

**BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**MEETING OF THE COUNCIL**

**WEDNESDAY 22ND FEBRUARY 2023, AT 6.00 P.M.**

PRESENT: Councillors R. J. Laight (Chairman), A. J. B. Beaumont (Vice-Chairman), S. R. Colella, R. J. Deeming, G. N. Denaro, S. P. Douglas, A. B. L. English, C.A. Hotham, R. J. Hunter, R. E. Jenkins, H. J. Jones, J. E. King, A. D. Kriss, 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, S. A. Webb and P. J. Whittaker

Officers: Mr. K. Dicks, Mrs. S. Hanley, Mr P. Carpenter, Mrs. R. Bamford, Mrs. C. Felton, Mrs. J. Bayley-Hill and Mrs J. Gresham

85\22 **TO RECEIVE APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors S. Baxter, S. Hession, M. Glass, A. Kent and K. Van Der Plank.

86\22 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillors C. Hotham, J. King, P. McDonald, M. Sherrey and P. Whittaker declared a pecuniary interest in respect of Minute Item 93/22 – specifically in relation to consideration of the alternative budget from the Liberal Democrat group - as Members of the Artrix Holding Trust. All five Councillors left the room during consideration of that item and took no part in the debate or vote thereon.

87\22 **TO CONFIRM THE ACCURACY OF THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COUNCIL HELD ON 25TH JANUARY 2023**

The minutes of the meeting of Council held on 25<sup>th</sup> January 2023 were submitted for Members' consideration.

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting of Council held on 25<sup>th</sup> January 2023 be approved as a true and accurate record.

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**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.

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**TO RECEIVE ANY ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM THE LEADER**

The Leader announced that since the last meeting of the Council, Councillor M. Thompson had stepped down from his role as Portfolio Holder for Leisure, Culture Services and Climate Change.

It was reported to Council that Councillor S. Webb and Councillor P. Thomas would oversee Leisure and Culture Services and Climate Change respectively for the remainder of the municipal year.

The Leader also took the opportunity to thank all Members of the Council for their work over the previous four years. It was noted that this had been a difficult few years, which had been impacted on greatly by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Councillor R. Hunter thanked the Leader for her work over this period. It was noted that it had been a challenging job over a very difficult period.

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

The Chairman informed Council that a question had been received from Ms. S. Wheeler to the Leader prior to the meeting. As Ms. Wheeler was not in attendance at the meeting, the question was read out for Members' information.

*"I would like to know what measures will be taken to prevent land that is currently undergoing development on Whitford from creating flooding issues on Whitford Road, Timberhonger Lane and Sanders Park?"*

The Leader provided a response and informed Council that a team from North Worcestershire Water Management (NWWM) had, over several years, commented on many Planning Applications received by the Council as a Local Planning Authority. The team at NWWM had reviewed various Flood Risk Assessments (FRAs) and drainage strategies, and generally had sent numerous versions of plans back and forth with developers to ensure NWWM were content with the proposals, including flood risk, water quality, and sustainable drainage.

It was reported that NWWM had been involved with the Whitford Road site from pre-application stage and were currently still involved for reserved matters and the discharge of conditions.

The latest / final drainage strategy for the site had included various Sustainable urban Drainage Systems (SuDS) features, including swales, porous paving and a SuDS basin (the latter of which was installed to help with drainage during construction); with an outfall to the Battlefield Brook restricted to greenfield rates (subject to Environment Agency approval as this was a main river).

There were still a few matters outstanding and NWWM were working closely with the Planning Case Officer to achieve the best outcome.

Members were asked to note that if residents had a specific concern, NWWM could investigate this in more detail.

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### **URGENT DECISIONS**

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

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### **INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL RECOMMENDATIONS** **2023/24**

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Governance presented the Independent Remuneration Panel's recommendations for Members' allowances in 2023/2024.

Council was informed that when considering the recommendations from the Independent Remuneration Panel (IRP), Members were advised that the Administration were not proposing to implement the first or second IRP recommendations, which related to an increase in the Basic Allowance for Members for 2023/2024 and Special Responsibility Allowances (SRAs) for 2023/2024.

It was highlighted that recommendations 3 – 6 from the IRP related to matters such as claiming travel and carer's allowances. It was noted that as no changes were proposed to the existing arrangements in these recommendations, they would be put forward in order to ensure that existing arrangements remained in place.

No changes were proposed to the Council's existing multipliers for the SRAs, with one exception. It had been suggested that the eligibility criteria for the SRA for political group leaders should be changed to enable any leader of a political group, except the Leader of the Council, to claim this SRA if they had 3 or more members in their group. If this suggestion was to be taken forward, it needed to be formally proposed as a change to the SRAs for the Council in an additional recommendation on Members' allowances.

The recommendations were proposed by Councillor G. N. Denaro and seconded by Councillor K. May.

Although some Members queried the proposals as outlined in the preamble above, it was confirmed that it seemed appropriate to make the change in respect of the SRA for political group leaders.

