

**BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**MEETING OF THE COUNCIL**

**17TH OCTOBER 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, S. P. Douglas, C.A. Hotham, R. J. Hunter, R. E. Jenkins, H. J. Jones, A. D. Kent, J. E. King, A. D. Kriss, K.J. May, S. A. Robinson, H. D. N. Rone-Clarke, M. A. Sherrey, P.L. Thomas, M. Thompson, J. Till, K. J. Van Der Plank, S. A. Webb and P. J. Whittaker

Officers: Mrs. S. Hanley, Mr P. Carpenter, Mrs. C. Felton, Mr. M. Dunphy and Mrs. J. Bayley-Hill

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**TRIBUTES TO HER ROYAL MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II, INCLUDING OBSERVING A PERIOD OF SILENCE IN HER MEMORY**

The Chairman opened the meeting by leading Members in observing two minutes' silence as a mark of respect following the death of Her Royal Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.

The Chairman subsequently paid tribute on behalf of the Council by commenting that the sudden death of Her Royal Majesty Queen Elizabeth II had been a great loss to the country and to the Commonwealth. Queen Elizabeth II had lived a life of extraordinary service, driven by duty and sustained by her faith. It had been the Chairman's civic duty to send sincere condolences to the Royal Family on behalf of Bromsgrove District Council and the residents of Bromsgrove District. The Chairman commented that many people had mourned Queen Elizabeth II's death and he expressed the hope that she would rest in peace.

Following the Chairman's comments, Members paid tribute to Her Royal Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, noting that she had served as monarch for 70 years and was the only Head of State that many citizens had ever known. Members commented that Queen Elizabeth II had set a positive example, through her values of openness, tolerance, listening to others and working together. The discussions concluded with Members thanking Queen Elizabeth II for her service.

45\22

**TO RECEIVE APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors G. Denaro, A. English, M. Glass, S. Hession, L. Mallett, P. McDonald, M. Middleton and C. Spencer.

46\22

**DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor A. Kent declared a pecuniary interest in Minute Item No. 57/22 – Motions on Notice – due to his role as the lead Portfolio Holder at Worcestershire County Council with responsibility for the Ryland Centre, which was the subject of one of the Motions. As he had left the meeting by the time that Members considered the item, he took no part in the debate nor vote thereon.

47\22

**TO CONFIRM THE ACCURACY OF THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COUNCIL HELD ON 20TH JULY 2022**

The minutes of the meeting of Council held on 20<sup>th</sup> July 2022 were submitted.

Reference was made to Minute Item No.40/22 – Recommendations from the Cabinet – in which Members’ debate in respect of the Memorandum of Understanding with Redditch Borough Council in relation to a duty to co-operate had been recorded. Members questioned whether the Memorandum of Understanding would be implemented as discussed at that Council meeting, given that work on the Council’s Local Plan had been postponed. Council was advised that, as this did not relate to an issue with the accuracy of the minutes and matters arising were not discussed when considering the minutes, this issue could not be debated at this time and would need to be considered outside the meeting.

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting of Council held on 20<sup>th</sup> July 2022 be approved as a true and correct record.

48\22

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

There were no announcements from the Chairman or from the Deputy Chief Executive, who attended the meeting on behalf of the Head of Paid Service, on this occasion.

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**TO RECEIVE ANY ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM THE LEADER**

The Leader advised that Councillors M. Glass and J. Till were being appointed as named substitutes for the Conservative group on the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee.

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

The Chairman confirmed that no comments, questions or petitions had been received for consideration at the Council meeting on this occasion.

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**URGENT DECISIONS**

Members were informed that there had been one urgent decision taken since the previous meeting of Council on the subject of appointments to Hunnington Parish Council.

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**TO RECEIVE AND CONSIDER A REPORT FROM THE PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR FINANCE AND GOVERNANCE**

In the absence of the Portfolio Holder, the Leader presented the annual report for the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Governance.

Council was advised that the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Governance was the lead Cabinet Member for Finance, Customer Services, Business Transformation and Organisational Development, Democratic, Electoral and Legal Services.

The annual report was extremely detailed. The following key points were highlighted for Members' consideration:

- The financial issues that had led to the non-delivery of the 2020/21 accounts and Government returns. During 2021/22, the Council had lost a significant number of staff in the Finance Department and this, alongside development of the Tech1 finance system, had led to a deterioration in the financial reporting of the Council's position. There had been a recovery process in place since March 2022 and, aligned to this, there had been two phases of recruitment for the team which had resulted in a reconstituted finance team with a wider range of skills than had previously been the case. The Cabinet and Audit, Standards and Governance Committee had both been updated on the situation and had been informed that, although a lot of the short-term deficiencies had been rectified and solutions were being embedded, there was still a significant issue with the 2020/21 accounts having not yet been completed. The main problem remained with the Tech1 finance system and the cash receipting solution, which was holding up the completion of the accounts, although a solution was expected imminently.
- Revenue collection rates had returned to a level similar to that in place prior to the Covid-19 pandemic.
- In total £8 million of Covid-19 grants had been distributed to 1,895 recipients in the District.
- There were 27,460 households who had received payments under the Energy Rebate Scheme.
- The Council's ICT team had used robotics to extract 350,000 invoices and purchase orders from the Council's old finance system and to correct 40,000 records in the Uniform system.
- The Human Resources team had developed an Agile Working Policy and supported its implementation. The team had also conducted a full staff survey and implemented a corporate training

programme, including delivery of training in HR and health and safety.

