of over 10%. Council was informed that the levels of increase had been based on a robust estimate of the impact of cost increases and demand within the services and the Council's overall financial position. This included assessing the affordability of any of these increases to our residents and customers.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Governance highlighted that Appendix 1 contained within the report detailed all the Fees and Charges for each area with a commentary against each block. Members were advised that the Council's proposal was to increase all Fees and Charges by 10%. It was confirmed that the 10% had been applied to contributions and Fees and Charges budgets, however, had not been applied where charges were set statutorily i.e. for, Lifeline, SLA Income, or services that were charged across a number of Councils, such as Worcestershire Regulatory Services.

It was estimated that the increase in income generated from the proposed increases were:

Year	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
Base Budget	3,820,000	3,899,000	3,904,000
10% Increase	382,000	389,000	390,000

If these Fees and Charges 2023/24 were agreed, it was confirmed that they would be included in the Medium-Term Financial Plan Tranche 1.

Following the presentation of the report it was confirmed by Members that there was no longer car parking at the Alvechurch Sports and Social Club.

Concerns were raised about the increases in Fees and Charges 2023/24 and although the level of inflation was currently over 10% this did not necessarily transfer to the increase in income for residents. It was queried by some Members whether the necessary level of scrutiny had been applied to the increases. Specific reference was made to the increase of 49% on allotment charges and it was confirmed that this proposed increase would bring Bromsgrove District Council more in line with charges made by other Councils across the County.

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

RESOLVED that all of the proposed fees and charges for 2023/24 be approved.

Sherwood Road Footbridge, Aston Fields - Permanent Closure of the Footbridge, Removal of Bridge Deck and Transfer of Ownership to Severn Trent Water Ltd

The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Regulatory Services presented the report and in doing so highlighted that the footbridge was decaying and was not a public right of way and that the costs to repair the footbridge were high and it was thought to be more cost effective to transfer the ownership to Severn Trent Water as detailed within the report.

It was raised by some Members that there was no legal obligation to make these repairs and therefore the footbridge could remain in its current condition so that no costs would be incurred. It was, however, confirmed that should there be an injury on the footbridge the Council would be liable should any accidents occur and that the advice from the civil engineer involved was that the £10k worth of works must be carried out in order to make the footbridge safe.

Some Members raised the procurement process that had been undertaken and it was confirmed that a procurement process would have had to be carried out within the appropriate framework.

The recommendation was proposed by Councillor P.L. Thomas and seconded by Councillor K. May.

RESOLVED that a budget of £10k be added to the 2022/2023 Capital Programme to be funded from internal resources.

Medium Term Financial Plan 2023/24 to 2025/26 - Update Report

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Governance presented the report and explained to Council that it had been hoped that more detail would have been available from the Chancellor's Statement on 17th November 2022 in readiness for this meeting. It was confirmed that information regarding the Local Government Financial Settlement (pLGFS) would not be available until the week commencing the 19th December 2022, which, it was clarified, was a week later than expected. However, in a statement from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and

Communities (DLUHC), it had been reported that in recognition of the Settlement being late in the year, an update on the pLGFS, including information on the measures that would be maintained into 2024/25, would be provided soon. It was clarified that it was the Government's intention that support for Local Authorities' budget setting processes, would be provided ahead of the publication of the pLGFS."

Council was advised that the following information was currently known:

- An increase of 1% of Council Tax base from 2% to 3% at the 2023/4 base level of £9.243m was 92k.
- The Council no longer faced the additional pressure of increased employer National Insurance (NI) contributions. However, as a result of this, DLUHC were revising the additional grant funding for Councils. The 1.25% increase in NI rates was being checked against the 23/24 assumptions as it was announced as part of the previous year's budget. It was clarified that this saving was potentially worth £139k on the Council's £11.1m salary budgets.
- The Autumn Statement announced a £13.6 billion support package to protect ratepayers facing increases. This included a freezing of the Business Rates multipliers for 23/24, a Transitional Relief scheme to limit the rate at which bills could increase, a more generous Retail, Hospitality and Leisure relief, and the Supporting Small Business scheme to cap bill increases for businesses that lost relief due to the revaluation. It was confirmed that Local Authorities would be fully compensated for any loss of income as a result of these business rates measures and would receive new burdens funding for administrative and IT costs.
- An extension to the Household Support Fund over 2023-24, providing £1 billion additional funding.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Governance explained that the update on the provisional settlement was greatly anticipated as it would hopefully provide some clarity around the Lower Tier Services Grant and hopefully the New Homes Bonus scheme. Planning was underway for the worst possible settlement, and it was highlighted that time would be very tight to produce the budget. This had also been acknowledged by the Government. Officers were working on reducing the present deficit level of an ongoing £1.3m gap and the strategic approach was included within the report.

It was also highlighted for Members' attention that the updated fee schedule for WRS was included within the report as Environmental Health Charges had been omitted from the list presented to Members as

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part of the Tranche 1 budget. Council was informed that although the Council had made huge steps in delivering over £1.6m of savings in Tranche 1, there was still significant work to be done.

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

RESOLVED that the Tranche 1 savings proposals, Fees and Charges increases including updated WRS charges, and the single Growth item in respect of the Climate Change Officer are approved for implementation to ensure maximum benefit as at 1st April 2023.

Fees and Charges Update

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Governance informed Council that a report had been considered at the Cabinet meeting held on 26th October 2022 as part of the suite of papers for the Tranche 1 Medium Term Financial Plan, around increases to Fees and Charges. It was recommended that the approach taken by the Council was to raise fees and charges generally by 10% with exceptions like WRS where increases would be 5%.

Members were advised that included in this Fees and Charges update report were the exempt Fees and Charges where the Council was in direct competition with the Private Sector. These included Cesspool Emptying and Commercial Waste Collections. It was reported that a 10% increase, in line with other Council Services, would still ensure that the Council remained competitive in these areas.

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

RESOLVED the approval of all exempt fees and charges.

68/22

TO NOTE THE MINUTES OF THE MEETINGS OF THE CABINET HELD ON 26TH OCTOBER AND 23RD NOVEMBER 2022

The minutes of the Cabinet meetings held on 26th October and 23rd November 2022 were noted.

69/22

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

The Chairman explained that 6 Questions on Notice had been received for the meeting and would be considered in the order they had been submitted.

It was explained that due to recent changes to Council meetings, Group Leaders had agreed that an extended period of up to 30 minutes would be allocated to the consideration of these questions and the answers provided and there were no supplementary questions.

Question submitted by Councillor P. M McDonald

"Does the Chairman not agree with me that he should allow supplementary questions to ensure there is no ambiguity in the response to questions."

The Chairman responded that it was not appropriate for him to determine permitting supplementary questions at Council meetings and that the question should be referred to the Constitution Review Working Group.

Question submitted by Councillor R. Hunter

"It has now been three years since this Council agreed to reverse the long standing neglect of our bus shelters and provide the modern well maintained facilities that residents deserve. However very few improvements have been made and the budget allocation is sitting unspent. I understand there are now further delays due to a review at County Council, but please could you provide some reassurance of when you expect so see these much needed improvements actually installed?"

In the absence of the Portfolio Holder for Environmental Services and Community Safety, the response to this question was provided by the Portfolio Holder for Strategic Housing and Health and Well Being who stated that prior to installing new bus shelters, Officers had contacted Worcestershire County Council (WCC) to establish the continued future of the bus routes using that particular shelter to ensure that time and money was not wasted installing a shelter that would no longer be utilised. It was explained that WCC were undertaking a comprehensive review of bus route provisions within the County, with a 'Bus Travel Task Force for Worcestershire' being set up to review current bus provision

and to ensure bus travel was able to meet residents' needs across the County.

It was further clarified that once Bromsgrove District Council had been made aware of this action, a temporary hold was put on the upgrading programme for new shelters as existing routes were then at risk of being removed.

Members were informed that, prior to this announcement, the Council had installed new shelters in Littleton Avenue, Worcester Road, Whetty Lane and Callow Bridge Road. Further information was provided that there were also shelters being held at Bromsgrove depot and were ready to be installed once there was confirmation that particular bus routes would continue. It was stated that currently no information was available as to when this review would be completed, and the County Council web link did not provide a timescale for the review.

Question submitted by Councillor J. King (read by Councillor R. Hunter in the absence of Councillor J. King)

“Could you please explain why it costs £234 for a planning application for a dropped kerb?”

The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Regulatory Services explained that Planning fees in England were set nationally by the Government and were detailed in the Town and Country Planning (Fees for Applications, Deemed Applications, Requests and Site Visits) (England) Regulations 2012 (as amended).

Question submitted by Councillor S. Robinson

“Are you concerned about the dark open spaces in our town centre that have developed as a result of this Council no longer maintaining lighting on void car parks such as School Drive, Stourbridge Road and Churchfields?”

The Leader provided a response to this question on behalf of the Portfolio Holder for Environmental Services and Community Safety and explained that Officers were aware of the problems with the lighting in these car parks. It was reported that Stourbridge Road and School Drive car parks had both been inspected and surveyed by the contractor to determine why the lighting had failed. In addition to this, orders had been placed with the lighting contractor in order to purchase the replacement parts and undertake the work. Members were informed that the work

had been started and completed on Stourbridge Road and that the works on School Drive car park would be completed within the following two weeks. In respect of Churchfields car park, it was explained that it had been closed due to the level of antisocial behaviour and the lighting was turned off to conserve electricity and that as this car park was closed to the public, Members were advised that as such it did not pose a health and safety risk.

It was confirmed that the Community Safety Team had not been made aware of any specific issues in these areas. However, if Members had concerns about these locations, they could report any issues as follows:

- To report serious incidents as they happened and, in an emergency, to always call 999.
- Other incidents and ASB concerns could be reported by calling 101 or online at Report Antisocial Behaviour, West Mercia Police.
- General neighbourhood concerns could be reported to the Councillor's Safer Neighbourhood Team.

Question submitted by Councillor S. Douglas

"It appears that less able people who use mobility scooters are being denied access to buses unless they have been assessed by the bus company as to their competence to drive a mobility scooter. This is degrading and humiliating and clearly an example of disability discrimination. This awful situation can result in unaware scooter users being left stranded at the roadside. Will the Leader join with me in condemning this practice and do all she can to ensure that all buses can be used by all appropriately sized mobility scooter users?"

The Leader responded by explaining that there was currently no legal requirement for bus operators to carry mobility scooters, and that they were carried at each operator's individual discretion. The Equality Act 2010 did not refer to mobility scooters in its provisions on public service vehicles or bus services.

It was further explained that some companies had signed up to the Confederation for Passenger Transport (CPT) Code for the use and acceptance of Mobility Scooters on low floor Buses', which was developed by the CPT and the Department for Transport. The Code did have certain conditions which included:

- Class 2 mobility scooters only, maintained in good working order

- The scooter could not be wider than 600mm or longer than 1000mm
- The scooter needed to have a turning radius of no more than 1200mm
- The safe working limit for the weight of the scooter plus the occupant was 300kg
- The scooter needed to be assessed by the operator, both in terms of the design of the scooter and the ability of the user to control and manoeuvre it safely
- Mobility scooter users needed to receive on bus training from the operator before travelling on the bus for the first time, including how to use the ramp
- Approval needed to be issued in the form of a 'permit for travel' with a fixed duration of no more than five years; this had to be obtained prior to their scooter being carried on any bus.

Members were informed that information as to whether an individual operator accepted mobility scooters would be available on their website. Operators who adhered to the code would make this publicly known, particularly to groups representing people with mobility difficulties. The Leader shared the concerns raised by Councillor Douglas and confirmed that she would raise this issue with the local MP at their next meeting.

