

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MEETING OF THE COUNCIL

6TH DECEMBER 2023, AT 6.00 P.M.

PRESENT: Councillors S. Ammar (Chairman), B. Kumar (Vice-Chairman), A. Bailes, S. J. Baxter, S. R. Colella, A. M. Dale, J. Elledge, S. M. Evans, D. J. A. Forsythe, E. M. S. Gray, C.A. Hotham, D. Hopkins, R. J. Hunter, H. J. Jones, R. Lambert, M. Marshall, K.J. May, P. M. McDonald, B. McEldowney, S. T. Nock, S. R. Peters, J. Robinson, S. A. Robinson, H. D. N. Rone-Clarke, J. D. Stanley, D. G. Stewart, K. Taylor, S. A. Webb and P. J. Whittaker.

Officers: Mrs. S. Hanley, Mr P. Carpenter, Mr. G. Revans, Mrs. C. Felton, Ms. N Cummings, Mrs B. Talbot, Mrs. J. Bayley-Hill and Mrs J. Gresham.

58\23 **TO RECEIVE APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors R. Bailes and D.J Nicholl.

59\23 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor R. J. Hunter declared that for the second Motion on Notice at minute item no.72/23 concerning improving rail connectivity at Bromsgrove train station, he was a member of the Bromsgrove and Redditch Rail Users Partnership.

60\23 **TO CONFIRM THE ACCURACY OF THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COUNCIL HELD ON 25TH OCTOBER 2023**

The minutes from the meeting held on 25th October 2023 were submitted for Members' consideration.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 25th October 2023 be approved as a true and accurate record subject to the inclusion of Councillor S.R. Peters in the list of those present at the meeting and a correction to minute number 43/23, Declarations of Interest, that Councillor P Whittaker's interest related to Tutnall Sewage Treatment Plant and not Frankley Green.

61\23 **TO RECEIVE ANY ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM THE CHAIRMAN AND/OR HEAD OF PAID SERVICE**

On behalf of the Council, the Chairman congratulated Alvechurch Parish Council on achieving the Quality Gold Award as part of the National Local Council Award Scheme, which recognised that the Parish Council met the high standards set by the Parish Council sector.

The following Parish Councillors were thanked:

Councillor Marc Worrall, Chairman
Councillor Nigel Cutress
Councillor Peter Freeman
Councillor Sue Lambert
Councillor Brett Shepherd
Councillor Tony Williams
Councillor Keith Wiseman
Councillor Paul Edwards
Councillor Sam Lewis
Councillor Rachael Bailes
Councillor Steve Hornsby
Councillor Barry Thornton,

together with the Parish Council's Executive Officer Mrs Jane Smailes and Assistant Mrs Faye Murphy.

62\23

TO RECEIVE ANY ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM THE LEADER

The Leader wished all Councillors compliments of the season, wished them a happy New Year and thanked all for their work on behalf of the residents of the District.

63\23

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

Mr. Jinks asked the following question:

"Having worked closely with 80+ High Street businesses, we have been asked to propose the following question. Can you please consider the option of reviewing the pricing structure on all council car parks around Bromsgrove High Street to enable an offering of 1 hours' free parking to be created. We feel that this will have a huge beneficial effect on the flow of business to the High Street and may lead to more businesses choosing to come to Bromsgrove in the future. We would propose that the shortfall created by this scheme be met by increasing the 1+ hour pricing charges."

Councillor S. Baxter, Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Regeneration, responded that the Council was currently undertaking a review of its car park charges including the charging periods, charges and any concessions. The outcome of the review would be part of tranche 2 of the reports included in the forward plan for the establishment of the 2024-5 budget. The Council currently supported local businesses and she gave the example of free parking across all car parks on the previous Saturday to support the Small Business Saturday initiative. Councillor Baxter invited Mr Jinks to send her an e-mail with proposals and ideas for car parking.

64\23

URGENT DECISIONS

Members were advised that no urgent decisions had been taken since the previous meeting of the Council.

65\23

STATUTORY OFFICER POSTS - APPOINTMENTS

Mrs S Hanley, Interim Head of Paid Service and Mr P Carpenter, Interim S151 Officer, left the room prior to consideration of this item. Mrs C Felton, Monitoring Officer, remained to support the Council so that one Statutory officer was present.