- A new Equalities Strategy 2022 – 2026 had been developed for the Council, which had set the direction for equalities work over the following four year period. In total, 12 local organisations had received financial support under the Bromsgrove Equality Small Grants scheme to support community activities.
- There had been increased participation in the Bromsgrove Community Panel's activities, comprising a list of Bromsgrove District residents who had agreed to participate in Council engagement and consultations. In 2021, an additional 159 people had joined the panel, meaning that there were 366 members in total by the date of the meeting.
- The MS Power BI dashboard was in the process of being introduced, which would provide a visual platform with a primary focus on business intelligence. The content of the dashboard would complement the Council's existing measures dashboard, the content of which was reported to the Cabinet on a quarterly basis.
- An updated Project Management Framework had been delivered and was providing training for 100 managers and team leaders in project planning and establishing a project monitoring process for the Corporate Management Team (CMT) to provide oversight of corporate projects.
- Over the preceding 18 months, the Democratic Services team had facilitated the Council's decision-making process throughout a period of significant change and disruption caused by the Covid-19 pandemic.

There remained a number of key objectives over the following 12 months, in addition to addressing the financial challenges that had been outlined to Members, which included:

- Developing a Cyber Security Strategy.
- Assessing ways to reduce the carbon footprint of the server room in line with the Council's Carbon Reduction Strategy.
- Introducing a customer portal onto the website to support self-service of Council functions, such as requests about Environmental Services tasks.
- Planning and conducting a new Community Panel Survey.
- Refreshing the Council's Performance Strategy.
- Preparing for the Member induction process for Councillors due to be elected in May 2023.

Members subsequently discussed the report in detail and in doing so raised questions on the following points:

- The difficulties that had been experienced within the Financial Services team and the proportion of posts that had been filled through the recruitment process by the date of the meeting. Members were informed that all posts, apart from four vacant

positions, had been filled in the Financial Services team by the date of the meeting. Council was advised that recruitment to Financial Services within local government was challenging for the whole sector, not just Bromsgrove District Council.

- The updates that had been provided on financial recovery at the Cabinet and Audit, Standards and Governance Committee and the extent to which this represented a positive situation, due to the challenges that had been encountered.
- The extent to which the problems with the Council's new finance system had been resolved and whether the 2020/21 accounts were on track to be completed by the end of the 2022 calendar year. The Interim Section 151 Officer clarified that the Council was working closely with the software provider and it was anticipated that the problems with the cash receipting part of the system would be resolved soon, meaning that the accounts could subsequently be completed.
- The penalties that could be applied to the Council as a result of non-delivery of the 2020/21 accounts. The Leader explained that the Council would receive a warning but there would be no fines imposed by the Government.
- The outcomes that had been achieved during the year as a result of service delivery. The Leader suggested that it would take some time for the outcomes to be clear.
- The reasons why the Council did not already have a Cyber Security Policy and a Workforce Strategy in place. Council was informed that many local authorities did not have Cyber Security Policies in place and some authorities that did have such policies had been subject to cyber attacks. The Council continued to work hard to address cyber security.
- The reference in the report to a decrease in payments in person since the Covid-19 pandemic, the support that was being provided to customers who would previously have paid for services using that payment method and the number of residents who continued to make payments in person. The Leader advised that Officers would be asked to provide this data for Members' consideration after the meeting.
- The problems that had been experienced with the introduction of the new finance system and the extent to which Members had been provided with adequate information prior to the introduction of the scheme about the challenges this would entail.
- The problems with the cash receipting part of the new finance system and the fact that Bromsgrove District Council and Redditch Borough Council were the first authorities to be using this system in the country. The Leader acknowledged that, with the benefit of hindsight, it would have been preferable not to be the first authority to trial a new part of the system but lessons had been learned from this experience.
- The former staff who had left the Council's employment and the need for exit interviews to be held with them in order to ascertain the reasons for their departure so that the Council could learn

lessons for the future. Council was advised that many staff had left for career progression reasons, although a number of people had also assessed their work during the Covid-19 pandemic and decided to make changes in their lives. There were also significant challenges nationally in terms of recruiting experienced, qualified staff to work in Financial Services, including for external auditors.

- The 25 per cent of walk-in general queries from customers about the location of services within Parkside and the extent to which the signage in the building was adequate.
- The financial challenges facing the Council like other local authorities, and the extent to which Members should be giving consideration at this point to introducing a unitary authority in either the north of the county or for the whole of Worcestershire. The Leader commented that it was not the right time to review the potential to introduce a unitary authority. However, the Leader suggested that there might be more opportunities to extend shared service arrangements to involve other Councils alongside Bromsgrove District and Redditch Borough Councils, and this could lead to significant savings for both the Council and partner authorities.
- The work that had been undertaken to provide the Council Tax Energy Rebate and the extent to which all eligible households had received the support they were entitled to. Members were advised that all eligible customers had received their rebates.
- The need for transparency in relation to the Council's finances and the process for the introduction of new IT systems.
- The updates that had been provided to the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee and the Cabinet and the extent to which they had challenged and received assurances in relation to the information provided in respect of the new finance system. Members were advised that both Committees had received detailed reports on the subject of the Council's financial recovery, financial and performance monitoring data and risk management. This had included the provision of information about the problems that had been experienced with the new finance system and the action that was being taken to address these problems.
- The public consultation that had been undertaken with the Bromsgrove Community Survey Panel, which had informed policy development, and the potential for the outcomes of this survey to be reported to Council.

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### **OUTSIDE BODIES**

Council debated and agreed appointments to the Herefordshire and Worcestershire Integrated Care Partnership Assembly and the Worcestershire Health and Wellbeing Board.