Question submitted by Councillor C. Hotham

“Since the introduction of wheelie bins, residents have been instructed to place the handle side inwards away from the kerb and highway. This seems perverse as it awkward and adds extra work as the operators have to turn the bins round before emptying them. Some residents have taken matters into their own hands and do place the handles towards the highway. Is it now time for the council to review the advice on bin handle positioning?”

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Governance provided a response to this question on behalf of the Portfolio Holder for Environmental Services and Community Safety and in doing so informed Members that the Council did not currently have any guidance for residents requiring this, and that this may have been something released when wheelie bins were first introduced to Bromsgrove to help highlight the potential safety issue of stepping into the road whilst people got used to handling the wheelie bins.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Governance thanked Cllr Hotham for highlighting that this may have previously been advised.

Council was informed that waste procedures and information for residents would be updated over the next few months and this information would be included in the Council Tax Bill as usual the following year. Members were reassured that this point would be taken into consideration in order to avoid any potential confusion for residents.

70/22

MOTIONS ON NOTICE

The Chairman explained that 2 Motions on Notice had been received for consideration at this meeting. However, it was confirmed that Councillor C. Hotham had withdrawn his Motion on Notice for this meeting.

Free School Meals

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

"Over 3.8 million children in the UK currently live below the poverty line and for those young people the price of school meals is prohibitive. In addition, with the cost-of-living crisis that is predicted to increase rapidly.

Council request our MP to lobby the Government to implement free school meals."

The Motion was proposed by Councillor McDonald and seconded by Councillor L. C. R. Mallett.

In proposing the Motion, Councillor McDonald commented that it had been well documented that children's education was being impacted during the current cost of living crisis. As a result, it had been reported that teachers were providing financial support and making referrals to Food Banks for needy families. Members were asked to note that it should not be the responsibility of teachers to provide this sort of care to their pupils and that more could be done by Government to help prevent this occurring in the future.

The suggestion was made that Free School Meals could go some way in mitigating the financial crisis that many families were currently experiencing. It was reported that it was expected that children living in households experiencing Fuel Poverty was set to rise by 38.6%. It was also suggested that over 3.8m children in the UK were living below the poverty line and that a positive and robust response was required. Furthermore, Councillor McDonald called upon Bromsgrove District

Council to lobby the local MP to act and introduce Free School Meals for all children in the District.

Following the presentation of the Motion, there was a query regarding the wording of the Motion. It was highlighted that there was ambiguity regarding whether the Motion was to 'implement free school meals' to all children as stated in the proposed Motion, or if it was for all school children within the District as outlined in the preamble above. If it was the case that it be for all school children, the question was raised as to whether this would also include private school pupils and international pupils. Councillor McDonald confirmed that the Motion was concerned with the implementation of free school meals for all children in the District of Bromsgrove and clarified that the Motion should read as follows:

"Over 3.8 million children in the UK currently live below the poverty line and for those young people the price of school meals is prohibitive. In addition, with the cost-of-living crisis that is predicted to increase rapidly.

Council request our MP to lobby the Government to implement free school meals for all children in the District of Bromsgrove."

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Governance responded to the Motion and in doing so reported that in October, each year every school completed a census which formed the basis for their following year's funding. It was noted that at present across Worcestershire there were 12,336 claimants of Free School Meals at a cost of £3,022,320, with Bromsgrove's figures totalling 2,171 claimants. This number was a result of a steady increase since October 2020. The annual payment from the Department for Education was £245 per annum per claimant, and prior to the clarification from Councillor McDonald it was noted that the figure for Free School Meals for all children in the UK would be astronomical.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Governance explained that supporting the current wording was not a viable option due to the costs involved. However, he commented that were there an addition of the following wording support could be provided. This wording was clarified as follows:

"Over 3.8 million children in the UK currently live below the poverty line and for those young people the price of school meals is prohibitive. In addition, with the cost-of-living crisis that is predicted to increase rapidly.

Council request our MP to lobby the Government to implement free school meals to all qualifiers on a termly basis.”

It was noted that the qualifying terms were quite wide and were stated as follows:

- Income Support
- Income-based Jobseeker’s Allowance
- Support under part 6 of the Immigration and Asylum Act, 1999
- Child Tax Credit, and an annual income less than £16,190
- Guaranteed Pension Credit
- Income-based Employment and Support Allowance
- Working Tax Credit run-on
- Universal Credit, and an annual household income of £7,400 per annum (£616 per month) or less after tax, and not including any benefits.

Councillor McDonald did not accept the amendment as proposed by Councillor Denaro and confirmed that the Motion was to be proposed as written, including the addition of the wording “all children in the District of Bromsgrove” as noted above.

During the debate, it was noted that this was a serious issue and that 300k children were eligible for Free School Meals. However, these were not accessed by all those who were eligible due to the stigma attached to receiving Free School Meals, particularly in more affluent areas. It was stated that this was the purpose of the proposed Motion and that receipt of free school meals for all children would remove this stigma and also would improve access and accessibility of free school meals.

Council was informed that during the Covid-19 pandemic WCC had utilised Household Support Grant funding to provide free school meals during the school holidays for those that were eligible and that this was set to continue in the forthcoming school holidays.

In summing up, Councillor McDonald suggested that this was a serious Motion that would make some steps in ensuring that children received the help they needed during a cost of living crisis. In lobbying the MP this could be an opportunity for this to be realised.

In accordance with Procedure Rule 18.3 a recorded vote was taken on this Motion and the voting was as follows:

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Members voting FOR the Motion:

Councillors P. McDonald and L.C.R Mallett (2)

Members voting AGAINST the Motion:

Councillors A. Beaumont, S. Colella, R. Deeming, G.N Denaro, A. English, M, Glass, H. Jones, A. Kriss, R. Laight, K. May, P. Thomas, J. Till, K. Van der Plank, S. Webb and P. Whittaker (15).

Members ABSTAINING in the vote on the Motion:

Councillors S. Douglas, C. Hotham, R. Hunter and S. Robinson (4).

The vote on the Motion was therefore lost.

[During consideration of Minute Item 70/22 – Motions on Notice, Councillor M. Thompson declared a pecuniary interest on the grounds that his employer, Bromsgrove School, may benefit financially from the implementation of Free School Meals. During this item, Councillor Thompson left the meeting and took no part in the debate or voting thereon].

The meeting closed at 9.11 p.m.

Chairman

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Portfolio Holder Report

Portfolio Holder Report - Leisure, Culture and Climate Change

Introduction and Overview:

At Bromsgrove District Council Portfolio Holders provide an annual update to Council on services within their portfolio remit. These services are delivered in accordance with the Council's Strategic Purposes, as detailed in the Bromsgrove District Council Plan 2019 – 2023.

This report provides an outline of services and activities within the remit of this particular Portfolio Holder. Information is included in relation to the Council's Strategic Purposes, relevant key activities, partnership working, projects and programmes and news stories.

A version of this report, focusing on each Portfolio Holder's remit in turn, will be considered at each meeting of Council (except for the Annual Council meeting).

Whilst services will be contributing information into this report it is worth noting that not all sections of the report will be relevant to all service areas. In this circumstance, some sections may not be completed by all services.

The report will be structured as follows:

- 1) Update on Strategic Purposes
- 2) Partnership working
- 3) Key activities and priorities
- 4) Good news stories and awards (if applicable)
- 5) Other

The Council has the following Strategic Purposes and Priorities:

Strategic Purposes	Council Priorities
Run and grow a successful business	Economic development and regeneration
Work and financial independence	Skills for the future
Living independent, active, and healthy lives	Improving health & well being
Affordable and sustainable homes	A balanced housing market
Communities which are safe, well maintained, and green	Reducing crime & disorder
The Green Thread runs through the Council Plan	Internal priorities
	Financial stability
	High quality services
	Sustainability

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Portfolio Holder Report

Leisure and Culture Services

1. Update on Strategic Purposes

The relevant strategic purposes are:

- Living independent, active, and healthy lives
- Communities which are safe, well maintained, and green.
- The Green Thread runs through the Council Plan

The recently approved leisure and culture strategy supports the strategic purposes by:

Creating a VISION: Healthy bodies and minds through active, engaged and creative communities

Creating an AIM: To inspire everyone to celebrate our historic past and participate in building a brighter future through access to parks, open spaces, sport, physical activity, arts, heritage, culture and everyday creativity. This way we will inspire our communities to lead longer happier, healthier, and more successful lives.

Key activities since last report:

1. Commissioning and member endorsement of the Leisure and Culture strategy.

The Leisure and Culture strategy component parts are the Parks and Open spaces Strategy and four management plans: Arts and Culture strategy and the Built Facility Strategy.

The Playing pitch strategy will follow in June 2023.

2. Some aspects of the Leisure and Cultural Strategy Recommendations are already being implemented. For example, in terms of the Arts and Culture Strategy the following has been achieved in terms of Strategy Recommendations 39, 40 and 42.

£15k leveraged from Arts Council England towards facilitation of Compact (total now being spent £35k).

Appointment of freelance project manager for the compact. This is funded externally and will create extra capacity and expertise between now and July 2023.

Confirmation of Compact Conference event at Avoncroft Museum 28th March 2023



Portfolio Holder Report

Subgroups for Compact in full motion with use of grants of £2,500 each. Projects being piloted between now and Conference on March 28th as follows:

1. What will you do when you're in charge? (a youth social action project)
2. Volunteering Campaign

Fundraising for Digital Heritage Trail in motion.

In addition to the work related to the preparation, endorsement, and early implementation of some of the Leisure and Cultural Strategy recommendations, other Events and activities have taken place. The following are examples:

External funding (£46,610) working alongside partners for physical activity and sport sessions as follows:

Summer 22:

Holiday Activity Funds – 1192 places available

- Bromsgrove Sports and Leisure Centre– Town Centre
- Aztec Upton Warren – Upton Warren
- Bromsgrove Youth & Community Hub – Town Centre & Charford
- Mindfully Empowered Coaching – Tardebigge
- Rigby Hall School – Aston Fields
- BDHT – Burcot, Wythall, Sidemoor, Charford
- Woodrush High School – Wythall

Short Breaks – 142 places available for young people with disabilities.

- Aztec Upton Warren – Upton Warren
- Upton Warren Sailing Club – Upton Warren

Adult disability activities (Non grant funded) – 24 places per week

- Bromsgrove Sports and Leisure Centre – Town Centre

Junior clubs (Non grant funded) – 45 places per week

- Bromsgrove Gymnastics Club – Sidemoor / town centre
- Meadows First School – Sidemoor / town centre

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Autumn / Winter 22:

Holiday Activity Fund – 133 places

- Bromsgrove Sports and Leisure Centre – Town centre
- Bromsgrove Youth & Community Hub – Town centre / Charford

Together Fund

- Aztec Upton Warren – Upton Warren
- Upton Warren Sailing Club – Upton Warren
- RYA - Worcestershire

Short Breaks – 36 places per week

- Rigby Hall School – Aston Fields
- Bromsgrove Youth & Community Hub – Town Centre & Charford

Adult disability activities (Non grant funded) – 24 places per week

BSLC – Town Centre

Junior clubs (Non grant funded) – 45 places per week

- Bromsgrove Gymnastics Club – Sidemoor / town centre
- Meadows First School – Sidemoor / town centre

Health sessions (Strong and steady classes for postural stability support: 40 participants)

- Rubery (Fathers Barn)
- Wythall (Wythall Village Hall)
- Bromsgrove (Newsong Church and Bromsgrove Methodist Church)
- New class starting in Catshill (2023)

Commonwealth Games

Queens Baton Relay visited Bromsgrove in July 2022. Local Paralympian Leanna Horne was the local authority's nominated Baton Bearer. Three other Baton Bearers were at the community celebration event at Sanders Park. Over 1000 people in attendance with Bromsgrove Gymnastics, Severn Arts, Bromsgrove Festival and the Town Crier presenting a celebration of the Bandstand (also originally built to mark the Queen's Reign).