Questions were raised with regard to the implications of not increasing the Basic Allowance and it was commented that this would potentially make it difficult to get new candidates to stand for election in the future, if the financial remuneration was not appealing. It was with this in mind that Councillor S. R. Colella proposed an amendment to approve the increase to the Basic Allowance of 7.37% as recommended in the IRP report. However, it was noted by some Members that a 7.37% pay rise did not seem appropriate in light of the current Cost of Living Crisis. This proposed amendment was therefore not seconded.

**RESOLVED** that

1. travel allowances for 2023/2024 continue to be paid in accordance with the HMRC mileage allowance;
2. subsistence allowances for 2023/2024 remain unchanged;
3. the Dependent Carer's Allowance remain unchanged;
4. for Parish Councils in the District, if travel and subsistence should be paid, the Panel recommends that it be paid in accordance with the rates paid by the District Council and in accordance with the relevant Regulations; and
5. the eligibility criteria for the SRA for political Group Leaders be changed to enable any leader of a political group, except the Leader of the Council, to claim this SRA when having 3 or more members in their Group.

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**RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE CABINET MEETING HELD ON 15TH  
FEBRUARY 2023 (TO FOLLOW)**

**Pay Policy 2023/2024**

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Governance presented the Pay Policy report for Members' consideration. It was explained that the Pay Policy needed to be approved by Council on a yearly basis and that the Statement needed to set out the relationship between the highest and lowest paid staff at the Council. Included within the report was the breakdown of remuneration of all Officers across the Council.

Council was informed that the Officer structure within the Council was as follows:

- Officer Grades 1-11
- 2 Manager Grades
- 3 Head of Service Grades
- Executive Director
- Deputy Chief Executive
- Chief Executive

It was highlighted in this Pay Policy Structure that the Council were part of the National Pay Bargaining Framework. Furthermore, Members were advised that Manager posts were evaluated by an external assessor (West Midlands Employers).

In respect of new appointments, it was noted that these would normally be made at the minimum of the relevant grade and that there was a system of annual progression to the next point on pay scales. The Council did not apply bonuses or performance related pay to its Chief Officers and progression through the incremental scale of a relevant grade was subject to satisfactory performance assessed on an annual basis. It was noted that the pay related allowances were subject to either national or local negotiated rates.

Members were advised that posts that were remunerated at over £50,000 per annum were also required to be published in the Statement of Accounts and it was reported that the current lowest salary at the Council, as at 1<sup>st</sup> April 2022, was £20,441 Full Time Equivalent (FTE).

The Appointments Committee was responsible for recommending to Council matters relating to the appointment of the Chief Executive, Monitoring Officer, Section 151 Officer and other Chief Officers.

The recommendations were proposed by Councillor G. N. Denaro and seconded by Councillor K. May.

**RESOLVED** that the Pay Policy 2023/2024 be approved.

**Budget and Medium Term Financial Plan 2023/24 to 2025/26 (Including Treasury Management Strategy and Capital Programme)**

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Governance presented the Budget and Medium Term Financial Plan 2023/24 to 2025/26 (Including Treasury Management Strategy and Capital Programme) proposed by the Cabinet for Council's consideration. In doing so, it was noted that the report set out the final 2023/24 to 2025/26 budgets for the Council as its Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP).

Members were reminded that this year the Council had followed a two Tranche approach to the Budget setting process. In the initial stages of the Budget setting process, the Council had an ongoing £1.6m gap to be closed. The Tranche 1 proposals set out progress made and £1.6m of proposed savings had been identified. However, pressures of £1.6m, mainly due to significant inflationary increases, had resulted in a £1.6m gap remaining to address. It was noted that these Tranche 1 savings and pressures had been agreed by Council at its meeting on 7<sup>th</sup> December 2022.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Governance stated that in reviewing basic assumptions (following the Provisional Local Government Settlement on 19<sup>th</sup> December 2022):

- The Council would increase Council Tax by 1.99%. This was less than the additional percentage that the Government had permitted the Council. The rationale behind this was that it was hoped that this smaller amount of increase would strike the right balance between raising much needed income for the Council whilst still recognising the increased bills people were facing during the current cost of living crisis.
- The adjustment of pay inflation increases to the actual award levels which were applied to employees pay budgets in December. This adjustment amounted to £718,000. It was noted that future pay awards were assumed at 2%.

- An assumption of general inflation increases of 10% had been made and that there would be a 200% increase on utilities fees. Members were reminded that this assumption had not changed since Tranche 1.

In terms of the Provisional Local Government Settlement that had been announced on 19<sup>th</sup> December 2022, it was reported that the Council had received a settlement totalling £1.198m. This included New Homes Bonus funding (£127,000), Services Grant (£68,000), Funding Guarantee (£1.027m) and a £24,000 reduction in the Council Tax Base.

This was positive for the Council and was in line with previous years' overall amounts. However, it was stated that as this was only a one-year settlement, an assumption of an ongoing amount of £1m had been made for the final 2 years of the MTFP.

In addition to the positive news in respect of the Local Government Settlement, further positives were highlighted for Members' attention. These were as follows:

- The final Triennial Pension Fund amounts had added a further £356,000 of ongoing savings for the next three years.
- Officers had reviewed Earmarked Reserves, reallocating £1m to cover half of the 200% utilities increase assumption and reducing budgetary amounts by £351,000 a year.
- Business Rates had many factors impacting on them, including reliefs from the Covid-19 pandemic period. Overall, £517,000 would support the base budget, £100,000 the General Fund and £638,000 to the Financial Services Reserve. As this was assessed by the Government on a yearly basis, only £400,000 benefit had been assumed in future years, £200,000 for the base budget-and £200,000 for the general fund.