The Council considered a report setting out proposals in respect of the fixed term appointment of Mrs Susan Hanley so that she could continue in post as the Council's Interim Head of Paid Service. It also proposed the fixed term appointment of Mr Peter Carpenter to the post of Interim Section 151 Officer and Deputy Chief Executive. Members also considered a proposal to appoint Mrs Claire Felton as the Electoral Registration Officer and Returning Officer for Bromsgrove District Council.

In July 2023, in preparation for the retirement of the former Joint Chief Executive and Head of Paid Service in September, the Council had appointed Mrs Hanley as Acting Joint Chief Executive and Head of Paid Service. An urgent decision on this subject was subsequently taken by Redditch Borough Council in August.

Whilst a recruitment exercise had been undertaken for both the posts of Chief Executive and Section 151 officer, the Council was unable to recruit on this occasion.

The Council therefore needed to

- Arrange for a further recruitment process for the two senior officer posts to take place, which would take time to set up and implement.
- Take steps to ensure the stability and continuity of the existing senior management team until such time as permanent recruitment could be implemented, and
- Ensure that the Council had a Returning Officer and Electoral Registration Officer during this period of transition.

The Council was required by law to appoint an officer as the Council's Head of Paid Service. Mrs Hanley had expressed a wish to retire on the appointment of the permanent Chief Executive, and therefore not to return to her substantive role as Deputy Chief Executive. As such, she had expressed her intention to resign from her substantive post as Deputy Chief Executive. This enabled both Councils to consider options regarding the Senior Management structure including that of the substantive role of Mrs Hanley ahead of her retirement. It was proposed that on receiving Mrs Hanley's notice, she would be appointed as Interim Chief Executive and Head of Paid Service on a Fixed Term contract until 30th November 2024.

In addition, following the resignation of Mr James Howse, Mr Carpenter had been appointed as interim Chief Finance Officer and Section 151 Officer. In June, Redditch and Bromsgrove Members separately agreed to extend his appointment until 22nd December 2023. The current arrangement was set up as a placement via West Midlands Employers and Mr Carpenter was paid on a daily rate. The Council remained subject to the legal requirement to have a Section 151 officer in place and Mr Carpenter was currently working on critical projects on behalf of the Council.

To ensure a period of stability at the senior level, it was proposed that Mr Carpenter be appointed as Interim Executive Director of Resources. It was also proposed that he was appointed as Interim Deputy Chief Executive, the post due to be vacated by Mrs Hanley. This role would encompass his current role of Section 151 Officer.

This new expanded role would be secured by way of a direct contract of employment between Mr Carpenter and Bromsgrove District Council, as the employing authority, on a Fixed Term contract until 30th November 2024. Mr Carpenter would be “made available” to Redditch Borough Council under the shared service arrangements and would also continue to act as Section 151 Officer for both Councils. In view of the resignation of Ms Michelle Howells who currently acted as the Deputy S151 Officer, continuity of tenure at the most senior level was important given current challenges and projects.

In practice, elections had to be covered simultaneously at both Councils, and these duties had always been shared by two officers. It was proposed that Mrs Hanley would continue to cover these roles for Redditch, and that Mrs Claire Felton, Head of Legal, Democratic and Property Services, be appointed as the Returning Officer and Electoral Registration Officer for Bromsgrove.

Councillor K. May proposed, Councillor C. Hotham seconded the recommendations in the report.

Councillors thanked Mrs. Hanley, Mr. Carpenter and Ms. Howells for their work and support to the Council.

RESOLVED that

- 1) Mrs Susan Hanley continue to be appointed as the Interim Head of Paid Service for Bromsgrove District Council until 30th November 2024, or, if the date is later, until such time as a new permanent Head of Paid Service has commenced employment with the Council.
- 2) Following Mrs Hanley’s resignation from her substantive position as Deputy Chief Executive, Mr Peter Carpenter be appointed as Interim Deputy Chief Executive and Interim Executive Director of Resources (Section 151 Officer) on a fixed term basis until 30th November 2024.