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2. Partnership Working

The Council works with a range of partner organisations to meet the needs of residents and businesses in the District. The following section details work delivered within the remit of this Portfolio Holder.

Partnership working examples:

The team are working with key community, charity and third sector groups/organisations to enable the delivery of the Leisure and Culture strategy outcomes.

The Cultural Compact partners currently engaged are as follows:

- Active Hereford and Worcester,
- Attract Marketing Ltd
- AIR: artsinredditch (local arts forum)
- Avoncroft Museum
- Bromsgrove Arts Alive (local arts forum)
- BARN (Bromsgrove and Redditch Network)
- Bromsgrove Festival
- Bromsgrove Society
- B Music (Town Hall and Symphony Hall Birmingham)
- Canals and Rivers Trust
- Culture Central
- Dancefest (Worcestershire and Herefordshire Dance Agency)
- Friends of St John
- Heart of Worcestershire College
- Kingfisher Shopping Centre
- Knights Pharmacy Group
- Motionhouse Dance Theatre
- National Trust,
- Reimagine Redditch Consortium (Creative People and Places Project)
- Royal Enfield (European region)
- Rubicon Leisure
- Severn Arts
- Stans Café Theatre
- Dry Spy Public House
- Heart of England Forest Trust
- University of Worcester
- Visit Worcestershire
- Worcestershire Wildlife Trust
- WMCA Cultural Services
- Writing West Midlands
- Young Solutions

Anticipated Activities/Key Milestones For Next Period

The key milestones will relate to working through the recommendations in the Leisure Strategy and spending any external funding received. For example:

Carry out a detailed assessment of the play value, quality, and accessibility of equipped play spaces across the district. Community first partnership has been

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Portfolio Holder Report

commissioned to develop this using information provided by the strategy and further research and using best practise. This is due to be completed by May 2023.

Deliver a pilot project to test how Council managed land can deliver offsite Biodiversity Net Gain.

Develop an overall capital investment plan for enhancing parks and open spaces to provide a more strategic approach to the use of Section106 and other funding.

Develop a clear marketing plan for green spaces that includes new web pages, social media, and targeted work with key audiences.

Develop a volunteer plan and a clear approach to working with Friends groups tied to its aspirations for Green Flag Award across its priority parks. Community engagement to generate interest will be developed during easter through to summer holidays.

Carry out a feasibility study to establish a roadmap for the self-management of allotment sites across the District.

Start a pilot project to explore the process of transfer of allotments to self-management and share this learning across the District.

Pilot an approach to establish a new model for event delivery that allows local organisations to deliver programmes of events and activities.

Evaluate the success of the pilot projects and implement any required changes to the new delivery model.

3. Good News stories and Awards

Contributions to delivery of arts and culture strategy

1. £35,000 awarded by Arts Council England to support Cultural Compact for North-East Worcestershire

Climate Change

1. Update on Strategic Purposes

Relevant Strategic Purpose 'Communities that are safe, well maintained & green'



Portfolio Holder Report

Climate Change supports the Council's strategic purpose of 'Communities which are safe, well maintained & green.' In addition, it underpins the green thread that runs through the Council Plan and supports the delivery of achieving carbon reduction across council services. It also contributes to each of the Council's four other Strategic Purposes all of which have measures that support climate change initiatives.

In addition to the Strategic purposes, the Council's Plan also sets out its organisational priorities, and within a sustainability framework a requirement on any review of services to understand how we can adapt to climate change.

Members will recall that the Council declared a climate emergency in 2019, affirming that it will place the Climate Emergency at the centre of its decision-making process

Key activities since last report:

In October 2022, the Council adopted a Carbon Reduction Strategy and Implementation Plan. This is our first Carbon Reduction Strategy which covers the next 3 years and is published on our website. The Strategy sets out how as a Council we will achieve a 50% reduction in carbon dioxide by 2030 and Net Zero by 2040. This is in advance of the Government's target of Net Zero by 2050.

Each of the Council's service areas contributed to the Strategy and Implementation Plan in order to produce 'carbon reduction pathways.' Through this approach carbon reduction will become 'business as usual' and truly embedded throughout the organisation.

Over the last 12 months our key successes and activities have been:

- Office for low emission vehicles funded electric taxi scheme – estimated Carbon savings of 126 CO₂ tonnes for the wider area, beyond Council operations
- Low carbon heating & Solar PV project at the Artrix Centre - estimated carbon saving of 100 CO₂ tonnes.
- Purchase of 100% green electricity for the Council - estimated carbon saving of 98 CO₂ tonnes.
- First delivery and implementation of hydrotreated vegetable oil (HVO) low carbon fuel for the Council's diesel fleet - estimated carbon saving of 530 CO₂ tonnes per annum and the Council is now using HVO in all its diesel vehicles
- Bromsgrove Zero Carbon District Heat Network study – carbon savings to be achieved when the scheme is operational.

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- A Green Fair at Sanders Park as a key event to communicate the message of a low carbon future to the wider community

Anticipated Activities/Key Milestones For Next Period

Our Carbon Reduction Strategy sets out our actions over the next 3 years to work towards our Net Zero target. Our top five future actions are:

- Assess further low carbon fleet fuel options - estimated carbon saving of 349 CO₂ tonnes.
- Seek commercial partners to build out the Bromsgrove District Heat Network - estimated carbon saving of 100 CO₂ tonnes.
- Support Bromsgrove District Housing Trust to apply for funding to improve efficiency of housing stock- estimated carbon saving to the District of 50 CO₂ tonnes.
- Set up a rolling programme of works to improve energy efficiency/ renewable generation in the buildings with the highest consumption - estimated carbon saving of 48 CO₂ tonnes.
- Implement Recommendations of the 2020 Energy Saving Trust report into decarbonising the council's transport fleet including staff mileage and travel plans across all service areas - estimated carbon saving of 36 CO₂ tonnes.

It was acknowledged that given the importance of this area of work additional staffing resources were required at a more strategic level. Consequently, in November 2022 the Council approved a budget bid to fund a Senior Climate Change Officer post. This post will be advertised in February 2023. Following the resignation of our Climate Change Officer at the end of 2022, a further post of Graduate Climate Change Officer will be recruited during 2023.

Our Carbon Reduction Implementation plan will be refreshed every 3 years and reviewed annually. Progress against targets will be reviewed by the Climate Change Working Party. The Strategy will further provide the focus, steer, and priority for the Climate change Panel for the next 3 years.

2. Partnership Working

The Council works with a range of partner organisations to meet the needs of residents and businesses in the District. The following section details work delivered within the remit of this Portfolio Holder.

It is vital that we work closely with partners, in order to reduce the carbon emissions of the district as a whole. It is important that we use our sphere of influence to encourage others to address their own emissions. The council also benefits from



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partnership working with county, regional and national organisations by seeking out and engaging the support that may be available.

Key activities since last report:

A key partner for the Council has been the West Midlands Net Zero Hub who have supported us in developing our Carbon Reduction Action Plan. I would like to say particularly thanks to Alex Pearson for this work.

We currently work closely on a district level with partners such as 'Everyone Active' who run our sports and leisure facilities. We work closely with Worcestershire County Council to ensure that homes and businesses can benefit from the advice and grants that are made available through the Sustainability Team. The Council is also part of the Joint Worcestershire and Herefordshire Waste Partnership group working towards waste reduction and better waste management across the county. We are also working closely with Worcestershire Regulatory Services to promote Electric Taxis through the licencing system. On a regional level alongside working with the Midlands Net Zero Hub we also work with the West Midlands Combined Authority and Sustainability West Midlands on several carbon reduction projects. On a national level we have recently worked with the Energy Saving Trust to look at carbon reduction options across our vehicle fleet.

Anticipated Activities/Key Milestones and Priorities For Next Period

- Work with Partners to deliver of the actions that require a partnership approach contained in the carbon reduction strategy
- Officers to attend monthly sustainability officers group meetings, organised through the County Council in order to share learning
- Investigate opportunities for carbon reduction with our suppliers and delivery partners
- Ensure that our Carbon Reduction Strategy is aligned with the other Worcestershire Councils and review all plans annually
- Work with Worcestershire Regulatory Services to investigate how we might develop a Street Trading Policy to encourage low carbon and sustainable trades to operate in the local area
- We will also continue to explore options with Worcestershire County Council and local businesses to encourage walking and cycling to work.

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Council Tax Reduction Scheme

Relevant Portfolio Holder		Councillor Geoff Denaro
Portfolio Holder Consulted		Yes
Relevant Head of Service		Michelle Howell, Head of Finance and Customer Services
Report Author Peter Carpenter	Job Title: Interim S151 Officer Contact email: peter.carpenter@bromsgroveandredditch.gov.uk Contact Tel:	
Wards Affected		All
Ward Councillor(s) consulted		N/A
Relevant Strategic Purpose(s)		Aspiration, work and financial independence
Non-Key Decision		
If you have any questions about this report, please contact the report author in advance of the meeting.		

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

Cabinet is asked to RECOMMEND that

- 1.1 The Council 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.**

Cabinet is asked to RESOLVE to note that

- 1.2 The scheme is 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 are designed to provide more support to low income households;**
 - (b) Disregarding certain child care charges where an applicant (and their partner if they have one) is working more than 16 hours per week;**
 - (c) To disregard 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 will give the Council the discretion to disregard those increases if they would have a negative effect of Council Tax Reduction.**

1.3 All other parts of the existing scheme will remain unchanged.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 The purpose of this report is to recommend the implementation of a revised scheme following feedback from the consultation with the public and the major precepting authorities in respect of proposed changes to the Council's Council Tax Reduction Scheme which would take effect from 1st April 2023.

2.2 Each year, the Council is required to review its Council Tax Reduction Scheme in accordance with the requirements of schedule 1A of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 and to either maintain the scheme or replace it.

2.3 Council Tax Reduction (CTR) was introduced from 1st April 2013, when it replaced the Central Government funded Council Tax Benefit. From the inception of CTR, the funding available to the Council from Government has reduced year on year.

2.4 The Council made significant changes to the CTR scheme, which took effect from 1st April 2021. The changes increased the maximum level of support and replaced the existing Council Tax Benefit based scheme with a banded income scheme intended to reduce the administrative burden placed on the Council by universal credit. As with the majority of authorities within England, the District Council needs to review the scheme for working age claimants to ensure it remains relevant and provides appropriate levels of support to the lowest income households.

2.5 It should be noted that the Council can only make changes to the working age Council Tax Reduction scheme as the scheme for pension age applicants is determined by Central Government by the Prescribed Requirement Regulations.

2.6 If the recommendations are accepted by Cabinet, then the new scheme will be submitted to Full Council for resolution (as required by the legislation) by no later than 11th March 2023.

The current scheme

2.7 The current scheme for working age applicants (Table 1) provides the following discounts and is based on the weekly net income of the applicant plus any partner (if they have one).

2.8 The existing scheme determines eligibility by placing claimants into income bands and a percentage reduction is then applied to their Council

Tax based on the relevant income band. There is no proposal to adjust the method for calculating CTR, however, there is a need to review and increase the income bands to adjust for the effects of inflation.

2.9 The Council has taken advice from ACS Consultancy who gives specialist advice in this area across a number of Councils and the current experience is that

- Councils are not looking to reduce the level of support to applicants and in fact authorities are either looking to maintain the maximum level of support or increase it. For 2023/24 a large number of authorities will be providing additional support;
- In all cases where changes are being made, authorities are looking to target support to low income households and to allow additional flexibilities especially where Government creates grant schemes to assist households with the cost of living crisis and avoid inadvertent effects on Council Tax Reduction;

2.10 In addition the vast majority of authorities are looking to simplify their working age scheme in a similar way to that being adopted by the Council.