This had the combined effect to move the £1.6m deficit position that the Council had been in when Tranche 1 savings had been considered into an £857,000 surplus. However, there were £1.1m of pressures to add to this. Consequently, the bottom-line figure for each year in the MTFP would be:

- A £250,000 deficit in 2023/24
- A £44,000 surplus in 2024/25
- A £431,000 deficit in 2025/26

Council was asked to note that, as set out at the Cabinet meeting held on 18<sup>th</sup> January 2023, the revenue amounts needed to be increased from 2024/25 by £6,000 to fund the CCTV upgrade increases, which were approved by Council in January 2023.

Further information regarding key pressures that remained were provided, these included:

- Refurbishment of the fleet – This refurbishment would extend the life of the existing vehicles for five years and would enable the Council to buy replacement vehicles in 2028 when the supply would be more stable.
- Leisure Contract – It was reported that this was a £550,000 net payment to the Council. However, it was only delivering a £100,000 surplus. It was noted that this had been reviewed with the contractor and budgets adjusted to a £150,000 surplus in 2023/24, increasing to £209,000 in 2024/25, and £275,000 in 2025/26. Members were further informed that this included absorbing the present costs of utilities. If these costs reduced, which seemed to be the case at the time of the meeting, these savings would come to the Council in addition to the above amounts.
- Fund for apprentices £50,000 – This had been allocated in order for the Council to take advantage of apprenticeship levies and “grow” the Council’s own staff.
- Funding of a Data Analyst at a cost of £25,000 – It was reported that currently there was only one staff member who could lead on this kind of work. As the Council moved forward with work on automation and robotics this role would provide support in this area. It was noted that this would indirectly lead to further savings as these processes/changes were embedded in future years’ budgets.
- The extension of the use of Worcestershire Regulatory Services (WRS) to expedite the Planning Enforcement process at a cost of £25,000.
- The increased costs of WRS due to the pay award and other inflationary increases at a cost of £39,000.
- Bringing employee budgets up to the full 2% level for pay awards in 2023/24 and 2024/25 at a cost of £140,000.
- The cost of all out elections in Bromsgrove. This expense was incurred every 4 years and was forecast to be £167,000 in 2023/24.
- The Council Tax Collection Fund was projected to under-recover by £1.020 million. The Council portion of this was 13% which was £132,000 for 2023/24.



Officers had reviewed Earmarked Reserves, which had seen little movement in recent years:

- £1.053m had been able to be reallocated to a Utilities Reserve and £2.682m transferred to the General Fund.
- The majority of funding to support these changes had come from the Covid-19 Pandemic Reserve (£1.177m), the Finance Reserve (£1.000m), and the Economic Regeneration Reserve (£0.600m).
- It was assumed that the Utilities Reserve would reduce to £0 over the MTFP period.

The significant issue for the General Fund was the impact of the 2022/23 overspend position which, as reported in the Quarter 2 Monitoring Report, was £1.472m. The impact of all these factors was that at the end of the MTFP period, the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2026, General Fund Reserve levels were projected to be £5.558m. This was above the 5% level suggested by the Department of Levelling Up Housing and Communities (DHLUC) of £1.4m, although given the overspend in 2022/23, it was noted that a level of 10% would be considered a more prudent benchmark.

The Financial Strategy, as set out in Tranche 1 of the budget setting process, needed to move the Council to financial sustainability in its Revenue Accounts by the 2024/25 financial year. To get to this position there would be the need for investment and possibly the requirement to fund redundancy (both from reserves). These requirements would arise as a result of the Council having to implement changes to the way it operated and in order to continue to become a viable entity going forward. This would take 18 months to implement fully.

The Capital Programme for the next three years was set out in the report. Many of these schemes were already in partial delivery in the 2022/23 financial year. By approving this list, the Council were also agreeing for sums not spent in 2022/23 to be carried forward into 2023/24. The programme was significant, however it was supported by substantial external funding:

- In 2023/24, of the £10.8m programme, £9.1m was externally funded.
- In 2024/25, of the £4.9m programme, £2.7m was externally funded.
- In 2025/26, of the £3.1m programme, £1.6m was externally funded.

The significant Council investment had been the Burcot Housing initiative, which would move to completion towards the middle of 2023.

Linked to the Capital Programme was the Council's Capital Strategy, Treasury Management Strategy, Minimum Revenue Provision Strategy and Investment Strategy. These strategies detailed how the Council could invest surplus funds and borrow to fund its capital investments. Members were asked to note that if Councils "invest for gain", then they could not use the Public Works Loans Board (PWLB) to fund expenditure – which had significantly lower interest rates than private finance. Members were advised that the Council did not "invest for gain".