- 3) Subject thereto, Mr Peter Carpenter to be made available under the shared services arrangements with Redditch Borough Council to perform such duties as are required in his capacity as Interim Deputy Chief Executive and Interim Executive Director Resources (Section 151 Officer) for Redditch Borough Council.
- 4) Mrs Claire Felton, Head of Legal, Democratic and Property Services, to be appointed as the Returning Officer and Electoral Registration Officer for Bromsgrove District Council.

66\23

RECOMMENDATION FROM THE LICENSING COMMITTEE

The Council considered a recommendation from the Licensing Committee which proposed the adoption of a refreshed Statement of Licensing Policy. This had been produced following a period of consultation.

RESOLVED that the revised Statement of Licensing Policy shown at Appendix 3 to the report be approved and published to take effect on 1st April 2024.

67\23

JOINT AUDITOR'S 2020-2021 AND 2022-2023 ANNUAL REPORT

The Council had received the Interim Auditor's Annual Report from its External Auditors Grant Thornton for 2021/22 and 2022/23. The report set out progress since the 2020/21 Report and contained an updated Statutory Recommendation with the key reason being the non-delivery of the 2020/21 and subsequent financial statements. This had been considered by the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee on 27th November 2023 and recommendations from the Committee had been circulated to Members.

In presenting the report, Councillor C. Hotham, Cabinet Member for Finance and Enabling, reported the Section 24 recommendation around the delivery of the 2020/21 accounts was still in place and had been extended to subsequent financial years. Of the five key recommendations in the 2021/22 report, only one serious weakness remained, relating to the opening balances linked to the budget, and would be resolved when the accounts were delivered. The others had either been resolved, downgraded or linked to improvement recommendations. There was one new key recommendation relating to organisation capacity and capability, which was being mitigated via the rollout of the Council's workforce strategy. £150k had been committed to supporting this.

Of the thirteen original improvement recommendations, nine had been fully or partially addressed and four were yet to be addressed. Ongoing improvements were linked to the ten new improvement recommendations in the Auditor's report. The External Auditors had noted the significant progress made by the Council in all areas apart from the delivery of the accounts. The existing Section 24

recommendation therefore remained outstanding in relation to the 2021 and subsequent accounts and the auditors had concluded it was appropriate to use their powers to make written recommendations under s 24 of the Act.

The Audit, Standards and Governance Committee had reviewed the report in front of the External Auditors, and the Vice Chairman of the Committee reported that it had asked probing questions and had agreed the recommendations before the Council today. This included adding a recommendation about the ongoing governance of the actions arising from the report.

RESOLVED that

- 1) That the Section 24 Statutory Recommendation is accepted and that Council review the recommendation, endorse the actions included in the management responses which form the rectification process required as per legislation; and
- 2) That Audit, Standards and Governance Committee members are updated on key deliverables, where deemed applicable by the Chairman, the Cabinet Member for Finance and Enabling and the Section 151 Officer, between Committee meetings and that appropriate governance arrangements are put in place to resolve the Council's position.

68\23

TO RECEIVE AND CONSIDER A REPORT FROM THE PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR LEISURE, CULTURE AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Councillor S.J. Colella, the Cabinet Member for Leisure, Culture and Climate Change, introduced his report. In doing so he referred to the Leisure and Cultural strategies that had seen a strong set of deliverables throughout the District and had built strong bonds within communities. The launch of the Cultural Compact's first major participation campaign, 'ReNEW' in the North East of the District was a particular highlight. The culture and heritage days had also been very successful. He thanked all the officers for their hard work and commitment in supporting such activities.

Since the Council declared a climate emergency in 2019 and adopted the climate change strategy in 2022, officers had been working to support achievement of the Council's carbon reduction targets. The Council worked in partnership with other organisations, residents and businesses on this. Councillor Colella referred to the carbon literacy training for Members being arranged for January 2024 and urged as many members as possible to attend. Additional finance had been obtained for the Council via grants which helped to support initiatives.