2.11 The objective of the Council's CTR scheme will continue to be to maintain additional support to those households on the very lowest incomes, especially given the present cost of living crisis. There is no intention to reduce the level of support available to other households

Table 1

Discount Band	Discount	Single Person	Single person with one child	Single person with two or more children	Couple	Couple with one child	Couple with two or more children
Income Ranges							
Band 1*	100%	£0 - £98.00	£0 - £155.00	£0 - £217.00	£0-£144.00	£0 -£201.00	£0 - £263.00
Band 2	75%	£98.01 - £119.00	£155.01 - £186.00	£217.01 - £247.00	£144.01 - £165.00	£201.01 - £232.00	£263.01 - £294.00
Band 3	50%	£119.01 - £139.00	£186.01 - £217.00	£247.01- £278.00	£165.01 - £186.00	£232.01 – £263.00	£294.01 - £325.00
Band 4	25%	£135.01 - £160.00	£217.01 - £247.00	£278.01 – £309.00	£186.01 £206.00	£263.01 - £294.00	£325.01 - £356.00

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	0%	Over £160.00	Over £247.00	Over £309.00	Over £206.00	Over £294.00	Over £356.00
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2.12 If the applicant or partner is in receipt of Income Support; Income-Based Jobseeker's Allowance or Income Related Employment & Support Allowance they will receive the maximum level of support.

2.13 Whilst the current scheme works well, it is considered that it does not:

- (a) Provide sufficient support for the households;
- (b) Allow for child care charges to be taken into account; nor
- (c) Have sufficient flexibilities to allow the scheme to disregard any grants or awards made by Central Government to assist household with the cost of living crisis

2.14 The present number of recipients of Council Tax Reduction are as follows:

- Pension Age - 1893
- Working Age - 2397

The proposed scheme

2.15 The proposed scheme is shown below in Table 2

Table 2

Discount Band	Discount	Single Person	Single person with one child	Single person with two or more children	Couple	Couple with one child	Couple with two or more children
Income Ranges							
Band 1*	100%	£0 - £115.00	£0 - £180.00	£0 - £245.00	£0- £165.00	£0 -£230.00	£0 - £295.00
Band 2	80%	£115.01 - £140.00	£180.01 - £215.00	£245.01 - £280.00	£165.01 - £190.00	£230.01 - £265.00	£295.01 - £330.00
Band 3	55%	£140.01 - £165.00	£215.01 - £250.00	£280.01- £315.00	£190.01 - £215.00	£265.01 – £300.00	330.01 - £365.00
Band 4	30%	£165.01 - £190.00	£250.01 - £285.00	£315.01 – £350.00	£215.01 £240.00	£300.01 - £335.00	£365.01 - £400.00

	0%	Over £190.00	Over £285.00	Over £350.00	Over £240.00	Over £335.00	Over £400.00
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- 2.16 As with the current scheme, ,If the applicant or partner is in receipt of Income Support; Income-Based Jobseeker's Allowance or Income Related Employment & Support Allowance they will receive the maximum level of support
- 2.17 The proposed scheme however increases the width of each income band and allows for certain child care charges to be disregarded where an applicant (and their partner if they have one) is working more than 16 hours per week. This incentivises returning to work.
- 2.18 The proposal is also to increasing support to households in income bands 2 to 4 to 80%, 55% and 30%. This ensures that more support is provided throughout the income ranges.
- 2.19 All other aspects of the scheme remain the same as at present.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 The current CTR scheme was first implemented in the 2021/22 financial year and currently costs £4.698m. This cost is borne by the Council's Collection Fund. Costs are shared between the Council and the Major Precepting Authorities in the following proportions:
 - District Council 13%
 - Worcestershire County Council 70%
 - West Mercia Police and Crime Commissioner 12%
 - Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service 5%
- 3.2 By implementing the proposed scheme, the overall costs of the scheme would increase by £131,000. This amount would be allocated to precepting authorities as per the percentages in paragraph 3.1 with the Bromsgrove's allocation 13%.
- 3.3 Whilst the expected costs of the scheme for 2023/24 are slightly higher, the overall level of Council Tax Reduction as a proportion to Council Tax Base has reduced year on year since 2013 as shown below until the 2020/21 tax year when support increased due to the discretionary one off support provided due to the C-19 pandemic.
- 3.4 The overall proposed costs level for 2023/24 is considerably lower in terms of the percentage of the tax-base than when Council Tax Reduction was introduced in 2013. The costs of the scheme, based on

2022/23 council tax charges, will increase to an estimated £4.954m from £4.659m with the proposed recommendation.

Tax Year	Maximum % reduction	Gross Council Tax £000s	Total CTR awarded £000s	CTR as % of gross CT
2013/14	100	56,465	4,564	8.08
2014/15	100	58,095	4,440	7.64
2015/16	80	59,655	3,897	6.53
2016/17	80	62,362	3,876	6.22
2017/18	80	64,557	3,804	5.89
2018/19	80	68,091	3,823	5.61
2019/20	85	71,818	4,028	5.60
2020/21	85	74,866	4,877	6.51
2021/22	100	77,498	4,699	6.06
2022/23	100	80,889	4,659	5.76

4. CONSULTATION

- 4.1 A full consultation process was undertaken in line with the legislative requirements with the following:
- Worcestershire County Council
 - West Mercia Police and Crime Commissioner
 - Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service; and
 - The public
- 4.2 Both the major preceptors and the public (including other stakeholders) were asked to provide their views on the changes.
- 4.3 The responses from the major preceptor, the County Council, is shown in Appendix A and an analysis of responses from both public and other stakeholders is shown within Appendix B.
- 4.4 The County Council's view is that *"Whilst we would support in principle the ambition for many of the changes to your Council Tax Reduction Schemes, the net council tax income would reduce and that would mean the impact, however small, would ultimately be felt on the overall resources available across other district areas outside of Bromsgrove"*

District Council and Redditch Borough Council. We would not encourage any cross subsidy and would ask that its impact is minimised or avoided if possible”.

- 4.5 The Council accepts this point but would highlight that non-payment will go up due to the present “cost of living” crisis. This will result in higher levels of default which in turn impacts the precepting authorities with lower levels of income and the requirement to make right in the following financial year through the collection fund. Although we do not have definitive figures, this change is substituting a degree of this risk but giving discounts to enable more of these low income families to be able to pay reduced amounts. This should be a benefit to the precepting authorities.
- 4.6 The public consultation ended on 16th December 2022 and the Council received 87 responses to the proposed changes. In summary the responses were overwhelmingly in favour of the changes as follows:

Question	Yes %	No %	Don't know %
Do you agree with revising the income-based banded discount scheme?	65.12	9.30	25.58
Disregarding certain child care charges where the applicant (and partner if they have one) worked for at least 16 hours per week	72.50	7.50	20.00
The scheme will disregard certain crisis payments paid to taxpayers (Local Welfare Provision)	80.00	2.50	17.50
Disregarding emergency increases in national welfare benefits	76.32	5.26	18.42

4. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 Schedule 1A (3) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, states:
Before making a scheme, the authority must:
- consult any major precepting authority which has power to issue a precept to it;
 - publish a draft scheme in such manner as it thinks fit; and
 - consult such other persons as it considers are likely to have an interest in the operation of the scheme.

- 4.2 In addition, in order to set a new scheme, the Council is obliged to make a resolution by 11th March of the year prior to the scheme coming into place

5. SERVICE IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The Council Tax Reduction was introduced by Central Government in April 2013 as a replacement for the Council Tax Benefit scheme administered on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). As part of the introduction, the Government:

- Placed the duty to create a local scheme for working age applicants with billing authorities;
- Reduced initial funding by the equivalent of ten per cent from the levels paid through benefit subsidy to authorities under the previous Council Tax Benefit scheme; and
- Prescribed that persons of Pension age would be dealt with under regulations set by central Government and not the authorities' local scheme.

- 5.2 Since that time, funding for the CTR scheme has been amalgamated into other central Government grants paid to Local Authorities and also within the Business Rates Retention regime. It is now generally accepted that it is not possible to identify the amount of funding actually provided from central Government sources.

- 5.3 The current CTR scheme administered by the Council is divided into two schemes, with pension age applicants receiving support under the rules prescribed by central Government, and the scheme for working age applicants being determined solely by the local authority.

- 5.4 Pensioners, subject to their income, can receive up to 100 per cent support towards their Council Tax. The Council has no power to change the level of support provided to pensioners and therefore any changes to the level of CTR can only be made to the working age scheme.

- 5.5 When CTR was introduced in 2013, for working age applicants, the Council broadly adopted the previous means tested Council Tax Benefit scheme as the basis of awarding support. Due to the reduction in funding from central Government, the Council also required all working age applicants, even those on the lowest income, to pay a minimum payment of 20%.

- 5.6 Since that time, other slight changes have been made to bring the scheme into line with Housing Benefit and Universal Credit.

6 OTHER OPTIONS

- 6.1 The alternative to introducing a revised scheme for CTR is to maintain the existing scheme; this would result in the income bands ceasing to be relevant and the withdrawal of support from the lowest income households and lead to increasing costs of administration; and in the longer term, significantly affect the collection of Council Tax and the effectiveness of the scheme to support households within the District Council's area.

7. STRATEGIC PURPOSES - IMPLICATIONS

Relevant Strategic Purpose

- 7.1 The Council Tax Reduction Scheme provides targeted support to the Councils most vulnerable residents.

Climate Change Implications

- 7.2 The delivery of additional support to our most vulnerable residents via a reduction in their Council Tax will have a neutral effect on the climate.

8. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

Equalities and Diversity Implications

- 8.1 A full Equality Impact Assessment has been undertaken as part of this process and is attached at Appendix C

Operational Implications

- 8.2 The changes to the Council Tax Reduction Scheme can be accommodated within existing teams and computer software.

9. RISK MANAGEMENT

- 7.1 A full risk assessment has been undertaken and the changes are assessed as low given that they are minor changes to the existing scheme.

8. APPENDICES

Appendix A – Responses from Major Preceptors
 Appendix B – Public consultation analysis
 Appendix C – Equality Impact Assessment

9. REPORT SIGN OFF

Department	Name and Job Title	Date
Portfolio Holder		
Lead Director / Head of Service		
Financial Services		
Legal Services		
Policy Team (if equalities implications apply)		
Climate Change Officer (if climate change implications apply)		

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APPENDIX A – MAJOR PRECEPTOR RESPONSES

With regard to your consultations on possible changes to your Council Tax Reduction Schemes in Bromsgrove and Redditch in 2023/24, I welcome the opportunity to comment on behalf of Worcestershire County Council. As the major preceptor in your area the majority of costs fall on the County Council and a main priority would be to ensure that these costs do not increase any further.

Whilst we would support in principle the ambition for many of the changes to your Council Tax Reduction Schemes, the net council tax income would reduce and that would mean the impact, however small, would ultimately be felt on the overall resources available across other district areas outside of Bromsgrove District Council and Redditch Borough Council. We would not encourage any cross subsidy and would ask that its impact is minimised or avoided if possible.