Council was advised that the opinion of the Interim Chief Finance Officer was that the 2023/24 budget estimates contained considerable risk due to the continued level of uncertainty in the Council's operating environment and a single year financial settlement, making it problematic to develop meaningful assumptions. Key risks to be aware of included:

- The Council had not yet closed its 2021/22 accounts, with the Period 11 Monitoring Report estimated outturn of £367,000 underspend still to be validated.
- The 2022/23 financial monitoring was showing an overspend position of £1.472m.
- The core risks of implementation of any MTFP.
- Loss of key personnel, with the average age of staff being 49. As a result, mitigation plans were being drawn up as part of the Council's Workforce Planning approach.
- The time limited nature of the large Levelling Up and UK Shared Prosperity Funds. If programmes were not delivered within the Government's specified timescales, then the Council would be liable for ongoing delivery expenditure.
- Business Rates Income – especially with the 1st April 2023 revaluations that were being undertaken, actual income received would vary depending on actual Business Rates growth, and levels of appeals.
- The ongoing impact of inflation, especially around utilities.
- Possible change of corporate direction/priorities following the elections in May 2023.

It was the Chief Financial Officer's opinion that the estimates were robust and the level of Reserves adequate.

The Cabinet's proposals in respect of the Budget and Medium Term Financial Plan 2023/24 to 2025/26 (Including Treasury Management Strategy and Capital Programme) were proposed by Councillor. G. N. Denaro and seconded by Councillor K. May.

During consideration of this item, Councillor P. McDonald proposed an alternative budget on behalf of the Labour Group, as detailed in the main agenda pack. The alternative budget from the Labour Group was seconded by Councillor H. D. N. Rone-Clarke.

In proposing the Motion, Councillor McDonald explained that the alternative budget was based on the figures provided in the MTFP report. However, it did not include an increase to Council Tax. A balanced position with no increase to Council Tax would be achieved by removing the following from the budget:

<b>Savings</b>	<b>£</b>
Play Audit	£11,750
Data Analyst	£25,000
Climate Change Officer	£30,000
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>£66,750</b>

Withdrawal from Town Hall	£68,000
Withdrawal from Crossgates	£20,000
Withdrawal from General Fund	£29,250
<b>Sub-Total</b>	<b>£117,250</b>

<b>Total</b>	<b>£184,000</b>
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During consideration of this proposal, Councillor McDonald highlighted the current cost of living crisis and the impact on local residents, including the increased use of foodbanks and difficulty in paying households bills. He stated that a Play Audit would be an unnecessary cost that could be carried out by Officers already at the Council rather than paying consultants to undertake the work. Furthermore, it was queried whether the new proposed roles of the Data Analyst and Climate Change Officer were necessary, and he commented that again potentially the Officers in current roles would be able to carry out these duties.

Council was informed that withdrawing payments to Redditch Town Hall and Crossgates would also result in savings.

It was reported that the withdrawal of £29,250 from the General Fund for 2023/24, although not sustainable in future years, coupled with the savings made as outlined above, would ensure that there was no increase in Council Tax to help alleviate financial pressures of local residents in the short term during the cost of living crisis.

In seconding the proposal, Councillor H. D. N. Rone-Clarke reiterated that the alternative budget proposed by the Labour Group had identified a number of ways that would result in not having to raise Council Tax. It was also suggested that the use of consultants was not always the most effective use of the Council's finances.

Members subsequently discussed the alternative budget from the Labour Group in detail and in doing so commented on the following:

- The potential to use consultancy services, when necessary, in Council operations in order to increase specialist knowledge.
- The role of the Play Audit, to ensure Health and Safety in Council owned recreational places.
- The importance of the Climate Change Officer and Data Analyst posts. These posts would ensure that the Council made stronger progress towards the 'green' targets as set out in the Council's Carbon Reduction Strategy and to develop data collection further in order to improve services to residents and make savings if possible.
- The lack of sustainability of withdrawing money from the General Fund.
- The need for greater collaborative cross party working within the Council in order to provide the best services for residents.

In accordance with the Local Authorities (Standing Orders) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2014, the alternative budget from the Labour Group was subject to a named vote.

Members voting FOR the alternative budget from the Labour Group:

Councillors P. McDonald and H. D. N. Rone-Clarke (2)

Members voting AGAINST the alternative budget from the Labour Group:

Councillors A. Beaumont, S. Colella, R. Deeming, G. N. Denaro, S. Douglas, A. English, C. Hotham, R. Hunter, R. Jenkins, H. Jones, J. King, A. Kriss, K. May, M. Middleton, S. Robinson, M. Sherrey, C.

Spencer, P. Thomas, M. Thompson, J. Till, S. Webb, P. Whittaker and R. Laight (23)

Members ABSTAINING in the vote:

No Councillors (0).

The vote on the alternative budget from the Labour Group was therefore lost.

Members subsequently considered an alternative budget submitted by The Bromsgrove Independent Group. The alternative budget was proposed by Councillor C. Hotham and seconded by Councillor S. Colella.

In proposing the alternative budget Councillor C. Hotham commented that he was disappointed in the lack of a community grants funding scheme in the budget proposed by the Cabinet and explained that these had been successful in the past and had helped to alleviate the pressures on local communities. Therefore, it was proposed in the Bromsgrove Independent Group's alternative budget that the net surplus from the Burcot Lane development, which was likely to be around £10,000 per annum, be used to support a community grants funding scheme in the future.