The following were the main items raised during this item:

- Further information was requested about the health intervention activity, especially relating to multiple sclerosis support, and an update was requested about cross departmental working supporting the launch of the youth service. The Cabinet member undertook to respond to Councillor Rone-Clarke outside the meeting on these queries.
- Whether carbon reduction could become a strategic purpose and reference to 'adapting' could be changed to be more robust.
- Whilst the improvement on the government's net zero target of 2050 by including 2040 was welcomed, it was suggested this should be set at 2030 to support achieving carbon neutrality. The Cabinet member responded that the situation was fluid but this was a clear corporate target.
- When the Climate change working party last met and whether this was the most appropriate vehicle for reviewing implementation of the Council's Carbon Reduction action plan. The Cabinet member responded that it last met prior to the elections in May 2023; he considered the issue would be better embedded by holding Cabinet member drop-in sessions open to all to provide opportunities to broaden members' knowledge.
- When the play audit was due to be brought to Councillors and whether there would be any commitment in the budget for improvements. The Cabinet Member responded that the position set out at the previous Council meeting under discussion of a Motion on Notice still remained and a report would be brought forward to members in February 2024.
- When the improvements at the park at the junction of New Road and Ford House Road would be completed. The Cabinet Member responded that the length of the project would be dependent on contract arrangements and the weather conditions.
- A member asked for details of membership of the Ryland Centre Advisory Group. The Cabinet Member advised that representatives from Bromsgrove School, Active Herefordshire and Worcestershire, the Chair of the Wellbeing Theme Group and relevant District Council officers attended this.
- A member sought clarity about the playing pitch strategy and how it was compiled. The Cabinet member reported that the assessment was carried out on both Council owned and other pitches, such as those run by Parish Councils, to identify any gaps in provision. Where a lack of facilities was identified then these could be addressed through planning applications as appropriate.
- The Cabinet member undertook to give details outside the meeting to Councillor D. Hopkins about how the £35k Arts Council grant to support the Cultural Compact in North East Worcestershire would be allocated.
- The view was expressed that focus and drive needed to be applied to the Carbon Reduction Implementation Plan and if the Climate Change Panel did not continue there was a risk this would be lost. The Cabinet Member commented that any

changes to governance would need to be considered by the Constitution Working Group initially. When the new Climate Change Officer had been appointed the Cabinet Member would pick up the current strategic targets and any additional targets brought forward with officers.

- Whether there were any plans to hold roadshows for residents to demonstrate how they could contribute to carbon reduction. The Cabinet Member responded that the Council had used Act on Energy to give advice in the past but agreed to pursue the suggestion as a way of engaging the community.
- Whether the Sanders Park Lights Trail could be held earlier in the year to avoid the busier festive period. The Cabinet member responded that this possibility could be explored.

69\23

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE CABINET

The Chairman advised that there were four recommendations from the meeting of the Cabinet held on 22nd November 2023, which were presented for the Council's consideration.

Governance Systems Review – Update Report

Council considered the recommendation which stemmed from action under the review of Council governance following the May 2023 election, where the Council was under no overall control and there was a desire to move forward in a more consensual way.

The Constitution Review Working Group had produced terms of reference for Cabinet Advisory Groups and a Memorandum of Understanding for cross party working. The Overview and Scrutiny Board had supported the documents with minor amendments and subsequently the Cabinet had also agreed their content, including the minor amendments.

In response to a query, the Monitoring Officer clarified that the proposed principle relating to the chairing of Council and certain committee meetings by members not from the ruling administration was currently agreed for adoption by the Council.

The Leader thanked Councillor P. McDonald and members of the Governance Systems Task Group who had carried out an extensive piece of work to support the review and also thanked the officers who supported it.

RESOLVED that the proposed Memorandum of Understanding concerning cross party working be approved, subject to an amendment to point 5 of the Principles section to read as follows: "Recognise and respect that each individual Member can contribute to decisions that are taken and *should be given the opportunity* to be involved and able to provide their opinion before a decision be taken".

Medium Term Financial Plan – Tranche 1 Budget Update Including Fees and Charges

The Council set a 3 year Medium Term Financial Plan and adopted a 2 stage approach to this. The budget position in late October when Tranche 2 was considered was a predicted deficit of £325,000 at the end of 2024-25 but the position would be clearer once Government grant support was announced before Christmas.