APPENDIX B – ANALYSIS OF PUBLIC CONSULTATION

Bromsgrove District Council - Council Tax Reduction Scheme 2023/24 Consultation

1. Background to the Consultation

1. I have read the background information about the Council Tax Reduction Scheme: This question must be answered before you can continue.			
Answer Choices		Response Percent	Response Total
1	Yes	<div style="width: 96.55%; height: 15px; background-color: #0070C0;"></div> 96.55%	84
2	No	<div style="width: 3.45%; height: 15px; background-color: #FF4500;"></div> 3.45%	3
		answered	87
		skipped	0

2. Part 1 – Increasing the level of support within the Income Grid scheme for applicants of working age

2. Do you agree with revising the income-based banded discount scheme?			
Answer Choices		Response Percent	Response Total
1	Yes	<div style="width: 65.12%; height: 15px; background-color: #0070C0;"></div> 65.12%	28
2	No	<div style="width: 9.30%; height: 15px; background-color: #FF4500;"></div> 9.30%	4
3	Don't Know	<div style="width: 25.58%; height: 15px; background-color: #32CD32;"></div> 25.58%	11
		answered	43
		skipped	44

3. If you disagree with revising the income-banded scheme please explain why and what alternative would you propose?			
Answer Choices		Response Percent	Response Total
1	Open-Ended Question	100.00%	6
1	This appears to exclude universal credit * marked .		
2	Leave as is, they are subsidised enough as it is		
3	Increase the support but change the banding system. It might be easy to understand but if your income is just a penny more than the band you lose a whole chunk of support, the worst falling into the 0 support band.		

3. If you disagree with revising the income-banded scheme please explain why and what alternative would you propose?			
4		please explain what the £ amounts quoted are. Are they council tax paid per period or are they net income or gross income per week or per month, much more details is needed to understand this grid	
5		<p>It is completely unclear to me as to why you continue to provide support for those on lower income, or income support (Which I 100% agree with), yet increase rates for the regular working class who are likely not much better off in real terms than the aforementioned.</p> <p>Those who miss the discount by being bringing in slightly higher income should not have rates increased to the point they become worse off than those claiming a discount. Some deeper level of thought should be seriously considered here for those who are self sufficient but living hand to mouth.</p>	
6		ryhryrhyr	
			answered 6
			skipped 81

3. Part 2 - Disregarding certain child care charges where the applicant (and partner if they have one) worked for at least 16 hours per week

4. Do you agree with this change to the scheme?				
Answer Choices			Response Percent	Response Total
1	Yes	<div style="width: 72.5%; height: 15px; background-color: #0070C0;"></div>	72.50%	29
2	No	<div style="width: 7.5%; height: 15px; background-color: #FF4500;"></div>	7.50%	3
3	Don't Know	<div style="width: 20%; height: 15px; background-color: #4CAF50;"></div>	20.00%	8
			answered	40
			skipped	47

5. If you disagree please explain why and what alternative would you propose?				
Answer Choices			Response Percent	Response Total
1	Open-Ended Question		100.00%	4
1	No change, keeps the status quo			
2	I agree a disregard should be applied, although I do not feel a disregard of £175 per week is appropriate and feel this amount should be reduced to reflect the individual choices said parent makes.			
3	thftrhfthftr			

5. If you disagree please explain why and what alternative would you propose?		
4	People have to pay childcare in order to work and they should not be penalised for this - many can ill afford these costs - we want to make it easier for people to go to work	
		answered 4
		skipped 83

4. Part 3 - The scheme will disregard certain crisis payments paid to taxpayers (Local Welfare Provision)

6. Do you agree with this change to the scheme?				
Answer Choices			Response Percent	Response Total
1	Yes	<div style="width: 80%; height: 15px; background-color: #0070C0; border: 1px solid #0070C0;"></div>	80.00%	32
2	No	<div style="width: 2.5%; height: 15px; background-color: #FF4500; border: 1px solid #FF4500;"></div>	2.50%	1
3	Don't Know	<div style="width: 17.5%; height: 15px; background-color: #32CD32; border: 1px solid #32CD32;"></div>	17.50%	7
			answered	40
			skipped	47

7. If you disagree please explain why and what alternative would you propose?				
Answer Choices			Response Percent	Response Total
1	Open-Ended Question		100.00%	2
	1	Keep as is & all income should be assessed		
	2	ftghfrhfhf		
			answered	2
			skipped	85

5. Part 4 - Disregarding emergency increases in national welfare benefits

8. Do you agree with this change to the scheme?				
Answer Choices			Response Percent	Response Total

8. Do you agree with this change to the scheme?				
1	Yes	<div style="width: 76.32%; height: 15px; background-color: #0070C0;"></div>	76.32%	29
2	No	<div style="width: 5.26%; height: 15px; background-color: #FF4500;"></div>	5.26%	2
3	Don't Know	<div style="width: 18.42%; height: 15px; background-color: #32CD32;"></div>	18.42%	7
			answered	38
			skipped	49

9. If you disagree please explain why and what alternative would you propose?				
Answer Choices			Response Percent	Response Total
1	Open-Ended Question		100.00%	1
	1	If they get more income they should get less benefit, fairer for all tax payers		
			answered	1
			skipped	86

6. Alternatives to changing the Council Tax Reduction Scheme

10. Please use this space to make any other comments on the proposed scheme.				
Answer Choices			Response Percent	Response Total
1	Open-Ended Question		100.00%	8
	1	The council needs to ensure the applicants are genuine		
	2	I'm blinking back tears. This is amazing. I know it looks like only small amounts but I live this and they make a massive massive difference.		
	3	If you are awarded Universal Credit of £334 pcm for a single person, and you are awarded £600 pcm for housing costs to pay your £600 a month social housing rent, the awarded £600 pcm housing costs should be disregarded as the single persons income. Only the £334 pcm Universal Credit allowance should be considered as the person's income.		
	4	As stated, please consider the working class and those who are on the fringe of your proposals, and/or those who fall just outside of the thresholds for support. Rates and rate increases should be tiered based on income beyond those working minimal hours. Many are already struggling despite their drive to work, and should not be penalised for this, in order make make up the shortfall created by your scheme.		
	5	I think there should be support more than 25% . I earn £13,400 a year with a child and have to pay £150 a month . Bromsgrove council tax is too much for those single families and no services or good shopping centre anymore ?		

10. Please use this space to make any other comments on the proposed scheme.

- | | |
|---|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 6 | I think this should also benefit all households due to the cost of living crisis. 100% of my wage goes on my mortgage and childcare so I rely heavily on my partner for all other costs. With the increase in house prices we can't even downsize to make things affordable. Please help all of the community. |
| 7 | N/A |
| 8 | I am lucky and do not apply for any benefits and really worry for low income families that are struggling to heat their homes this year. Im glad the council are considering these changes to help them. I do get a reduction in council tax as I'm the only person living in my home. |

answered	8
skipped	79

11. Please use the space below if you would like the Council to consider any other options (please state).

Answer Choices		Response Percent	Response Total
1	Open-Ended Question	100.00%	5
1	The scheme seems to count universal credit the same as employed income . And also discriminate against people who have children but don't use /pay for childcare ie part time		
2	See my comment on question 1 the banding system is really harsh for those who income falls just slightly above the relevant band meaning in some cases household A earn 1p more than household B gets no support at all.		
3	Only more gradations - so it's not such a leap. 25% chunks are a hit.		
4	Please see above.		
5	N/A		

answered	5
skipped	82

12. If you have any further comments or questions to make regarding the Council Tax Reduction Scheme that you haven't had opportunity to raise elsewhere, please use the space below.

Answer Choices		Response Percent	Response Total
1	Open-Ended Question	100.00%	3
1	The Council should propose the introduction of a universal basic income and the increase of the national minimum wage to allow people to live comfortably on the wage they earn.		
2	Please see above.		
3	N/A		

12. If you have any further comments or questions to make regarding the Council Tax Reduction Scheme that you haven't had opportunity to raise elsewhere, please use the space below.

answered	3
skipped	84

7. About You

13. Are you completing this form on behalf of an organisation or group?

Answer Choices		Response Percent	Response Total
1	Yes	0.00%	0
2	No	100.00%	37
		answered	37
		skipped	50



If yes, please tell us the name of the organisation/group and add any other comments you wish to make.



Answer Choices		Response Percent	Response Total
1	Open-Ended Question	0.00%	0
No answers found.			
		answered	0
		skipped	87



8. Questions for Individuals


14. Do you live in the Bromsgrove District Council area?

Answer Choices		Response Percent	Response Total
1	Yes	100.00%	37
2	No	0.00%	0
		answered	37
		skipped	50

15. Are you currently receiving Council Tax Reduction?				
Answer Choices			Response Percent	Response Total
1	Yes		29.73%	11
2	No		70.27%	26
			answered	37
			skipped	50

16. Are you or your partner in work or self-employed?				
Answer Choices			Response Percent	Response Total
1	Yes		72.97%	27
2	No		27.03%	10
			answered	37
			skipped	50



17. Are you liable to pay Council Tax?				
Answer Choices			Response Percent	Response Total
1	Yes		97.30%	36
2	No		2.70%	1
			answered	37
			skipped	50




18. Are you currently serving in the Armed Forces?				
Answer Choices			Response Percent	Response Total
1	Yes		0.00%	0
2	No		100.00%	37
			answered	37
			skipped	50


19. What is your gender?				
Answer Choices			Response Percent	Response Total
1	Male		18.92%	7
2	Female		67.57%	25
3	Non-Binary		0.00%	0
4	Prefer not to say		13.51%	5
			answered	37
			skipped	50

20. What is your age?				
Answer Choices			Response Percent	Response Total
1	18-24		0.00%	0
2	25-34		10.81%	4
3	35-44		16.22%	6
4	45-54		32.43%	12
5	55-64		29.73%	11
6	65-74		2.70%	1
7	75-84		2.70%	1
8	85+		0.00%	0
9	Prefer not to say		5.41%	2
			answered	37
			skipped	50

21. Disability: Are your day to day activities limited because of a health problem or disability which has lasted, or is expected to last, at least 12 months?				
Answer Choices			Response Percent	Response Total
1	Yes		13.51%	5
2	No		81.08%	30

21. Disability: Are your day to day activities limited because of a health problem or disability which has lasted, or is expected to last, at least 12 months?				
3	Don't know		2.70%	1
4	Prefer not to say		2.70%	1
			answered	37
			skipped	50

22. Ethnic Origin: What is your ethnic group?				
Answer Choices			Response Percent	Response Total
1	Prefer not to say		11.11%	4
2	White British		83.33%	30
3	White Irish		0.00%	0
4	White Gypsy or Irish Traveller		0.00%	0
5	Any other White background		2.78%	1
6	Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups - White & Black African		0.00%	0
7	Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups - White & Black Caribbean		0.00%	0
8	Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups - White & Asian		0.00%	0
9	Any other multi mixed background		0.00%	0
10	Asian or Asian British Pakistani		0.00%	0
11	Asian or Asian British Indian		0.00%	0
12	Asian or Asian British Bangladeshi		0.00%	0
13	Asian or Asian British Chinese		0.00%	0
14	Any other Asian background		0.00%	0
15	Black African		0.00%	0
16	British Caribbean		0.00%	0

22. Ethnic Origin: What is your ethnic group?				
17	Black British		2.78%	1
18	Any other Black background		0.00%	0
			answered	36
			skipped	51

23. Other ethnic group?			
Answer Choices		Response Percent	Response Total
1	Open-Ended Question	0.00%	0
No answers found.			
		answered	0
		skipped	87

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APPENDIX C – EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT



Equality Assessment Record

Title of Service, Policy, Procedure, Spending Review being Proposed	Council Tax Reduction Scheme 2023/24
Name of Service Area	Revenues and Benefits
Name of Officer completing this assessment	Lisa Devey & David Riley
Date Assessment Started	
Name of Decision Maker (in relation to the change)	
Date Decision Made	

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Overview

Provide a clear overview of the aims of the service/policy/procedure and the proposed changes being made. Will the current service users' needs continue to be met? Why is the change being proposed? What needs or duties is it designed to meet?