Council was informed that another proposal in the alternative budget included increasing Council Tax by the full 2.99% as permitted by the Government. It was proposed that the £92,000 raised from the 2.99% increase should be ringfenced and used to invest in youth services within the District. It was hoped that this could result in established Community Safety programmes such as the Friday Night Diversionary Programme and Empowering Young People projects potentially being taken to other parts of the District.

During consideration of this alternative budget the following was discussed by Members:

- The increase in Council Tax of 2.99% and whether this was too great during a cost of living crisis and would impact directly on residents living within the District.
- The assumption that had been made in the alternative budget about the use of the surplus from the Burcot Lane Development. It was highlighted that the plan had been for any surplus to stay

with the Housing Company in order to impact on the local Housing Market.

- The importance of the work the Community Safety Team undertook in respect of young people and that it was felt that their work needed to be extended across the District. It was however, highlighted that increasing the Council Tax by 2.99% to fund Youth Services could be considered double taxation. This suggestion was made in light of Worcestershire County Council (WCC) providing £530,000 to fund youth services annually. Furthermore, it was stated that WCC had also provided £350,000 from the Contain Outbreak Management Fund (COMF) for the years 2021/2024 to provide additional detached or targeted youth work to support recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic.

In accordance with the Local Authorities (Standing Orders) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2014, the alternative budget from the Bromsgrove Independent Group was subject to a named vote.

Members voting FOR the alternative budget from the Bromsgrove Independent Group:

Councillors S. Colella, A. English, C. Hotham, R. Jenkins and J. King (5)

Members voting AGAINST the alternative budget from the Bromsgrove Independent Group:

Councillors A. Beaumont, R. Deeming, G. N. Denaro, S. Douglas, R. Hunter, H. Jones, K. May, P. McDonald, M. Middleton, S. Robinson, H. Rone-Clarke, M. Sherrey, C. Spencer, P. Thomas, M. Thompson, J. Till, S. Webb, P. Whittaker and R. Laight (19)

Members ABSTAINING in the vote:

No Councillors (0).

The vote on the alternative budget from The Bromsgrove Independent Group was therefore lost.

(Councillor A. Kriss left the room during the vote on the alternative budget from The Bromsgrove Independent Group and as such he did not participate in the vote thereon).

Members subsequently considered an alternative budget submitted by The Liberal Democrat Group. The alternative budget was proposed by Councillor R. Hunter and seconded by Councillor S. Robinson.

This alternative budget was based on the figures provided in the MTFP report. However, it proposed an increase to Council Tax by an additional 1% (2.99% in total). The £92,000 generated as a result of the increase would be used for an annual subsidy for the Artrix.

In proposing the alternative budget, Councillor Hunter highlighted the lack of support for the Artrix and that the proposed Council Tax increase (which equated to an additional 20p per week on the average Band D property) would raise revenue that could provide financial support. It was noted that the Finance and Budget Working Group had looked at the Council Tax Support Scheme in detail and particularly those residents on the lowest incomes.

During consideration of this alternative budget the following was discussed by Members:

- That the Artrix was not a Council run entity and that a business plan was to be commissioned by The Artrix Holding Trust and considered by the Council in the near future. It was commented that until this happened no one could establish the financial support that would be necessary, and it was suggested that it was therefore premature to assume that the £92,000 of revenue raised by the increase of Council Tax would provide the necessary financial support. In addition to this, the Council Tax bills were to be issued within the following 4 weeks and that an amendment such as this would result in delays to sending this information to residents.
- Residents and Members cared deeply for the Artrix. However, there had been problems with the financial situation when it was open as audiences were not attending in great numbers. Issues had also been experienced with parking and high running costs. Members commented that there had been changes made to the fixtures and fittings of the building, including in relation to carbon reduction measures which had been undertaken as a result of grant funding received.
- The effect on the mental health of residents as a result of having no arts provision in the town. This, it was highlighted could particularly impact on young people in the town who had no provision to showcase their skills and talents in an arts setting.

Members once again commented that they could not support the increase in Council Tax to 2.99%, at a time when residents were struggling to pay bills and provide food for their families.

In accordance with the Local Authorities (Standing Orders) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2014, the alternative budget from the Liberal Democrat Group was subject to a named vote.

Members voting FOR the alternative budget from the Liberal Democrats:

Councillors S. Colella, S. Douglas, A. English, R. Hunter, R. Jenkins and S. Robinson (6)

Members voting AGAINST the alternative budget from the Liberal Democrats:

Councillors A. Beaumont, R. Deeming, G. N. Denaro, H. Jones, A. Kriss, K. May, M. Middleton, H. Rone-Clarke, C. Spencer, P. Thomas, M. Thompson, J. Till, S. Webb, and R. Laight (14)

Members ABSTAINING in the vote:

No Councillors (0).

The vote on the alternative budget was therefore lost.

[Prior to the consideration of the alternative budget from the Liberal Democrat Group, Councillors C. Hotham, J. King, P. McDonald, M. Sherrey and P. Whittaker declared a pecuniary interest due to their role as members of the Artrix holding Trust. They left the meeting room prior to consideration of this alternative budget and took no part in the vote thereon].

Following consideration of the three alternative budgets, the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Governance asked Members once again to consider the content of the MTFP recommendations from the Cabinet meeting held on 15<sup>th</sup> February 2023.