During consideration of this item, questions were raised about the reasons for the timing of the appointments as well as the names of the Councillors who had previously been appointed to these outside bodies. The Leader clarified that the Herefordshire and Worcestershire

Integrated Care Partnership Assembly was a new group and the Council had been invited to make an appointment to the Assembly. In respect of the Worcestershire Health and Wellbeing Board, previously the District Councils in north Worcestershire had been required to appoint one Councillor to represent the north of the county, which had mirrored arrangements for the south of the county. However, a decision had recently been taken to invite all the District Councils in Worcestershire to appoint a lead Member and named substitute to serve on the Board on behalf of their Councils.

The nominations were proposed by Councillor K. May and seconded by Councillor M. Thompson.

**RESOLVED** that

- 1) Councillor S. Webb be appointed as the Council's representative on the Herefordshire and Worcestershire Integrated Care Partnership Assembly;
- 2) Councillor S. Webb be appointed as the Council's lead representative on the Worcestershire Health and Wellbeing Board; and
- 3) Councillor M. Sherrey be appointed as the Council's named substitute on the Worcestershire Health and Wellbeing Board.

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**RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE CABINET**

The Chairman explained that recommendations had been made at meetings of Cabinet held on 27<sup>th</sup> July and 12<sup>th</sup> October 2022 respectively.

UK Shared Prosperity Fund

The Leader presented the recommendation that had been made at the meeting of Cabinet held on 27<sup>th</sup> July 2022 on the subject of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. Members were advised that Bromsgrove had been allocated £2.8 million under the scheme. The funding would be allocated to projects and the Council had agreed criteria against which bids for funding would be assessed. The criteria had been submitted for the Government's consideration in August 2022. Local organisations would be encouraged to submit bids, which would be assessed by the Bromsgrove Partnership.

The recommendation was proposed by Councillor K. May and seconded by Councillor M. Thompson.

During consideration of this item, an amendment was proposed by Councillor C. Hotham.

The amendment read as follows:

*“This fund should be allocated by North Worcestershire Economic Development and Regeneration (NWEDR) after consultation with a politically balanced UK Shared Prosperity Fund Board, who will determine how this funding should be allocated.”*

In proposing the amendment, Councillor Hotham expressed concerns about the process for determining whether to approve bids to fund projects under the scheme and he questioned the transparency of the process. Councillor Hotham commented that the Bromsgrove Partnership, which had been allocated this responsibility, had one elected Member representative: the Leader. The suggestion was made that there needed to be a greater level of elected Member oversight, particularly given the amount of money involved.

Consideration was given to this proposed amendment and as part of this process, advice was provided by the Monitoring Officer. Members were informed that the proposed amendment actually related to matters that had already been resolved by Cabinet. The role of the Council meeting was to consider whether to amend the authority’s Medium Term Financial Plan to incorporate the UK Shared Prosperity funding allocation. The Government’s intention for the UK Shared Prosperity Fund had been for there to be community involvement in the process. The governance arrangements required the Council’s Section 151 Officer to sign off any grants. For these reasons, the amendment was not accepted for debate.

Questions were subsequently raised about the membership of the Bromsgrove Partnership and the extent to which this information was available in the public domain. Members also commented on the need for members of the partnership to be transparent in respect of declaring interests, given the amount of money that would be distributed under the scheme. The Leader explained that the Bromsgrove Partnership Manager maintained a list of partner organisations that were represented on the Bromsgrove Partnership. Members of the partnership were required to declare interests at every meeting they attended and any declarations were recorded in the minutes of those meetings. The Bromsgrove Partnership was involved in engagement and enablement and focused on the needs of the local community. Council was advised that most Councils in the country in receipt of funding under the UK Shared Prosperity Fund scheme had adopted a similar approach, whereby either the local partnership or District Collaborative was taking a lead on determining funding allocation.

Consideration was given to the process that would be followed to advertise the funding allocated through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. Members questioned whether a list of approved projects could be reported for the consideration of Council in due course. The Leader suggested that this might be a more suitable topic for discussion at a future meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board.



Members commented on the submission that had been made by the Council to the Government in August 2022, on the subject of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and questions were raised about whether the Council had received a response. The Leader confirmed that the Council had not yet received a response from the Government. However, the authority had been advised to proceed with the plans that were in place.

Following further questioning, the Leader read out an email that had been sent to all elected Members on 4<sup>th</sup> October 2022 updating Councillors on the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. This email had the following wording:

*“Dear Councillor*

*I am emailing you as I want to update you on the progress of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and the next steps that we plan to take. As you are aware, Bromsgrove district has been allocated £2,805,712 from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund covering the 3 years from 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2025. To unlock this funding, we were tasked with preparing an Investment Plan detailing the challenges and opportunities in the district and where we would spend the fund to address these. The Investment Plan was approved by the Cabinet in July and submitted to the Government for approval on 1 August 2022. The Government has stated that they will be issuing approvals from October onwards – we await a decision on our Investment Plan.*

*One of the first steps taken to prepare the Investment Plan was to put out a call for projects. The purpose of this was to identify the local challenges and opportunities at a more granular level than statistics can provide and also to understand what capacity there was within the community to deliver projects. However, the timescales were incredibly tight and several organisations have indicated that they were unable to engage in the process due to this. Consequently, whilst we have sufficient projects to spend all of the funding, the range of projects is not very balanced and I feel that a second opportunity to submit projects should be extended to our partners and stakeholders.*

*The Autumn call for projects will be launched this week with a deadline for submissions by 9:00am Monday 14 November 2022. This will give organisations a minimum 5 weeks to submit a project. Officers will be holding a webinar on 18 October, to provide further guidance to those wishing to submit a project and to answer questions. Organisations that submitted projects previously, do not need to re-submit. We will be sending the submission pack to c200 organisations, and promoting the opportunity widely, but I would encourage you to share this information with any groups that you think may have a suitable project. We hope to get a wide range of projects covering as much of the district as possible.*