In the meantime, Council was requested to approve a commitment to additional capital funding for 2023-24 financial year for identified works to play areas in the District. It was anticipated that additional projects would come forward when the Play Audit was published.

In response to a question, the Cabinet Member reported that the fees the Council was able to charge for planning would be increased and it was hoped that there would be additional income to the Council via that route.

RESOLVED that the Play capital works for 2023/4 as set out in 3.38 of the report are approved and added to the Capital Programme.

Half Yearly Treasury Update Report 2023/24

In presenting the report, the Cabinet member thanked the finance team for their work in treasury management.

A member referred to a sentence in the introduction to the report which referred to the Council being exposed to financial risks and sought clarification on this. The Section 151 Officer reported that whilst professional advice was sought in terms of investment and risks were mitigated, a risk of adverse change would remain and that should be pointed out in the report.

RESOLVED that the position in relation to the Council's Prudential indicators be noted.

Finance and Performance Monitoring Report Quarter 2 2023/24

In introducing the report, the Cabinet member for Finance and Enabling reported that the deficit at year end was predicted to be £464k. The majority of this was due to the pay award for 2023/24, temporary staff, additional fuel and fleet hire costs and costs of temporary accommodation due to homelessness. This had been offset in part by a utilities underspend and additional income from commercial activities.

In response to a query about whether the Council had received value for money for the Civica Open Revenues system, the Cabinet member assured member that this was the case.

A member asked for details of costs incurred by the Council during the periods when the Artrix was unoccupied. The Cabinet member would provide a copy of a written response recently provided to Councillor P McDonald to all members.

RESOLVED that Changes to the Capital Programme in relation to ICT be actioned, bringing forward Cyber Security linked Tape Drive replacements forward from 2024/5 into 2023/4, and increasing the budget in 2023/4 to ensure the continuation of the Civica OpenRevenues system for the administration of council tax, business rates and housing benefits.

70\23

TO NOTE THE MINUTES OF THE MEETINGS OF THE CABINET HELD ON 22ND NOVEMBER 2023

The minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 22nd November 2023 were noted.

71\23

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

The Chairman advised that five questions on notice had been received for this meeting.

Question submitted by Councillor E. Gray

“Would the Cabinet Portfolio Holder agree that in the interests of shoppers, residents and Bromsgrove businesses, at least the first half-hour of parking should be FREE and thereafter a “Pay on Foot” model, paying on exit, should be adopted across the District?”

The Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Regeneration responded that the Council was currently undertaking a review of car parking charges including the charging periods, charges and any concessions. The outcome of this review would form part of Tranche 2 of the reports included with the forward plan for the establishment of the 2024/5 budget. The Council over recent years had invested heavily in new pay and display machines across its car parks that was agreed by the District Council, as part of its upgrading of the car parking infrastructure. This had modernised its delivery of car parking payments towards a cashless payment system, moving away from the ‘pay on foot’ model to the ‘pay and display’ model which had meant that customers could use cash, card, or pay by app. Pay by App was a convenient method that allowed drivers to add time to their stay without returning to their vehicle/pay station. This also removed the need for a Civil Enforcement Officer (CEO) to be present, in case pay station or exit barriers developed a fault and enabled the CEO to undertake enforcement patrols.

Councillor Gray asked a supplementary question about making it as straightforward as possible to enable drivers to park in the District, such as ANPR and ‘pay as you leave’, so that people could feel able to stay longer and use local businesses.

Councillor Baxter agreed that the review would look at options to encourage people to stay longer and use local businesses. The decision to change from pay on foot to pay and display had been taken some time ago and the Council had invested in reliable machines, but these would always take cash.

Question submitted by Councillor P McDonald

“Would the Cabinet Member for Finance and Enabling inform me how many additional staff have been employed since May 2023 in the area of Leisure and Cultural Services?”

The Cabinet member for Finance and Enabling responded that Leisure and Culture had employed no additional staff since May 2023. There were currently three vacancies out of sixteen members of staff, two of which were covered by a mixture of agency staff and seconded permanent staff. The Council was looking to fill these posts as soon as possible and one post was on the cusp of being recruited to.

Temporary staff were used for event security and risk assessments of larger events.