Members were advised that this had been a difficult three years for the Council as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. However, there were opportunities for the future and the Levelling Up Funding of £14.5m, the UK Shared Prosperity Funding of £2.8m and the Centres Strategy would be catalysts for regeneration.



In accordance with the Local Authorities (Standing Orders) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2014, the MTFP 2023/24 to 2025/26 was subject to a named vote.

Members voting FOR the recommendations in the Budget and Medium Term Financial Plan 2023/24 to 2025/26 (Including Treasury Management Strategy and Capital Programme)

Councillors A. Beaumont, R. Deeming, G. N. Denaro, S. Douglas, H. Jones, A. Kriss, K. May, M. Middleton, M. Sherrey, C. Spencer, P. Thomas, M. Thompson, J. Till, S. Webb, P. Whittaker and R. Laight (16)

Members voting AGAINST the recommendations in the Budget and Medium Term Financial Plan 2023/24 to 2025/26 (Including Treasury Management Strategy and Capital Programme)

Councillors P. McDonald and H. D. N. Rone-Clarke (2)

Members voting to ABSTAIN in the vote on the recommendations in the Budget and Medium Term Financial Plan 2023/24 to 2025/26 (Including Treasury Management Strategy and Capital Programme)

Councillors S. Colella, A. English, C. Hotham, R. Hunter, R. Jenkins, J. King and S. Robinson (7)

The vote on the Budget and Medium Term Financial Plan 2023/24 to 2025/26 (Including Treasury Management Strategy and Capital Programme) was therefore carried.

**RESOLVED** that Council approve the:

1. Tranche 2 growth proposals.
2. additional funding to the Council as per the Local Government Settlement on 19th December 2022, including the estimated levels for 2024/25 and 2025/26.
3. Tranche 2 savings proposals, including an Increase of Council Tax at 1.99%.
4. Capital Programme 2023/24 to 2025/26 and associated projects where outstanding budgets to be allowed to be carried forward at the end of the 2022/23 financial year.

5. levels of reserve being carried forward into future years.
6. level of General Fund balances being used to balance budgets over the Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) period.

And that Council **NOTE**

7. The Chief Financial Officer (CFO) Opinion on Estimates and Reserve Levels – the Robustness Statement (Section 25 Statement).

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**RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE CABINET MEETING HELD ON 22ND FEBRUARY 2023 (TO FOLLOW)**

**Council Tax Resolutions**

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Governance presented the Cabinet's recommendations on the Council Tax Resolutions 2023/24, which had been made at a meeting of the Cabinet held immediately prior to the Council meeting.

Council was informed that this report was seeking the formal approval of the Council Tax Resolutions for 2023/2024. The report took into account the spending requirements of Bromsgrove District Council, Worcestershire County Council (WCC), the Police and Crime Commissioner for West Mercia, Hereford and Worcester Fire Authority and the various Parish Councils. There were nine recommendations contained within the report.

The recommendations were proposed by Council G. N. Denaro and seconded by Councillor K. May.

In accordance with the Local Authorities (Standing Orders) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2014, the Council Tax Resolutions 2023/24 was subject to a named vote.

**Members voting FOR the Council Tax Resolutions 2023/24:**

Councillors A. Beaumont, S. Colella, R. Deeming, G. N. Denaro, S. Douglas, A. English, C. Hotham, R. Jenkins, H. Jones, A. Kriss, K. May, M. Middleton, M. Sherrey, C. Spencer, P. Thomas, M. Thompson, J. Till, S. Webb, P. Whittaker and R. Laight (20)

Members voting AGAINST the Council Tax Resolutions 2023/24:

Councillors P. McDonald and H. D. N. Rone-Clarke (2)

Members who ABSTAINED in the vote on the Council Tax Resolutions 2023/24:

Councillors R. Hunter, J. King and S. Robinson (3).

The vote on the Council Tax Resolutions was therefore carried.

**RESOLVED** that Council approve

- 1) The calculation for the Council Tax requirement for the Council's own purposes for 2023/24 (excluding Parish precepts) as **£9,204,565.**
- 2) That the following amounts be calculated for the year 2023/24 in accordance with sections 31 to 36 of the Act:
  - (a) £46,449,077 being the aggregate of the amounts which the Council estimates for the items set out in Section 31A (2) of the Act (taking into account all precepts issued to it by Parish Councils) (*i.e., Gross expenditure*)
  - (b) £36,113,337 being the aggregate of the amounts which the Council estimates for the items set out in Section 31A (3) of the Act. (*i.e., Gross income*)
  - (b) £10,335,740 being the amount by which the aggregate of 1.2.2(a) above exceeds the aggregate at 1.2.2(b) above, calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 31A (4) of the Act, as its Council Tax requirement for the year. (Item R in the formula in Section 31B of the Act).
  - (d) £272.57 being the amount at 1.2.2 (c) above (Item R), all divided by Item T (1.1(a) above), calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 31B of the Act, as the basic amount of its Council Tax for the year (including Parish precepts).