*Following the submission deadline, all projects submitted in both calls will be assessed for strategic fit, deliverability and value for money.*

*Bromsgrove Partnership, acting as the Local Partnership Board for the UK SPF, will oversee this process. We hope to be in a position to issue funding agreements by the end of the year, ready to start delivery in January 2023. However, this is dependent upon receiving approval for the Investment Plan from Government as we will be unable to contract with external organisations until this is in place. This will put particular pressure on those organisations looking to deliver projects in Year 1, i.e. before 31/3/23. The allocation is split over the 3 years with set expenditure levels for each year. Failure to spend each year's allocation could result in forfeiting the funding or delaying receipt of the following year's funding. As a result, Year 1 projects will be assessed with extra emphasis on deliverability. I would advise any organisations with limited capacity to deliver to consider projects for funding in years 2 or 3 only.*

*Thank you for your support with this programme. Our aim is to deliver a range of impactful projects that will meet the strategic objective of the fund – building pride in place and increasing life chances.*

*If you would like any further information about the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, please contact Georgina Harris at [georgina.harris@nwedr.org.uk](mailto:georgina.harris@nwedr.org.uk)".*

Following further discussion, on being put to the vote the recommendation from the Cabinet on the subject of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund was carried.

**RESOLVED** that the Medium Term Financial Strategy is amended to include the UK Shared Prosperity Fund Allocation when next reviewed.

#### Budget Framework Finance and Performance Quarter 1 Monitoring Report

The Leader presented a recommendation from Cabinet arising from the Budget Framework Finance and Performance Quarter 1 Monitoring Report. This recommendation proposed the need to increase the Council's operational bank limit to £2 million.

During consideration of this item, reference was made to the performance data that had been provided in the report in respect of housing growth. Members commented that this information appeared to indicate that 118 new houses had been built during the period but that none of these properties had constituted affordable housing. In this context, Members requested an update on progress with the development of affordable homes during the year. The Leader explained that an update would be requested in respect of this matter from the Head of Planning, Regeneration and Leisure Services.

Reference was also made to the information provided in the report in respect of the financial performance of the Council, particularly the £477,890 of cross cutting savings and efficiency targets recorded for the 2022/23 financial year. Questions were raised about the extent to which savings from vacant posts would be taken into account when

determining whether the Council was meeting this target. The Leader explained that for the first quarter savings from vacant posts had been taken into account where it had been identified that those posts were no longer necessary. Further information would be available on this subject in the Quarter 2 monitoring report.

Consideration was given to the data that had been provided in respect of the length of time that customers waited to get through by phone to the Council and were then subsequently on the phone to staff for revenue calls. Concerns were raised that the length of time appeared to be increasing. However, Members were advised that this data related to the period in which the Council had been managing calls relating to the Energy Payment Scheme.

The recommendation was proposed by Councillor K. May and seconded by Councillor M. Thompson.

**RESOLVED** that the Operational Bank Account limit is raised to £2m.

55\22

**TO NOTE THE MINUTES OF THE MEETINGS OF THE CABINET HELD ON 27TH JULY AND 12TH OCTOBER 2022**

Reference was made to the Cabinet's debate in respect of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and questions were asked about the potential risk that the funding in this scheme might be withdrawn or reduced, following changes at the national Government level since the scheme was introduced. The Leader explained that no information had been received suggesting that this funding would be removed.

The minutes of the Cabinet meetings held on 27<sup>th</sup> July and 12<sup>th</sup> October 2022 were noted.

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**QUESTIONS ON NOTICE**

The Chairman explained that nine Questions on Notice had been received in advance of the meeting. Due to recent changes to Council meeting arrangements, group leaders and the Chairman had agreed that the time dedicated to consideration of Questions on Notice at this meeting should be extended from the usual time of 15 minutes to 30 minutes.

**Question submitted by Councillor H. Rone-Clarke**

"Many residents will already be aware that our MP holds an annual jobs fair in Bromsgrove. However, there are many young people seeking part-time employment in our town, in order to support themselves and their families. For these young people, it can be difficult to find part time roles that suit their school or college timetable.

In order to overcome this difficulty, will the leader support either a jobs fair tailored more towards younger people, or perhaps consider devoting

a section of BDC's website/social media to advertising part time jobs that are better suited to this section of the population?"

The Leader responded by commenting that the Jobs Fair held by the local MP was always welcomed and important for those seeking employment opportunities. The last successful jobs fair took place in April 2022, and if the next was to be held in 2023, the Council would fully support the event, alongside the many businesses and agencies who could showcase and provide the opportunity and offer for people in the community, including young people, who were seeking both full time and part time employment.

Having been in contact with the MP's office, the Leader explained that they had confirmed they always welcomed suggestions for the job fair and were aware of this matter being raised as a question at the Council meeting.

With regards to the use of the Council's website and social media, whilst the authority advertised Council jobs, through West Midlands Employers, it would be unable to act as a 'jobs hub' as it would be difficult to both source 'suitable jobs' and thereafter promote links to individual employers or agencies in equitable terms without due regard to their suitability.

However, the Council's website and social media would be used to fully promote the jobs fair in future, in line with practice in previous years.

**Question submitted by Councillor R. Hunter**

"Have all eligible households in Bromsgrove now received their April council tax rebate?"