Councillor McDonald asked a supplementary question, referring to a statement earlier in the Municipal year that vacancies were being recruited to and the impact these had on the Council’s ability to bid for external funds. The Cabinet member replied that the earlier statement had been in relation to the Programme Manager and Project Manager. Since then, a wider review of project management and grant applications across the Council was being undertaken.

Question submitted by Councillor S Evans

“Could you please confirm the budget for the levelling up fund awarded to Bromsgrove and how we are currently tracking against this?”

The Cabinet member for Economic Development and Regeneration responded that the budget details were contained on page 159 of the Council agenda. Council undertook returns to DLUHC on a quarterly basis to update them on spending, deliverables and risks and issues being encountered. Progress was also monitored at the Levelling Up Board which met on a monthly basis now the projects were moving into the design and delivery phases. This Board was Chaired by the Leader, and also included the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Regeneration and the Cabinet Member for Finance and Enabling.

Councillor Evans asked a supplementary question, that given there had been an increase in costs for some of the projects, whether the Cabinet member could confirm this would not be to the detriment of the regeneration of the High Street?

The Cabinet member replied that this would not be to the detriment of the regeneration of the High Street.

Question submitted by Councillor R. Hunter

“Could the leader please confirm if it is this Council’s policy to exempt people receiving council tax support from bailiff enforcement action over non-payment of council tax?”

The Leader of the Council responded that the Council looked at each case of recovery of Council tax on its individual merits, so would not automatically exempt those on Council tax support from bailiff action. There was no blanket policy to exclude Council tax support recipients from any specific enforcement action. There would be cases in which - having regard to the debtor’s income, their assets, the period from which the debt accrued; or to the makeup of the household - the use of Enforcement agents was an appropriate course of action. The Council’s appointed enforcement agents were instructed to identify vulnerable cases and to pause action where vulnerability had been identified. The Council was currently in the process of updating its recovery process for the collection of council tax and non-domestic rates.

The recovery policy set out the actions the council would take before instructing enforcement agents to collect the debt. Where a customer was in receipt of council tax support, the authority would take steps to engage with the customer and agree a suitable payment arrangement. Deductions from benefits would be used in preference to the instruction of enforcement agents.

Revenue Services were trialling the use of external data validation to assist in the identification of cases which were not suited to further enforcement. Bromsgrove data was being reviewed in January 2024. The validation would identify, for cases where a liability order for non-payment of council tax was obtained, debtors:

- a) who were vulnerable; or
- b) who had low incomes and were unable to pay; or
- c) had sufficient income to pay their council tax but were prioritising non-priority debts, or
- d) who had the ability to pay.

Communication with the debtor would then be tailored to their circumstances and appropriate steps taken to resolve the debt. A sample of cases had been referred for data profiling and outcomes would be reviewed in quarter 4.

Councillor Hunter asked a supplementary question that as part of the policy review, the Council consider making exempt from bailiff action those in receipt of council tax support. Councillor May responded that this would be considered as part of the review.

Question submitted by Councillor S. Robinson

“Could you please set out the consequences of Bromsgrove not having a five year land supply and explain what the Council is doing to remedy this situation?”

The Cabinet Member for Planning, Licensing and WRS responded that where a five-year housing land supply could not be demonstrated, the presumption in favour of sustainable development applied. This meant that some policies were deemed to be out of date and permission for new housing should more often than not be granted. One of the exemptions from the presumption in favour of sustainable development was if there was green belt, and as Bromsgrove was 89% green belt at the moment, the consequences of not having a 5 year land supply were very limited.

To remedy this the Council was:

- progressing the plan review to bring forward new sites for allocation to be delivered over the next plan period;
- Holding regular Strategic Planning Steering Group meetings, which all members were welcome to attend;
- Bringing reserved matters applications on allocated sites to planning committee.

72\23

MOTIONS ON NOTICE

The Chairman reported that four Motions on Notice had been submitted for this meeting. However, the third Motion, submitted by Councillor Whittaker, had been withdrawn.

With the agreement of all group leaders, Councillor Nicholl's Motion, which featured in the agenda of the last Council meeting, but which was not debated then, had been postponed for consideration at the next Council meeting in January 2024. This would ensure that he could be present for the debate on his own Motion.