- (e) £1,131,175 being the aggregate amount of all special items (Parish precepts) referred to in Section 34 (1) of the Act (as per the attached **Schedule 3**).
  - (f) £242.74 being the amount at 1.2.2 (d) above less the result given by dividing the amount at 1.2.2 (e) above by Item T (1.1 (a) above), calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 34 (2) of the Act, as the basic amount of its Council Tax for the year for dwellings in those parts of its area to which no Parish precept relates.
  - (g) The amounts shown in Column 3 of **Schedule 1**. These are the basic amounts of the council tax for the year for dwellings in those parts of the Council's area shown in Column 1 of the schedule respectively to which special items relate, calculated by the Council in accordance with Section 34(3) of the Act. (District and Parish combined at Band D).
  - (h) The amounts shown in Column 5 of **Schedule 1** being the amount given by multiplying the amounts at 2.2.2(g) above by the number which, in the proportion set out in Section 5(1) of the Act, is applicable to dwellings listed in a particular valuation band divided by the number which in that proportion is applicable to dwellings listed in valuation band D, calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 36(1) of the Act, as the amounts to be taken into account for the year in respect of categories of dwellings listed in different valuation bands;
- 1) It be noted that for the year 2023/24, Worcestershire County Council, Police and Crime Commissioner for West Mercia and Hereford and Worcester Fire Authority had issued precepts to the Council in accordance with Section 40 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 for each category of dwelling in the Council's area as indicated below:

	Valuation Bands							
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£
Worcestershire County Council	977.19	1,140.05	1,302.92	<b>1,465.78</b>	1,791.51	2,117.24	2,442.97	2,931.56
Police and Crime Commissioner for West Mercia	176.33	205.72	235.11	<b>264.50</b>	323.28	382.06	440.83	529.00
Hereford and Worcester Fire Authority	62.93	73.42	83.91	<b>94.40</b>	115.38	136.36	157.33	188.80

- 4) That having calculated the aggregate in each case of the amounts at 1.2.2(h) and 1.2.3 above, that Bromsgrove District Council in accordance with Sections 30 and 36 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 hereby sets the amounts shown in **Schedule 2** as the amounts of Council Tax for 2023/24. for each part of its area and for each of the categories of dwellings.
- 5) That the Interim Director of Finance be authorised to make payments under Section 90(2) of the Local Government Finance Act 1988 from the Collection Fund by ten equal instalments between April 2023 to March 2024 as detailed below:

	Precept £	Deficit on Collection Fund £	Total to pay £
Worcestershire County Council	55,581,557.00	(715,149.00)	54,866,408.00
Police and Crime Commissioner for West Mercia	10,029,691.88	(127,825.00)	9,901,866.88
Hereford & Worcester Fire Authority	3,579,733.94	(45,773.00)	3,533,960.94

- 7) That the Interim Director of Finance be authorised to make transfers under Section 97 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988 from the Collection Fund to the General Fund the sum of £10,199,253 being the Council's own demand on the Collection Fund (£9,204,565) and Parish Precepts (£1,131,175) and the distribution of the Deficit on the Collection Fund (-£136,487).

- 8) That the Interim Director of Finance be authorised to make payments from the General Fund to Parish Councils the sums listed on **Schedule 3** by two equal instalments on 1 April 2023 and 1 October 2023 in respect of the precept levied on the Council.
  
- 9) That the above resolutions to be signed by the Chief Executive for use in legal proceedings in the Magistrates Court for the recovery of unpaid Council Taxes.
  
- 10) Notices of the making of the said Council Taxes signed by the Chief Executive be given by advertisement in the local press under Section 38(2) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992.

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**TO NOTE THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE CABINET HELD ON 15TH FEBRUARY 2023 (TO FOLLOW)**

The minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 15<sup>th</sup> February 2023 were noted.

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**QUESTIONS ON NOTICE**

The Chairman explained that one Question on Notice had been received for the meeting.

**Question submitted by Councillor S. Douglas**

"My question concerns Bromsgrove's unemployment. I am asking because the statistics tell a different story from the apparently amazing current rate that is frequently trumpeted at PMQs. Recent reports say that there is an additional 300.800 unemployed in our region. These people are involuntarily out of work but are now classed as economically inactive, thus 'hidden'. Jobseeker's rate stands at 5.1% not the 3% quoted in Parliament, with the 'hidden' unemployed the figure for the region actually is 14.3%.

What is Bromsgrove's unemployment rate including those 'hidden'? How does this breakdown across age groups?"

The Leader provided the response to the question and in doing so reported that Bromsgrove's unemployment rate was 3.9% as reported by the Office of National Statistics (ONS) from October 2021 - September 2022. It was highlighted that the unemployment figures were model based, and that the unemployment rate was for the 'unemployed as a

percentage of the economically active population' as defined by the ONS in 2023. The economically active population included 'people who were either in employment or unemployed' as defined by the ONS in 2023.

The unemployed population 'referred to people without a job who were available to start work in the two weeks following their interview and who had either looked for work in the four weeks prior to interview or were waiting to start a job they had already obtained.' as defined by the ONS in 2023.

The ONS classification of the 'economically inactive population' was defined as 'people who were neither in employment nor unemployed including students, people looking after family/home, temporary sick, long term-sick, discouraged, retired and other' There was no breakdown across age groups available.