The Leader explained that the Government's Council Tax Energy Rebate scheme provided a £150 payment to households that, on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2022, occupied properties in Council Tax valuation bands A to D or valuation band E if the Council taxpayer was eligible for the Council Tax reduction for disabilities. If a home was unoccupied, classed as a second home, or the owner was liable for Council Tax but was not the occupier – for example houses in multiple occupation – then the property was not eligible for the payment.

The Council had identified 27,458 eligible households and had written to, emailed, or sent SMS messages to the households advising how to claim the payment. In total, 25,409 households had received a direct payment into their nominated bank account, a further 2,049 households did not submit a claim for the rebate and the payment was credited to their Council Tax account. This Council Tax account credit would reduce future instalments of Council Tax. The Leader concluded the response to this question by confirming that the Council had paid the £150 to everyone identified.

**Question submitted by Councillor J. King**

“Could you confirm when the Churchfields car park will be reopening please and what measures you will be putting in place to keep users and the wider community safe from criminal and antisocial behaviour?”

The Leader informed Members that Officers were reviewing the operation and safety of the Churchfields car park. Following the completion of the 2040 report, which would include a strategic view of parking in general within the town, a subsequent report would be produced for Cabinet on the future of the multistorey car park as soon as possible.

**Question submitted by Councillor S. Robinson**

“Could you explain the cause of the recent disruption to household bin collection services please and what measures you have put in place to address this?”

The Portfolio Holder for Environmental Services and Community Safety responded by commenting that the Waste Collection Service relied on a fleet of vehicles to function, and although these received regular maintenance, they did experience damage and breakdowns that impacted on the available fleet as a routine part of operating the service, and there were appropriate resources available to support this most of the time.

Unfortunately, the Council had recently experienced a series of mechanical issues in close succession that resulted in the authority not having enough functioning vehicles to carry out the service as efficiently as normal. These were:

- 1) The vehicle being serviced and submitted for an MOT.
- 2) Suspension components being worn and replaced with new parts.
- 3) The vehicle having an accident on a narrow rural road and slipping into a ditch resulting in recovery and repairs.
- 4) Replacement Brake Discs and Pads – There was a delay on receiving replacement parts.
- 5) Damage to the lifting mechanism due to an accident whilst reversing. Replacement parts were required from Germany.
- 6) Damage to the wing mirror and passenger side door due to an accident on a rural lane with a tree branch.
- 7) Hydraulic ram failure in a narrow access vehicle, resulting in staff being unable to eject the load and requiring manual extraction prior to repair.
- 8) A split in the waste hopper requiring welding.
- 9) ABS brake system faults, which needed to be diagnosed and repaired.
- 10) An investigation into noises from the steering system.
- 11) Wrong replacement parts being supplied during the engine service, resulting in delays.

12) A fault with the health and safety camera system.

The service required 15 refuse vehicles every day, and during the disrupted period, there had been several days where the authority was between two and three vehicles short. Each vehicle serviced between 900 and 1,300 properties depending on how many rural and urban properties were in an area.

Although some of this work was added to the workload of the vehicles that were functioning, and staffing was secured to support this, there were limits on how much extra work could be accommodated without causing further issues. Where this happened, work was planned in alongside other scheduled work for the following day as much as possible to minimise the delay.

To offset this, the team arranged for some staff to work overtime to minimise the volume of work being missed on scheduled days, and in combination with the workshop returning vehicles to operation, the disruption was largely limited to a single week. Details of these issues were publicised on social media and the Council's website to inform residents of the problems.

The workshop would continue to carry out maintenance as efficiently as possible to ensure the fleet was available to service the needs of residents, and the Waste Collection team would work to ensure that resources continued to be managed to minimise disruption to services, as they had done previously throughout the last few years whilst battling the impact of Covid on staffing levels.

**Question submitted by Councillor S. Baxter**

“Please could the cabinet member for planning give an estimate of the likely additional costs associated with the 11<sup>th</sup> hour U-turn to abandon the current strategic plan review until after the next set of district council elections?”

The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Regulatory Services advised that the plan had not been abandoned. Work was still progressing on further establishing key infrastructure provision. There were no costs in delaying the plan. All the work that had been done to date was still relevant to the ongoing review work.

**Question submitted by Councillor S. Douglas**

“BDC was awarded £14.5 levelling up funding in November 2021. According to ONS statistics since November 2021 construction cost inflation is between 11.6% and 17% to the end of June 2022. This represents minimal additional costs of £1.7m, the higher end being £2.47m of cost pressure. Please could the Cabinet member for finance assure Council that sufficient contingency has been built into the bid budget to cover this?”

The Leader responded by commenting that the scheme had a total cost of £16.1 million (£14.5 million of which was grant funded and £1.6 million Council funded). For the two levelling up schemes, there was 10% contingency (a combined £1.58 million) and 4.5% inflation (a combined £725,000) to give an overall total of £2.31 million, which was to the higher end of the range suggested in the question.

Given the economic conditions, the Council would continue to review the situation, but it was felt that there were adequate contingency plans included in the project.

**Question submitted by Councillor S. Colella**

“This Council asks for reassurance that the transport assessment work which has been lacking to date will be completed to the satisfaction of BDC for the Issues and Options consultation along with a stated time plan that can be adhered to?”

The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Regulatory Services responded by explaining that additional transport assessment work was being progressed with Worcestershire County Council. This work would support the preferred option of the District Plan Review. In due course, a new timetable for the plan production would be published which would fully take into account the time it would take to complete the additional transport assessment work.

**Question submitted by Councillor C. Hotham**

“It appears that BDC raised £150920 from parking fines in the 2021/22 year. Out of this total some £10791 was raised in Hagley/Client, £3431 from Barnt Green and £1771 from Aston Fields. Does the cabinet member for Finance agree with me that it would only be fair and just if this money was directly reinvested in the communities where it is generated?”