Publicity Campaign for Dog Welfare

The Council considered the following Motion on Notice from Councillor H Jones:

After hearing the devastating news, that two innocent, healthy puppies had been killed and dumped within our district, I call upon this council to commit to prioritise the promotion to support a publicity campaign to reminding dog owners and breeders of their responsibilities, in the hope we can stop anymore uncalled-for deaths of an animal. Within this campaign we also need to remind residents that they should only buy animals from a reputable source and the steps they should take to ensure the animals they buy are healthy and have been well cared for.

The campaign should also emphasise the need for the public to report any situations they identify where people may be breeding dogs illegally, or in circumstances that put the health of animals in jeopardy. WRS has “dog related issues” as one of its key priorities and, whilst they do their best to proactively identify illegal breeders and sales, more help from the public would not go amiss.

In proposing the Motion, Councillor Jones referred to advice offered to dog owners by Worcestershire Regulatory Services (WRS) such as temporary kennelling and support for when people could no longer keep an animal. She suggested that a targeted campaign could prevent animals from abuse, suffering or death. The pre-Christmas period would be an ideal time for a publicity campaign to remind people only to purchase a dog from a reputable dealer and also where to go to for help if they were struggling with caring for a pet.

The Motion was seconded by Councillor K Taylor, who referred to the financial and other commitments that should be considered before acquiring a dog.

Members spoke in support of the motion and of the benefits of owning a dog. They also referred to recent incidents which highlighted the need to promote responsible dog ownership and the support available when circumstances changed. It was noted that WRS would lead on a publicity campaign and the Council’s communications team might also be able to assist.

RESOLVED that

After hearing the devastating news, that two innocent, healthy puppies had been killed and dumped within our district, this council commits to prioritise the promotion to support a publicity campaign to reminding dog owners and breeders of their responsibilities, in the hope we can stop anymore uncalled-for deaths of an animal. Within this campaign we also need to remind residents that they should only buy animals from a reputable source and the steps they should take to ensure the animals they buy are healthy and have been well cared for. The campaign should also emphasise the need for the public to report any situations they identify where people may be breeding dogs illegally, or in circumstances that put the health of animals in jeopardy. WRS has “dog related issues” as one of its key priorities and, whilst they do their best to proactively identify illegal breeders and sales, more help from the public would not go amiss.

Connectivity from Bromsgrove Train Station

The Council considered the following Motion on Notice from Councillor S Evans:

This Council supports improving connectivity for rail users travelling from Bromsgrove Train Station so that they can travel to destinations such as Cheltenham, Bristol and Cardiff with ease.

This Council therefore resolves to support the campaign for greater connectivity from Bromsgrove Train Station, as campaigned for by organisations such as BARRUP, and calls on the Leader of the Council to write to Cross Country Trains to request that their service, which currently runs between Nottingham and Cardiff, stops at Bromsgrove train station to improve connectivity between our area and popular destinations, putting Bromsgrove on the map and increasing tourism to our town whilst allowing residents to travel with ease.

In introducing the Motion, Councillor Evans referred to the current hourly service between Cardiff and Nottingham which did not stop at Bromsgrove station. If it did, it would enable passengers to alight at Worcestershire Parkway, Cheltenham and Bristol. He suggested that including Bromsgrove in the route would bring social, economic and environmental benefits to the District. He acknowledged the efforts of groups such as the Bromsgrove and Redditch Rail Users Partnership (BARRUP) to improve the connectivity from Bromsgrove train station.

The Motion was seconded by Councillor S. Robinson.

Councillor H.D.N. Rone-Clarke detailed an amendment he wished to propose, as follows:

In the second paragraph of the motion to insert the words 'as well as Network Rail' after 'calls on the Leader to write to cross Country Trains.....and to insert the words 'and/or Barnt Green' following 'stops at Bromsgrove....'