The policy revises the Council's working age Council Tax Reduction Scheme by:

1. 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 are designed to provide more support to low income households;
2. Disregarding certain child care charges where an applicant (and their partner if they have one) is working more than 16 hours per week;
3. To disregard certain payments paid to taxpayers under special schemes (Local Welfare Provision); and

4. Where the Government makes emergency increases to national welfare benefits to assist in a crisis, the scheme will give the Council the discretion to disregard those increases if they would have a negative effect of Council Tax Reduction

Who is the proposal likely to affect?	Yes	No
All residents	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Specific group(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
All Council employees	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Specific group(s) of employees	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other – Provide more details below	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Details

Outline who could be affected and how they could be affected by the proposal/service change. Include current service users and those who could benefit from but do not currently access the service.

Working age applicants who are currently in receipt of Council Tax Reduction or those who apply on or after 1st April 2023. Pension age applicants will not be affected as their scheme remains unchanged.

Evidence and data used to inform your equality impact assessment

What data, research, or trend analysis have you used? Describe how you have got your information and what it tells you.

Modelling of the revised scheme has been undertaken throughout and will continue to be undertaken until such time as the 2023/24 scheme is approved.

The **current modelling data** is shown below:

	Existing Scheme			New Scheme			Average Weekly Gain / (Loss)
	Numbers	Expenditure	Average Weekly Amount	Numbers	Expenditure	Average Weekly Amount	
Single Person							
Couple no children							
Single person with one child							
Single person two or more children							
Couple with one child							
Couple with two or more children							
Applicant Gender – Male							

Applicant Gender - Female							

- The scheme is designed to protect the households with the lowest incomes and will redistribute the levels of support available in a fairer manner. The overall costs of the scheme are marginally higher, and this will allow up to 100% support to those applicants on the lowest incomes and improve the support to those households in the lower discount bands
- The scheme will protect applicants who are disabled or where any member of their household is disabled;
- The scheme will be more generous to carers and those who have non dependants;
- The scheme will also allow for child care charges where the applicant works for 16 hours per week or more; and
- The scheme will not have unintentional consequences when the applicant is in receipt of Government crisis awards; and **No applicant** will be detrimentally affected by the changes.

Engagement and Consultation

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Consultation has taken place with the Major Preceptors (Fire and Rescue, Police and the County Council). Details of their responses are shown within Appendix A of the report.

A full public consultation has been undertaken until 16th December 2022 and the results of which are shown within Appendix B of the report

It can be seen that the consultation has received an overall positive response.

Public Sector Equality Duty

Equality Duty Aims	Evidence
<p>Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation</p> <p>How does the proposal/service ensure that there is no barrier or disproportionate impact for anyone with a particular protected</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The revised scheme has been designed to support all low-income taxpayers and has been created strictly in accordance with the legislative requirements. • The revised scheme provides more support to those on the lowest incomes • Existing ‘protected’ categories or persons who are currently determined as vulnerable within the existing scheme, will continue to be protected in the new scheme.

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characteristic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The authority's Exceptional Hardship Scheme will continue to assist any applicant who feels that they require additional support.
<p>Advance equality of opportunity between different groups</p> <p>How does the proposal/service ensure that its intended outcomes promote equality of opportunity for users? Identify inequalities faced by those with specific protected characteristic(s).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All working age are covered by the scheme and any taxpayer who meets the criteria will be able to apply for support. The scheme allows easier access to support; maximisation of assistance whilst at the same time maintaining the protections from the current scheme; No applicant will receive less support.
<p>Foster good relations between different groups</p> <p>Does the service contribute to good relations or to broader community cohesion objectives? How does it achieve this aim?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Yes, the scheme is designed to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Be easily accessible by all applicants; Avoid multiple changes to entitlement (and Council Tax) throughout the year; Be less complicated and more easily understood.

Is there evidence of actual or potential unfairness for the following equality groups?

- Does the proposal target or exclude a specific equality group or community?
 - No, all working age applicants are treated in the same way;**
- Does it affect some equality groups or communities differently and can this be justified?
 - No**
- Is the proposal likely to be equally accessed by all equality groups and communities? If not, can this be justified? (It may be useful to consider other groups, not included in the Equality Act, especially if the proposal is specifically for them e.g. lone parents, refugees, unemployed people, carers)
 - Yes**

Impact of proposal

Describe the likely impact of the proposal on people because of their protected characteristic and how they may be affected. How likely is it that people with this protected characteristic will be negatively affected? What are the barriers that might make access

difficult or stop different groups or communities accessing the proposal? How great will that impact be on their well-being? Could the proposal promote equality and good relations between different groups? How?

- **Details of the impact of the change have been provided above**

If you have identified any area of actual or potential unfairness that cannot be justified, can you eliminate or minimise this?

What mitigating actions can be taken to reduce or remove this impact? (Include these in the action plan at the end of the assessment) Equal treatment does not always produce equal outcomes; sometimes you will have to take specific steps for particular groups to address an existing disadvantage or to meet differing needs.

Protected Group	Impact of proposal	Justification for any actual or potential unfairness identified	If you have identified any area of actual or potential unfairness that cannot be justified, can you eliminate or minimise this?
Age	Affects working age applicants only (pension age applicants are dealt with under Central Government Prescribed Scheme)		
Disability	Protected		
Transgender	N/A		
Marriage and Civil Partnership	N/A		
Pregnancy and Maternity	N/A		
Race	N/A		
Religion or Belief	N/A		
Sex (Male/ Female)		The scheme provides a higher level of support to both male and female applicants. As with the existing scheme, more female applicants will be in receipt of Council Tax Reduction	
Sexual Orientation	N/A		

How will you monitor any changes identified?

The scheme will be constantly monitored by the service throughout 2023 /24 to ensure that its objectives are met.

The actions required to address these findings are set out below.

Action Required	By Whom	By When	Completion Date
Recommended – It is recommended that the revised Council Tax Reduction scheme be implemented from 1 st April 2023			

Sign off on completion	Name	Signature	Date
Lead Officer completing assessment			
Equalities Officer			

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When you have completed this assessment, retain a copy and send an electronic copy to the Policy Team (Equalities) attaching any supporting evidence used to carry out the assessment.

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WORCESTERSHIRE REGULATORY SERVICES BUDGET INCREASES

Relevant Portfolio Holder	Cllr. Phillip Thomas
Portfolio Holder Consulted	Yes
Relevant Head of Service	Michelle Howell
Report Author	Job Title: Head of Finance & Customer Services email:michelle.howell@bromsgroveandredditch.gov.uk Contact Tel:
Wards Affected	N/A
Ward Councillor(s) consulted	N/A
Relevant Strategic Purpose(s)	All
Non-Key Decision	
If you have any questions about this report, please contact the report author in advance of the meeting.	

1. SUMMARY OF PROPOSALS

- 1.1 Following its meeting on the 17th November, the Worcestershire Regulatory Services (WRS) Board approved budget increases for all constituent Members for the 2022/23 and 2023/24 financial year. This report sets out those increases for their inclusion in the Councils 2022/23 Monitoring reports and 2023/24 budget.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

Cabinet are asked to Recommend to Council that:

- 1 WRS contributions are increased by £167,843 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 are increased to £510,000 in 2023/24 to take account of pay awards and the impact of the “cost of living crisis.”

3. Background

Introduction

2022/23

- 3.1 The WRS Budgets for 2022/23 were set as part of the 2022/23 MTFP process. At the WRS Board meeting on the 17th November it was reported that at the end of September the overall position was a projected outturn 2022/23 resulting in a £1k refund to partners against the agreed budget. This overspend was set against the assumptions in the MTFP of a 2% pay award,

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Pest Control overspends being allocated based on actual work undertaken for partners, and Bereavement costs being charged on an “as and when” basis.

- 3.2 WRS budgeted for a 2% pay award in 2022-23. The current proposed pay award of £1,925 per annum on all pay points (pro rata for part time work) has now been accepted by employers and unions, the additional pressure on WRS salaries will be £115,757. WRS are unable to cover this increase, therefore an increase to partner funding will be required of:-

Council	2022/23
	£
Bromsgrove District Council	16,843
Malvern Hills District Council	15,083
Redditch Borough Council	20,292
Worcester City Council	19,146
Wychavon District Council	26,902
Wyre Forest District Council	17,491
Total	115,757

- 3.3 When hosting charges was set in November 2021 it was impossible to anticipate the level of cost increases faced by local authorities in terms of pay award, utility costs and the wider impact of high inflation. In order to avoid placing a significant burden on hosting authorities in year, members are asked to agree to the following increases in hosting charges below:

Council	2022/23 Increase in Rent £	2022/23 Increase in ICT Hosting £	2022/23 Increase in Support Hosting £
Bromsgrove District Council	811	434	728
Malvern Hills District Council	725	388	651
Redditch Borough Council	977	522	877
Worcester City Council	921	493	827
Wychavon District Council	1,294	692	1,162
Wyre Forest District Council	842	450	756
Total	5,570	2,980	5,000

2023/24

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- 3.4 The WRS Board also considered the 2023/24 budget at the meeting on the 17th November. In the budget presentation the following assumptions were agreed as being valid for constructing the budget:
- The base budget has been adjusted to include the increase of £116k created by the higher-than-expected pay award in 2022-23 and also the increase in hosting and support charges of £13.5k
 - 2% pay award across all staff for 2023/24 – 2025/26. This will be subject to the National Pay Negotiations that are ongoing and therefore the final position will reflect any formally agreed increases, the budget also includes any employee entitled to an incremental increase.
 - Increase in Rent of £7.7k
 - Increase in ICT Hosting of £7.5k
 - Increase in Support Hosting of £8.6k in 2023-24 and a further 2% in 2024-25 and 2025-26
 - No inflationary increases in supplies and services or transport.
 - Pension back-funding will be paid by all partners.

- 3.5 The unavoidable salary pressures are not able to be met by WRS making additional income, therefore, an increase to partner funding will be required of:

Council	2023/24	2024/25 - Cumulative	2025/26 - Cumulative
	£'000	£'000	£'000
Bromsgrove District Council	12	23	34
Malvern Hills District Council	11	21	31
Redditch Borough Council	14	28	41
Worcester City Council	14	27	40
Wychavon District Council	19	37	54
Wyre Forest District Council	12	24	35
Total	82	160	235

- 3.7 In the Autumn of 2021, when the Officer members of the Board reached agreement on the increase in hosting charges for Wyre Forest and Bromsgrove for 2022/23, no one could have anticipated the extent of the inflationary pressures currently being experienced by all councils. Inflation being in double figures was not yet talked about. The scale of the sharp increases in energy costs had not yet become apparent and a national pay settlement for 2022/3 that adds around 7% on average was well beyond what was anticipated. Whilst the pay award clearly impacts directly on staff

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employed for WRS purposes, it also impacts those staff based in the host authorities that provide supporting roles. These impacts, along with the anticipated impacts that will hit us in 2023/4, need to be reflected realistically in setting the budget for hosting next year.

- 3.8 IT suppliers are also experiencing increased financial pressures that many are passing these on to users. Software license charges are increasing significantly, which means a significant impact on our modern, digitally enabled services. All officers in local authorities are reliant on IT kit and software for their flexible work patterns and the cost of these provisions are increasing and will increase further looking forward. Utilities costs continue to rise and must be factored into the accommodation charges that the hosting provider faces. These pressures are not able to be met by WRS, therefore, an increase to partner funding will be required of:

Council	2023/24 Increase in Rent	2023/24 Increase in ICT Hosting	2023/24 Increase in Support Hosting
	£'000	£'000	£'000
Bromsgrove District Council	1	1	1
Malvern Hills District Council	1	1	1
Redditch Borough Council	2	1	2
Worcester City Council	1	1	1
Wychavon District Council	2	1	2
Wyre Forest District Council	1	1	1
Total	8	7	8

- 3.10 In addition to the base budget there are three additional technical officers working on income generation, animal activity and gull control. We are unable to include these officers into the base budget as the income generation officer is an additional post on the establishment to bring in additional income agreed by partner councils and the animal activity and gull control officer recharge percentage basis is different to the agreed partner recharge allocations.