The Leader commented in response that the Council did not have an investment policy for parking fines but did have a policy for capital receipts where they were used for the benefit of overall Council priorities. In the absence of a policy, parking fines needed to be treated like capital receipts and pooled for the prioritised benefit of the Council overall. Parking and parking surpluses needed to be linked to prioritised parking and transportation schemes across the Council.

**Question submitted by Councillor A. English**

Councillor Colella asked the following question on behalf of Councillor English:

“Please could the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Regulatory Services explain how it is acceptable for Officers to instigate a review of the

procedures and effectiveness of the working of the District Planning Committee without reference to said committee and whether a similar review of the whole of the Planning Department has been arranged?"

The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Regulatory Services responded by advising Members that part of the role of officers was to always look at how things could be improved and to take advantage of any external support to achieve this. One of the examples of external support was the Planning Advisory Service (PAS), which offered to undertake an independent review of the procedures and the effectiveness of Bromsgrove District Council's Planning Committee. PAS was part of the Local Government Association (LGA) and provided high quality help, advice, support and training on planning and service delivery to Councils, primarily in England. Its work followed a 'sector led' improvement approach, whereby local authorities helped each other to continuously improve. The benefit of testing this assertion through independent scrutiny was invaluable.

All Members of Bromsgrove Planning Committee were emailed on 19th August 2022 setting out the purpose of the review. The review was focused on the operation of the Planning Committee. It was not a review of the operation of the Council's Planning Department. The review would include an assessment of the effectiveness of the whole Committee process and recommendations for improvement based upon best practice from around the country. The review would also include an element of observing Planning Committee meetings to understand the appropriate size of the Planning Committee, the public speaking process, and the recording of decisions. The review would take into account the content of reports, the length of the agenda and how Officers presented and managed during Committee meetings.

The PAS representative interviewed a selection of Committee Members and Officers involved in the Planning Committee process on 6th September 2022, together with observing the subsequent Planning Committee meeting held on that date. Other stakeholders who regularly attended the Committee (planning agents and Parish Council representatives) had also been contacted (or would be contacted) and interviewed. A further Planning Committee meeting would be observed by the PAS representative.

Any findings and/or recommendations arising from the review would be shared with the District Council prior to being included in a report. The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Regulatory Services commented that he fully supported this approach.

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### **MOTIONS ON NOTICE**

The Chairman explained that four Motions on Notice had been received for consideration at this meeting. For the first of these, submitted by Councillor R. Hunter, the wording of the Motion had been amended after the main agenda had been published and this had therefore been reissued in a supplementary pack. As agreed by group leaders prior to the meeting, following changes to Council meetings, an extended time of



one and a half hours had been allocated to the consideration of Motions on Notice at the meeting.

### **The Local Plan**

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

“This council believes that the local plan preferred options paper should have been published this autumn as previously planned and should be published as soon practicably possible with or without further infrastructure assessment to avoid any further unnecessary delays to the completion of our next local plan.”

The Motion was proposed by Councillor Hunter and seconded by Councillor S. Robinson.

In proposing the Motion, Councillor Hunter commented that the Motion focused on the decision that had been taken to delay publication of the preferred options paper for the Council, which would have identified potential sites for development. It was suggested that this delay would cause anxiety for many residents, due to uncertainty about whether particular land might be identified as suitable for development. In addition, Members were asked to note that the deferral would delay the provision of affordable housing in the District. Members were asked to note that the original wording of the Motion had been amended at the suggestion of Officers.

Reference was made to the Strategic Transport Assessment for the District, which had been postponed, however, Councillor Hunter suggested that the delay of this document did not justify deferring the preferred options paper. Other Councils in Worcestershire were proceeding with their work on their Local Plans and Councillor Hunter suggested that it would be more transparent and appropriate to proceed at a similar pace in Bromsgrove.

In seconding the Motion, Councillor Robinson stated that, whilst Members might have different views about the reasons for the deferral, it had been unfortunate that there had been limited notice provided to Councillors of the delay. Members had been working to a particular deadline and Councillor Robinson suggested that any concerns about meeting this deadline should have been raised at an earlier stage in the process with Members. Should the preferred options plan be deferred, it was suggested that clarification would need to be provided as soon as possible about the new deadline.

The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Regulatory Services responded to the Motion by explaining that, as advised and explained at a meeting of the Strategic Planning Steering Group, the plan had been delayed for further infrastructure work to be undertaken. The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Regulatory Services expressed the view that providing

residents and businesses with more certainty over the infrastructure required to support the plan was key, which was why a decision had been taken to delay the plan. A new timetable would be published in due course which would set out when the Council would consult on its new plan. The future of the District and residents needed to be considered and the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Regulatory Services expressed the view that it would be reckless to continue without this infrastructure work in place.

During consideration of this Motion, Councillor S. Colella proposed an amendment to the wording. The amended wording was as follows:

“This council believes that the local plan preferred options paper should have been published this autumn as previously planned and should be published as soon practicably possible with a further infrastructure assessment to avoid any further unnecessary delays to the completion of our next local plan.”

In proposing this amendment, Councillor Colella expressed concerns about the support that had been received from Worcestershire County Council in relation to the infrastructure required for large developments at Whitford Road and Perryfields as well as in relation to Active Travel. Councillor Colella suggested that the Council required reassurance that Worcestershire County Council would undertake infrastructure assessments in relation to the Bromsgrove Local Plan and would offer support to Bromsgrove District Council where needed. In this context, Councillor Colella suggested that an infrastructure assessment was needed for the local plan preferred options paper.