The proposer and seconder of the Motion accepted the changes as suggested and the motion as amended was debated by the Council. The main points raised were:

- The Council was committed to making the District as accessible as possible and the Leader was supportive of the action proposed by the Motion
- A member raised that there were currently only two trains per hour which called at Alvechurch and it was suggested that the letter from the Leader should be expanded to request an increase in service to this station too. It was argued that to add further destinations into the current motion would dilute its impact
- Efforts should be made to improve connectivity across the District and the wider West Midlands as a whole
- Current arrangements for travelling to the south meant that passengers had to travel via Birmingham, which damaged productivity

RESOLVED that

This Council supports improving connectivity for rail users travelling from Bromsgrove Train Station so that they can travel to destinations such as Cheltenham, Bristol and Cardiff with ease.

This Council therefore resolves to support the campaign for greater connectivity from Bromsgrove Train Station, as campaigned for by organisations such as BARRUP, and calls on the Leader of the Council to write to Cross Country Trains as well as Network Rail to request that their service, which currently runs between Nottingham and Cardiff, stops at Bromsgrove and/or Barnt Green train station to improve connectivity between our area and popular destinations, putting Bromsgrove on the map and increasing tourism to our town whilst allowing residents to travel with ease.

Introduction of 'Live Time' on Bus Shelters

The Council considered the following Motion on Notice from Councillor P McDonald:

We call upon the Cabinet to modernise bus shelters by introducing 'Live Time'. The new system will tell waiting passengers exactly when the next bus is due by monitoring and reporting on its progress in real-time. It helps make services more efficient, which means a better service.

In proposing the Motion, Councillor McDonald referred to arrangements where real time information was displayed on bus shelters. He considered this encouraged 'casual' users to use the services and an opportunity to do this was being missed.

Councillor McDonald noted that a sum had been allocated to bus shelters in the budget which should be spent, and he suggested that they could be used for advertisements which could bring in revenue to the Council. Replacing car journeys with bus travel would also have environmental benefits by reducing CO2 emissions.

The Motion was seconded by Councillor D Hopkins, who referred to recent changes to bus timetables and the confusion this caused. Real time information would help to give the public more confidence in bus services and support them in planning their time and their journeys. There was a parallel with the system used at the train stations and this should be universally applied to bus routes.

Councillor P Whittaker gave details of an amendment he wished to propose, which was accepted by the proposer and seconder of the motion. This changed the motion as follows and it became the substantive motion:

We call upon *Worcestershire County Council* to work with the Cabinet at *Bromsgrove District Council* (delete the words 'to work') to modernise

the (delete 'our') bus shelters *within Bromsgrove District* by introducing 'Live Time'. The remainder of the motion was unchanged.

In presenting the amended wording, Councillor Whittaker referred to the shared responsibility between the County and District Councils for bus shelters.

Councillor J Robinson proposed an amendment that the words 'That the Cabinet member for finance brings forward proposals for a budget for bus shelter improvements to replace the funds not used in previous years as part of the 2024/25 budget' were added to the end of the motion. The Monitoring Officer advised that this was not an admissible amendment as it had budgetary implications; the substantive motion enabled financial implications to be considered by Cabinet.

During debate on the substantive motion the following were the main points raised

- Live time information was necessary to reassure passengers that a service was running, albeit if there were delays
- Whether the bus stops at the train station would be included in the motion as there was confusion about which organisation was responsible for them
- There was a mixture of ownership of bus shelters across the District, including some Parish Councils, and all involved should work together to make this universally available
- Not all people had access to mobile phone technology so live time at bus shelters would make the services more accessible
- There was a need to better maintain bus shelters across the District, regardless of ownership; funds allocated in the budget had not yet been spent on improvements and the motion should be a catalyst to improvements being made
- It was unlikely that real time information could be used for demand responsive transport
- How the technology would work in more rural areas. Reference was made to the technology being used in rural parts of a neighbouring county
- The Council asked for details of bus services from the County Council before upgrading bus shelters which had led to delays in some maintenance work.

RESOLVED that

We call upon Worcestershire County Council to work with the Cabinet at Bromsgrove District Council to modernise the bus shelters within Bromsgrove District by introducing 'Live Time'. The new system will tell waiting passengers exactly when the next bus is due by monitoring and reporting on its progress in real-time. It helps make services more efficient, which means a better service.

The meeting closed at 8.55 p.m.

Chairman