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Council	Tech Officer Income Generation £000	Tech Officer Animal Activity £000	Tech Officer Gull Control £000
Bromsgrove District Council	5	7	
Malvern Hills District Council	5	13	
Redditch Borough Council	6	2	
Worcester City Council	6	3	65
Wychavon District Council	8	11	
Wyre Forest District Council	6	5	
Total	36	41	65

3.11 The Pension back-funding figures to be paid by partners are as follows:

Council	Pension Back Funding 2023-24 £000	Pension Back Funding 2024-25 £000	Pension Back Funding 2025-26 £000
Bromsgrove District Council	5	5	5
Malvern Hills District Council	5	5	5
Redditch Borough Council	6	6	6
Worcester City Council	6	6	6
Wychavon District Council	8	8	8
Wyre Forest District Council	6	6	6
Total	36	36	36

3.12 The Approved revenue budget and partner percentage allocations for 23/24 onwards agreed at the Board on the 17th November are

Council	£'000	Revised %
Bromsgrove District Council	510	14.52
Malvern Hills District Council	457	13.00
Redditch Borough Council	615	17.49
Worcester City Council	580	16.72
Wychavon District	815	23.19

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Wyre Forest District Council	530	15.08
Total	3,507	

4. IMPLICATIONS

Financial Implications

4.1 Financial implications are set out in section 3.

Legal Implications

4.2 A number of statutes governing the provision of services covered by this report contain express powers or duties to charge for services. Where an express power to charge does not exist the Council has the power under Section 111 of the Local Government Act 1972 to charge where the activity is incidental or conducive to or calculated to facilitate the Council's statutory function.

Service / Operational Implications

4.3 Monitoring will be undertaken to ensure that income targets are achieved in 2023/24. This is via the quarterly WRS Board Meetings.

Customer / Equalities and Diversity Implications

4.4 The implementation of the revised fees and charges will be notified in advance to the customer to ensure that all users are aware of the new charges and any concessions available to them.

5. RISK MANAGEMENT

5.1 There is a risk that if fees and charges are not increased that income levels will not be achieved, and the cost of services will increase. This is mitigated by managers reviewing their fees and charges annually.

6. APPENDICES and BACKGROUND PAPERS

Appendix

Appendix 1 – Minutes of the WRS Board meeting held on 17th November 2022

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Background Papers

WRS Updated Fees and Charges 2023/24 – Council 7th December 2022:
[Agenda for Council, 07/12/2022 18:00 \(bromsgrove.gov.uk\)](#)

WRS Board Papers 17th November 2022: [Agenda for Worcestershire
Regulatory Services Board, 17/11/2022 16:30 \(bromsgrove.gov.uk\)](#)

Tranche 1 MTFP – Cabinet 26th October 2022: [Agenda for Cabinet,
26/10/2022 18:00 \(bromsgrove.gov.uk\)](#)

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WORCESTERSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCILS

MEETING OF THE WORCESTERSHIRE REGULATORY SERVICES BOARD

THURSDAY, 17TH NOVEMBER 2022, AT 4.30 P.M.

PRESENT: Councillors: T. Rowley (Chairman), S. Cronin (Vice-Chairman, during Minute No's 24/22 to 27/22), H. J. Jones, P.L. Thomas, S. Khan, L. Harrison (substituting for Councillor N. Nazir), J. Raine, B. Nielsen, C. Mitchell, D. Morris and N. Martin

Officers: Mr. S. Wilkes, Mr. P. Carpenter, Mr. R. Keyte, Mr. D. Mellors, Ms. K. Lahel, Mr. M. Cox and Mrs. P. Ross

Partner Officers: Mr. L. Griffiths, Worcester City Council, Mr. I. Miller, Wyre Forest District Council, Mr. I. Edwards, Malvern Hills and Wychavon District Councils (all via Microsoft Teams)

19/22 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTES**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor N. Nazir, Redditch Borough Council, with Councillor L. Harrison in attendance as the substitute Member; and Councillor L. Whitehouse, Wyre Forest District Council.

20/22 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

21/22 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meetings of the Worcestershire Regulatory Services Board held on 23rd June and 6th October 2022, were submitted.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Worcestershire Regulatory Services Board meetings held on 23rd June and 6th October 2022, be approved as correct records.

22/22 **WRS BOARD AGENDA PAPERS FROM 6TH OCTOBER 2022**

The Head of Regulatory Services reminded the Board that the meeting of the Board on Thursday 6th October 2022 was not quorate due to unforeseen circumstances impacting on one Board Member, which had resulted in one partner authority not being represented at the meeting.

Having discussed all options with the Council's Legal Advisor and Head of Regulatory Services, the Chairman determined that the meeting would go ahead in order to avoid wasted journeys; having noted that no papers on the agenda required a formal vote for decision, they were all simply for noting. Members who were in attendance were then able to ask questions of the officer's present on the reports presented and a broad ranging discussion of the issues raised took place.

However, in order to address what was effectively outstanding business, this report introduced those previously scheduled papers as background papers; in order for them to be formally noted by the Board and to agree the minutes of the previous meeting held on 23rd June 2022.

The reports that were presented to Board Members on 6th October 2022, were included as background papers, with the agenda distributed for 17th November 2022.

Thus, enabling those Board Members who were not in attendance to address their contents and to ask any questions during today's meeting.

RESOLVED that the Board papers report for 6th October 2022 be noted, and that the relevant recommendations in each of the reports as detailed in the background papers as provided, be noted.

23/22

WRS REVENUE MONITORING APRIL - SEPT 2022

The Interim S151 officer, Finance, Bromsgrove District Council (BDC) and Redditch Borough Council (RBC), introduced the report and in doing so drew Members' attention to the Recommendations as detailed on pages 27 to 29 of the main agenda report.

The Interim S151 officer, confirmed that the report covered the period April to September 2022.

Members were informed that the detailed revenue report, as attached at Appendix 1 to the report; showed a projected outturn 2022/23 of £1k refund to partners. It was appreciated that this was an estimation to the year-end based on the following assumptions: -

- A 2% pay award had been added to the April to September Actual and projected outturn figures.
- Agency staff costs were being incurred due to backfilling of staff working on grant funded work and other contractual work e.g., food recovery programme, contaminated land.
- If April to September 2022 spend on pest control continued on the same trend for the rest of year, there would be an overspend on this service of £14k. WRS officers would continue to monitor and

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Worcestershire Regulatory Services Board
17th November 2022

analyse this spend and advise of any changes in the projected outturn figure at quarter 3. The projected outturn figure to be funded by partners was, as follows: -

Redditch Borough Council	£6k
Wychavon District Council	£7k
Worcester City Council	£1k

- The following was the actual bereavements costs April to September 2022 to be funded by partners. These costs were charged on an as and when basis. Due to the nature of the charge, it was not possible to project a final outturn figure: -

Bromsgrove District Council	£8k
Malvern Hills District Council	£4k
Redditch Borough Council	£2k
Worcester City Council	£6k

- Appendix 2 to the report, detailed the income achieved by WRS for April to September 2022.
- Any grant funded expenditure was shown separate to the core service costs as this was not funded by the participating Councils.

WRS had budgeted for a 2% pay award in 2022-23. The current proposed pay award was £1,925 per annum on all pay points (pro rata for part time work,) had now been accepted by employers and unions; the additional pressure on WRS would be £115,757. WRS were unable to cover this increase, therefore an increase to partner funding would be required as follows: -

Council	2022/23
	£
Bromsgrove District Council	16,843
Malvern Hills District Council	15,083
Redditch Borough Council	20,292
Worcester City Council	19,146
Wychavon District Council	26,902
Wyre Forest District Council	17,491
Total	115,757

RESOLVED that the Board notes the final financial position for the period April – Sept 2022, and that

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- 1.1 partner councils be informed of their liabilities for 2022-23 in relation to Pest Control, as follows:-

Council	Projected Outturn for Pest Control £000
Redditch Borough Council	6
Wychavon District Council	7
Worcester City Council	1
Total	14

- 1.2 partner councils be informed of their liabilities for 2022-23 in relation to Bereavements, as follows:-

Council	Apr–Sept 22 Actual for Bereavements £000
Bromsgrove District Council	8
Malvern Hills District Council	4
Redditch Borough Council	2
Worcester City Council	6
Total	20

- 1.3 partner councils be informed of their liabilities for 2022-23 in relation to three additional Technical Officers; as follows:-

Council	Estimated Projected Outturn 2022/23 Tech Officer Income Generation £000	Estimated Projected Outturn 2022/23 Tech Officer Animal Activity £000	Estimated Projected Outturn 2022/23 Gull Control £000
Redditch Borough Council	6	2	
Malvern Hills District	4	7	

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Council			
Worcester City Council	5	2	70
Bromsgrove District Council	5	8	
Wychavon District Council	8	13	
Wyre Forest District Council	5	8	
Total	33	40	70

- 1.4 Approve the additional partner liabilities for 2022/23 in relation to the additional increase in pay award and recommend the increase to individual partner councils, as follows:-

Council	£000
Bromsgrove District Council	17
Malvern Hills District Council	15
Redditch Borough Council	20
Worcester City Council	19
Wychavon District Council	27
Wyre Forest District Council	18
Total	116

- 1.5 Approve additional partner liabilities for 2022/23 in relation to the additional increase in hosting cost in Wyre Forest and Bromsgrove District Councils relating to ICT, accommodation and support staffing costs and recommend the increase to individual partner councils; as follows: -

Council	2022/23 Increase in Rent £000	2022/23 Increase in ICT Hosting £000	2022/23 Increase in Support Hosting £000
Bromsgrove District Council	0.8	0.4	0.7
Malvern Hills	0.7	0.4	0.6

District Council			
Redditch Borough Council	1.0	0.5	0.9
Worcester City Council	0.9	0.5	0.8
Wychavon District Council	1.3	0.7	1.2
Wyre Forest District Council	.8	0.5	0.8
Total	5.5	3.0	5.0

24/22

WRS BUDGETS 2023/24 - 2025/26

The Interim S151 officer, Finance, Bromsgrove District Council (BDC) and Redditch Borough Council (RBC), introduced the report and in doing highlighted that no one could have anticipated the extent of the inflationary pressures and economic conditions currently being experienced by all councils; with the sharp increases in energy costs and utilities.

IT suppliers were also experiencing increased financial pressures with many passing these on to users. WRS had therefore incurred increased costs with licensing and Uniform costs. However, some costs were offset against a decrease in transport costs now that the essential car user allowance could no longer be claimed.

The Head of Regulatory Services responded to questions regarding the non-Partner Council revenue side; and in doing so briefly explained that the Service were doing an excellent job working with Worcestershire County Council on areas like Safety at Sportsgrounds and petroleum licensing, with the Technical Services Manager's Team were doing an excellent job on delivering this alongside the vapour recovery work of Environmental Health, both of which had generated an additional income. Officers would continue to look more broadly at other public authorities to work with as the legislative framework made this more straight forward than dealing with the private sector; although no one would know the medium term financial situation for some time. If WRS were struggling with the budget, then partner officers would look at how services could be delivered differently if necessary.