Consideration was given to the amendment proposed by Councillor Colella and the Monitoring Officer was called upon to provide advice. In responding to the proposed amendment, the Monitoring Officer highlighted that the amendment, and the rationale provided for the amendment, could be regarded as criticisms of the competence of Worcestershire County Council. This would be unprofessional wording for a Motion. Therefore, for this reason, the amendment was rejected.

The infrastructure assessments needed, particularly in relation to larger housing developments, were subsequently debated. Members noted that the strategic transport assessment for Bromsgrove District had been discussed at a number of Council meetings with reference also having been made in the past to the potential to introduce a Western Bypass and the need for a feasibility study in respect of this. Concerns were raised that the delays in relation to the strategic transport assessment would mean that work would have already commenced on housing development in locations where a Western Bypass could have been situated. Reference was also made to the availability of bus services and support for walking and cycling in the county and Members questioned whether additional support in relation to this would be made available to the District moving forward.

Clarification was provided that the decision had been taken to defer the local preferred options to allow for a range of infrastructure issues, not just the strategic planning assessment, to be investigated further. This included giving consideration to the provision of schools in larger housing developments as well as to the outcomes of the ongoing review of Active Travel in the county. The deferral would provide extra time for the Council to consider data and other evidence that would help to inform the content of the plan moving forward.

The work that had already been undertaken by the Council's Strategic Planning team was subsequently debated. Members noted that Officers had already assessed a number of sites and questions were raised about the extent to which Officers were likely to change their assessments as a result of further information being provided about the infrastructure.

The need for transparency in the strategic planning process was also discussed. Members commented on the value of providing clarification as soon as possible on the numbers of houses that would be built in each ward during the period of the next Local Plan. This information would enable Members to assess the potential impact on their communities. However, it was also noted that, rather than raising expectations unnecessarily based on incomplete information, the deferral of the preferred options plan would ensure that the Council had time to gather more detail and to ensure that future proposals had an evidence basis.

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

Members voting FOR the Motion:

Councillors S. Douglas, C. Hotham, R. Hunter, J. King, S. Robinson, H. Rone-Clarke and K. Van Der Plank (7).

Members voting AGAINST the Motion:

Councillors A. Beaumont, R. Deeming, H. Jones, A. Kriss, R. Laight, K. May, M. Sherrey, P. Thomas, M. Thompson, J. Till, S. Webb and P. Whittaker (12).

Members ABSTAINING in the vote on the Motion:

Councillor S. Colella (1).

The vote on the Motion was therefore lost.

**The Ryland Centre**

Council considered the following Motion on Notice that was submitted by Councillor S. Robinson:

“Cabinet is asked to work with Worcestershire County Council, which owns the Ryland Centre, to ensure that, wherever possible, services continue at the centre.”

The Motion was proposed by Councillor Robinson and seconded by Councillor Hunter.

In proposing the Motion, Councillor Robinson commented that the Ryland Centre was a unique and valued local leisure centre. Residents could access a sports hall in the Ryland Centre, which was a facility that was not available at other leisure centres in the town. There were good sports facilities available for residents to access in the Ryland Centre and it needed support to ensure that this could continue to be offered to Bromsgrove residents moving forward.

In seconding the Motion, Councillor Hunter noted that the Ryland Centre provided a great facility for the use of local residents.

During consideration of this Motion, Councillor M. Thompson proposed an amendment to the wording of the Motion. This amended wording was as follows:

“Cabinet is asked to work with Worcestershire County Council, which owns the Ryland Centre, to ensure that, wherever possible, *with no financial burden to Bromsgrove District Council*, services continue at the centre.”

The amendment was proposed by Councillor Thompson and seconded by Councillor K. May.

In proposing the amendment, Councillor Thompson acknowledged that the Ryland Centre was a valued leisure facility. However, Members were asked to note that the Ryland Centre was owned by Worcestershire County Council, not Bromsgrove District Council. At a challenging time for local government finances, there was a need to ensure that Council budgets were utilised appropriately. In this context, any support that the Council provided to the Ryland Centre needed to be supplied without having budget implications for the authority.

In seconding the amendment, Councillor May commented that Members needed to be mindful of the difficult financial situation of the Council. Members were also asked to note that the Council had submitted a bid in the 2010s to Worcestershire County Council to run the Ryland Centre and this had been rejected in favour of a different supplier.

In considering the amendment, Members commented that the Motion, as originally worded, did provide flexibility over the type of support that Bromsgrove District Council could provide in relation to the Ryland Centre. It was further noted that reference to “wherever possible” could be interpreted as clarifying that Bromsgrove District Council could only

provide so much support within existing resources. However, concerns were also raised about the financial implications of the Council's existing responsibilities and Members commented on the need for the authority to manage public finances prudently. Therefore, it was suggested that the Council needed to be careful and to consider the risks to the authority when offering support to the Ryland Centre.

On being put to the vote, the Motion was carried in the amended form.

**RESOLVED** that

Cabinet is asked to work with Worcestershire County Council, which owns the Ryland Centre, to ensure that, wherever possible, with no financial burden to Bromsgrove District Council, services continue at the centre.

**Street Theatre**

Council considered the following Motion on Notice that was submitted by Councillor S. Colella:

“That BDC reinstates the Street Theatres from Summer 23 and monies that would have been spent on this year's street Theatres are made available to the communities that have this year missed out so that ward councillors can use this money in their wards for community events.”