The percentage of economically inactive population in Bromsgrove was reported by the ONS in October 2021 – September 2022 as 22.4%. The percentage represented a proportion of those aged 16-64. The estimated number of economically inactive people was 12,700 (the number was for those aged 16-64). This included 4,500 students and 2,900 retired people. The number of economically inactive people for the remaining categories could not be estimated, as sample sizes were too small to produce reliable estimates or were disclosive. Of the estimated 12,700 economically inactive people (aged 16-64), 12,300 or 97% did not want a job. People not wanting a job were 'people who were neither in employment nor unemployed and who did not want a job.'

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### **MOTIONS ON NOTICE**

The Chairman explained that there had been two Motions on Notice received for this meeting.

#### **Worcestershire Unitary Authority**

Council considered the following Motion on Notice that was submitted by Councillor C. Hotham

"This Council asks Officers to fully appraise and report back on the implications for Bromsgrove residents of the introduction of either a whole Worcestershire unitary authority or a smaller North Worcestershire unitary authority."

The Motion was proposed by Councillor Hotham and seconded by Councillor S. Colella.

In proposing the Motion, Councillor Hotham highlighted the financial deficit that had been discussed earlier in the meeting at the Council. He also stated that this was the picture across many Councils across the County. It was noted that these financial difficulties would almost certainly result in cuts to services and impact residents.

Research had been carried out by PricewaterhouseCoopers in 2020 outlining the savings that could potentially be made over five years if a Single or Dual Unitary Authority were to be created. In respect of a Single County Unitary, it was reported that this could potentially generate savings of £126m for a mid-sized county area over five years. For a Dual Unitary Authority, it was reported that the potential savings could be £51m for a mid-sized County area.

Council was advised that Central Government seemed to be pushing for a Unitary approach across the country and there was a danger that if something was not done to start this process, Bromsgrove District Council could be left behind.

During consideration of this Motion, Members raised the positive impacts of having a District Council in a two-tier authority area rather than a unitary authority. It was stated that at District Council level, Members knew communities and understood its needs. It was highlighted that as there were Shared Services operating across both Bromsgrove and Redditch Councils, this would already have a positive impact on savings.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Governance stated that there needed to be a unanimous agreement across all local authorities for this Motion to proceed, however this was not the case currently. Research and appraisal would cost time and money and was something Bromsgrove District Council would certainly not consider solely funding.

It was outlined that as there were only three months until District Council elections took place, this would be a decision for the new administration.

On being put to the vote the Motion was lost.

### **Bromsgrove Town Relief Road**

Council considered the following Motion on Notice that was submitted by Councillor R. Hunter:



“We believe a detailed study into alternative options for a Bromsgrove Town relief road is now urgently required in order that chronic traffic congestion can be addressed. It is requested that officers prepare a brief for such a study together with an estimate of the cost and present the brief to the Cabinet for their consideration as soon as possible.”

The Motion was proposed by Councillor Hunter.

In proposing the Motion Councillor Hunter stated that the traffic congestion around Bromsgrove town centre was a critical issue. Local businesses and air quality were being impacted significantly as a result of this and it was noted that this was detrimental to the growth of Bromsgrove in the future.

During consideration of this Motion, Members were advised that WCC was undertaking an extensive piece of work around traffic modelling which would take into account current traffic levels and form part of a Strategic Transport Assessment for the whole of Worcestershire. This included work in relation to the future infrastructure requirements for Bromsgrove District.

It was important for Members to understand that any decisions on future infrastructure needed to consider a wide range of factors, including the role that sustainable modes of transport such as walking, cycling and passenger transport, as well as emerging new technology could play, in reducing the need to travel. Similarly, the impact on the environment of all these interventions needed to be taken into account. A stand-alone assessment of a new route for a road would have limited value without being able to factor in all the other relevant elements fully. It was noted that there needed to be more focus on the reduction in use of cars. This would encourage residents to take alternative modes of transport and reduce the numbers of cars on the roads, thereby improving congestion.

Members once again raised their concerns in respect of the congestion in and around Bromsgrove town centre and highlighted that the large developments at Perryfields and Whitford Road, that had been approved by the Planning Inspectorate, would only compound the issues that were already problematic. In addition, it was raised that there had been discussions regarding a Strategic Transport Assessment which was due to be carried out in 2021. This had still not been received for Council to consider. As a result of this, it was felt that the plans for the relief road were still no further forward than they were prior to the approval by the Planning Inspectorate of those two developments.

It was with this in mind that Councillor H. D. N. Rone-Clarke proposed the following amendment to the Motion.

'We believe a detailed study into alternative options for a Bromsgrove Town relief road is now urgently required, *as well as a timeline for the release of the new Strategic Transport Assessment (promised by Sep 2022) and the delayed green belt review for Council's consideration*, in order that chronic traffic congestion can be addressed. It is requested that Officers prepare a brief for such a study together with an estimate of the cost and present the brief to the Cabinet for their consideration as soon as possible.'

Councillor Hunter indicated, as the proposer of the original Motion, that he was happy to accept this amendment. Councillor H. D. N. Rone-Clarke subsequently seconded the amended Motion.

On being put to the vote the Motion was lost.

The meeting closed at 9.47 p.m.

Chairman