WRS was relatively unique, there were no other district council partnership models delivering services on the scale of WRS. The shared services model on which WRS is based was a tried and tested model and officers had been successful in bringing in additional income and had built a strong team to achieve this. The work of WRS was nationally

recognised by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA); and WRS was very well known to the Local Government Association (LGA). The Licensing and Support Services Manager, WRS, chaired the Primary Authority group and the Food Standards Agency (FSA) was visiting WRS in the near future to look at the service's use of intelligence, with a view to using this in part of the amendments to its Code of Practice.

Officers would continue to scope other areas of expertise and also build on more Primary Authority work.

With regard to promoting WRS, the Head of Regulatory Services commented that most of the business was generated by peer to peer contact, by word of mouth. Officers had looked at trying to market services. However, he would also ask Senior Officers and Members to champion WRS when / whenever possible at relevant forums.

The Chairman thanked officers and stated that we all had a role to play in promoting WRS.

RECOMMENDED that partner authorities approve the following for 2023/24 – 2025/26: -:

- 1.1 Approve the 2023/24 gross expenditure budget of £4,288k as shown at Appendix 1 to the report,
- 1.2 Approve the 2023/24 income budget of £781k as shown at Appendix 1, to the report;
- 1.3 Approve the revenue budget and partner percentage allocations for 2023/24 as follows: -

Council	£'000	Revised %
Bromsgrove District Council	510	14.52
Malvern Hills District Council	457	13.00
Redditch Borough Council	615	17.49
Worcester City Council	580	16.72
Wychavon District	815	23.19
Wyre Forest District Council	530	15.08
Total	3,507	

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1.4 Approve the additional partner liabilities for 2023/24 in relation to unavoidable salary pressure, as follows: -.

Council	£'000
Bromsgrove District Council	12
Malvern Hills District Council	11
Redditch Borough Council	14
Worcester City Council	14
Wychavon District Council	19
Wyre Forest District Council	12
Total	82

1.5 Approve the additional partner liabilities for 2023/24 in relation to increase in hosting costs, as follows: -

Council	Increase in Rent £000	Increase in ICT Hosting £000	Increase in Support Hosting £000
Bromsgrove District Council	1	1	1
Malvern Hills District Council	1	1	1
Redditch Borough Council	2	1	2
Worcester City Council	1	1	1
Wychavon District Council	2	1	2
Wyre Forest District Council	1	1	1
Total	8	7	8

1.6 Approve the additional partner liabilities for 2023/24 in relation to three Technical Officers, as follows: -

Council	Tech Officer Income Generation £000	Tech Officer Animal Activity £000	Tech Officer Gull Control £000
Bromsgrove District Council	5	7	
Malvern Hills	5	13	

District Council			
Redditch Borough Council	6	2	
Worcester City Council	6	3	65
Wychavon District Council	8	11	
Wyre Forest District Council	6	5	
Total	36	41	65

25/22

ACTIVITY AND PERFORMANCE DATA QUARTER 2 - 2022/2023

The Community Environmental Health and Trading Standards Manager, Worcestershire Regulatory Services presented the Activity and Performance Data for Quarter 2, 2022/2023 and in doing so highlighted the following key points: -

ACTIVITY DATA

The number of food safety cases recorded by WRS during the year to date was a reduction of 28% compared to 2021-22, but an increase of 18% compared to 2020-21. In general terms, a higher proportion of food safety cases were enquiries such as requests for business advice or export health certificates.

Of the interventions conducted at businesses included in the Food Hygiene Rating Scheme (FHRS), 39 were rated as non-compliant (0, 1 or 2) with most of these ratings issued to takeaways, restaurants and small retailers.

Approximately 71% of recorded cases related to noise nuisances, with noise from domestic properties (such as from dog barking or noise from audio-visual equipment) being the most prominent sources. A further 11% of recorded cases related to smoke nuisances and issues such as the burning of domestic or commercial waste.

PERFORMANCE

At the end of last year, officers saw an increase in the number of defective vehicles reported, driven mainly by higher numbers in one of the six fleets. There was a similar picture at the end of quarter 2 this year, with 37 vehicles being suspended in the period but with 25 being in that same fleet area. Even with this number, only 2.37% of the fleet county-wide were recorded as potentially problematic. Members' attention was drawn to the table detailed at Appendix B to the report. Officers hoped that they could work with the operators to reduce this figure, but members of the trade needed to be aware that they must

always keep their vehicles up to standard and that the regular tests undertaken, were not there to be used to assess what maintenance may be required on their vehicles.

The rate of noise complaints against population was 0.91. This was slightly lower than the figure at quarter 2 last year (1.08,) but like the figures in the previous 2 years (0.94 and 0.85 respectively.) Members may be aware that this measure had been significantly higher at this point in previous years with 1.7 in 2018/19 and 2.1 in 2017/18. Hopefully, the current figure again was indicative of a return to normal levels.

Income brought in during the first half of 2022/23 was £232,520, which was significantly up on last year at this point (£163, 583,) and the previous year (£131,901). Using the historic budget figure for 2016/17 (£3,017,000) to maintain the comparison with previous years, this comes out at 7.7%. Hopefully, this showed that WRS were starting to see more normality returned in the areas that generated our income streams. Officers had not included additional income for work on issues like supporting Ukrainian refugees as this was work done on behalf of the six partners and officers tried to use this measure to look at the work that WRS carried out for others.

Officers responded to questions from the Chairman and Members of the Board, with regard to the information as detailed at Appendix 2, on page 59 of the main agenda report; with regard to defective vehicles and why Redditch Borough Council appeared to be out of kilter compared to other partner authorities.

It was suggested as mentioned above that some drivers may be using the taxi checks at the depot, as a way of seeing what work was required on their vehicles in order to keep them operating within policy and safe. Members were reassured that the Licensing and Support Services Manager, WRS was looking into this. Licensing officers needed to ensure that drivers were carrying out safety checks and that regular maintenance on their vehicles was taking place.

Officers further responded to questions regarding the use of domestic log burners. Members were briefly informed that new powers under the Environment Act 2021 could allow local authorities to issue Penalty Notices for illegal smoke emissions, however, officers needed a better understanding on how log burners were being used incorrectly before they could do this as there were a number of reasons that could result in an illegal emission, particularly if the wrong fuel was used, and most log burners on the market were tested to standards that made them suitable for use in smokeless zones. The Head of Regulatory Services reminded

members that the service's enforcement policy would require that officers take a proportionate approach, making members of the public aware of what to / what not to buy, what can / can't be used as fuel with log burners; and that officers had to have the tools to deal with any concerns / issues raised in this area before any kind of formal action would be instituted.

The Chairman expressed his sincere thanks to officers for an informative report.

RESOLVED that the Activity and Performance Data Quarter 2, for 2022/2023, be noted and that Members use the contents of the activity data in their own reporting back to fellow Members of their partner authorities.

26/22

UPDATE ON PROGRESS OF THE AUTOMATION PROJECT

The Licensing and Support Services Manager introduced a further update report on the Automation progress, as agreed.

Members were informed that progress on making a final decision on a system had progressed. WRS had found two suppliers who seemed most positive about working with WRS and being able to deliver within our proposed timescales. The specification was being finalised and discussions were taking place with procurement colleagues this would enable WRS to make a direct award to the one that best fits the needs of WRS.

In the coming few weeks WRS will be working with the Procurement solicitor at Bromsgrove District Council to ensure that the necessary procurement processes were followed, whilst utilising one of the two Government portals available for direct award.

In parallel to the wider automation project officers had also been discussing the implementation of electronic ID Cards in the taxi trades for both safeguarding and enforcement measures. Since there was only one supplier on the market for this technology the procurement process was not as burdensome so officers would continue to work with the supplier to ensure that all of the needs would be met on implementation.

RESOLVED that the update on progress of the automation project be noted.

27/22

INFORMATION REPORT - FLEXIBLE WRS WORKFORCE

The Technical Services Manager, WRS, introduced the report and in doing so informed the Board that as detailed in the report that, during the last three years, WRS had provided reports or updates to Members on the various COVID-19 related workstreams. At the peak of demand, we

had teams working to support businesses and the public in a variety of ways throughout the pandemic. This led to a massive recruitment drive to fill the 80 plus temporary posts created.

The pandemic had created a unique situation which WRS was able to use to its benefit, in giving lots of talented, conscientious, and highly skilled individuals a chance to work alongside Environmental Health and Licensing staff to get a taste of our world. Whilst much of that work has come to an end during 2022 many of the staff previously employed in COVID-19 workstreams had been able and willing to be redeployed in regulatory and public health related matters utilising the skills developed and supporting the WRS budget.

The Head of Regulatory reiterated this and commented that the Technical Services Manager had provided a good summary for Members. They had employed some very talented people during Covid-19.

Planning Enforcement

WRS had been utilising the knowledge and skills we have in this area to support our partner authorities. During the spring we trained former contact tracing staff where required (as some had considerable experience in enforcement previously) to deliver planning enforcement work on behalf of four of the Worcestershire District Councils. Whilst the work for Wychavon and Malvern Hills Districts ceased in June, WRS continued to work alongside Planning colleagues in Bromsgrove District and Redditch Borough Councils.

Members' attention was drawn to the table, as detailed on page 96 of the main agenda report.

Homes for Ukrainians

Much of the work of the COVID Advisors during the pandemic was to support businesses and members of the public with a variety of issues, concerns, and worries. The Advisors were selected for their communication skills and drive to help people. This has served well in supporting housing colleagues at Bromsgrove District, Malvern Hills District, Redditch Borough, and Wychavon District Council's in delivering the work of supporting Ukrainians who had arrived in the county.

In July two more COVID Advisors started to assist but this time in Wychavon District and Malvern Hills District Council areas to carry out property checks to ensure that the properties were suitable for the Ukrainian guests.

COVID Advisors were always happy to take on any new challenges and were flexible in their approach to the regular changing guidelines during

COVID and now the regular change in workplace. They adapted well in these important roles using their previous experiences dealing with a range of different people (the general public, business owners, colleagues and management across the county in the six districts, county public health and councillors) and transferable skills such as their caring, empathic approach from visiting the clinically extremely vulnerable during lockdown, helping on vaccine centres to now carrying out Safeguarding checks for the Homes for Ukraine scheme.

In the last few months there had been some complex and sensitive cases, as one would envisage in a scheme where hosts offered to open their homes to strangers who had had to leave their homes and, in many cases, suffered terribly from the conflict.

Benefit to Partners

As well as supporting our colleagues in the District Councils, we have retained staff with valuable skills and knowledge. In terms of WRS' income generation from these work strands, we have only covered costs, but it had enabled us to utilise the associated opportunities in developing and enhancing our baseline workforce with managerial experience, a variety of work and an opportunity to provide value to our society; whilst being flexible and adaptable to our partners and residents in managing and delivering services for the benefit of all.

Further detailed discussion followed on the role of the flexible workforce in dealing with planning enforcement. Officers reassured Members that the flexible workforce had the crucial skills in adhering to enforcement policies and in enabling successful prosecutions. All enforcement goes through the planning department who direct WRS. Key communication with planning officers takes place and officers ensure that each of the partner authorities' policies are followed. It's about a flexible workforce having the abilities to undertake investigation without falling foul of legislation, the law and regulations; and assisting with quite onerous cases that could take between 1 and 2 years.

Further discussion took place on other enforcement work that WRS might take on. The Head of Regulatory Services directed Members to those areas mentioned in the WRS 3-year business plan as options that partners could consider, although he added that the view expressed by some members about wanting to retain services locally was understandable and reasonable.

RESOLVED that the Information Report – Flexible Worcestershire Regulatory Services workforce, be noted.

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The meeting closed at 5.30 p.m.

Chairman