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

In proposing the Motion, Councillor Colella explained that there had been street theatre in Bromsgrove District, organised by the Council, for at least ten years. The street theatre had become popular with residents and the quality of events had improved over time. Whilst the street theatre had been cancelled in 2020, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, events had returned in 2021. However, Councillor Colella expressed concerns that street theatre had not taken place in 2022 and that he had learned about this from the Parish Clerk at Hagley Parish Council rather than from Council Officers. After raising questions about this, Councillor Colella had been advised that the budget for street theatre had been replaced with support from the Welcome Back Fund. Councillor Colella questioned when the decision had been taken to make changes to the budget and whether Members had been involved in making this decision. In addition, Councillor Colella raised concerns that there might be expectations that Parish Councils should take a lead on organising and funding street theatre activities, using funds from their precepts, despite the different roles of Parish and District Councils. Concerns were also raised that some arts and cultural activities had taken place in the Birdbox in Bromsgrove town centre and Councillor Colella suggested that this approach appeared to demonstrate a focus on the town at the expense of communities in outlying areas. Councillor Colella concluded by highlighting the content of the Centres Strategy and questioning

whether the focus of this strategy had been reduced without prior consultation.

In seconding the Motion, Councillor Hotham acknowledged that the Council was in a challenging financial position and only had finite resources. However, Members were asked to note that there would be funding in the budget for arts events and activities in 2023/24 and it was important to ensure that decisions about how this funding was used were made following consultation. It was also important to ensure that Members were kept informed about plans for the District in terms of use of this funding.

Members subsequently discussed the Motion in detail and in so doing noted that the Welcome Back Fund had consisted of two tranches of funding. However, Council was asked to note that this funding had not been cut. It was noted that the allocation of funding to services was determined by Members but how this funding was used was delegated to officers to decide following consultation with the Leader.

The Portfolio Holder for Leisure, Culture and Climate Change explained that in 2022 it had been agreed that the Council should use the budget for street theatres to deliver three key and unique events:

- 1) The Queen's Platinum Jubilee commemorating 70 years on the throne. This event involved the lighting of a beacon as part of the thousands lit across the UK to mark the start of the celebrations.
- 2) The Green Funday, an event to support the messaging and challenges around the climate emergency.
- 3) The Queen's Baton Relay event in Sanders Park to welcome the Queen's Baton as it moved across the Midlands before reaching its destination in Birmingham for the Commonwealth Games.

These events were programmed and delivered following consultation with the relevant lead Portfolio Holder and officers had had delegated authority to act in this way.

Members were asked to note that a recommendation within the emerging Leisure and Culture Strategy for Bromsgrove District was to develop programmes of support to increase skills and capacity amongst local organisations and communities and to ensure the successful delivery of new programmes of events and activities. This would allow local groups and communities to have more say and control of what happened where they lived. The Council would continue to assess the most appropriate ways to deliver events and activities moving forward and Members were asked to note that, just because a particular event had taken place in the past, this would not guarantee that it would continue to take place in the future if there was evidence to suggest that a different approach was needed to meet the needs of the local community.

Reference was made by Members to the need for the Council to prioritise use of funding in any given year and it was noted that in 2022 events related to Queen Elizabeth II's Platinum Jubilee, the Commonwealth Games and to tackling climate change had all been prioritised. However, it was also commented that there needed to be greater transparency in future in respect of determining which events and activities should be prioritised.

On being put to the vote the Motion was lost.

### **Cost of Living**

Council considered the following Motion on Notice that was submitted by Councillor H. Rone-Clarke:

"Council recognises that the current cost of living crisis is both an emergency and a matter of paramount concern for local residents.

Therefore, council resolves to:

1. Lobby the new Prime Minister for concrete action to be taken in order to support the public through this upcoming crisis
2. To ask the Overview and Scrutiny Board to consider use of the Parkside complex as a day centre during the Autumn/Winter period to support residents who cannot afford to heat their homes, providing a warm space to sit and even socialise."

The Motion was proposed by Councillor Rone-Clarke and seconded by Councillor May.

In proposing the Motion, Councillor Rone-Clarke explained that, following a conversation with the Leader, the wording of the Motion had been amended slightly from the version published in the agenda to ask the Overview and Scrutiny Board to investigate the potential to use the Parkside building to provide warmth and support to residents who could not afford to heat their homes.

In seconding the Motion, Councillor May commented that she was keen to lobby the Government over the provision of certainty in relation to the Revenue Support Grant for the Council. In addition, the Council would aim to liaise with Worcestershire County Council, which managed the Library in Parkside, over the potential for that facility to provide a safe and warm space for local residents. Reference was made to leaflets that had recently been circulated for Members' consideration on the cost of living and Members were advised that the Print Unit could produce copies of this leaflet on request for Members to distribute.

During consideration of this item, Members noted that the agenda for the following meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board had already been published and the cost of living was not an item on the agenda. However, there was a review that had been undertaken by the Fuel

Poverty Task Group, which was close to completion, which could potentially be asked to investigate this matter further and to report back to the Overview and Scrutiny Board in due course. As the Fuel Poverty Task Group had been due to report to the meeting of the Board in October, Members suggested that this item should be postponed at the Board meeting and that the outcomes of the group's discussions could be reported at a following meeting of the Board, which could include holding an extra meeting of the Board in November.

On being put to the vote the Motion was agreed.

**RESOLVED** that Council recognises that the current cost of living crisis is both an emergency and a matter of paramount concern for local residents.

Therefore, council resolves to:

- 1) Lobby the new Prime Minister for concrete action to be taken in order to support the public through this upcoming crisis.
- 2) Ask the Overview and Scrutiny Board to consider use of the Parkside complex as a day centre during the Autumn/Winter period to support residents who cannot afford to heat their homes, providing a warm space to sit and even socialise.

The meeting closed at 9.15 p.m.

Chairman