

**BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**MEETING OF THE COUNCIL**

**21ST FEBRUARY 2024, 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, S. M. Evans, D. J. A. Forsythe, E. M. S. Gray, C.A. Hotham, D. Hopkins, R. J. Hunter, H. J. Jones, M. Marshall, K.J. May, P. M. McDonald, B. McEldowney, S. T. Nock, D. J. Nicholl, S. R. Peters, J. Robinson, S. A. Robinson, H. D. N. Rone-Clarke, J. D. Stanley, 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 and Mrs. J. Bayley-Hill and Ms J. Gresham

88\23 **TO RECEIVE APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors R. Bailes, J. Elledge, R. Lambert and D. Stewart.

89\23 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillors K. May and S. Baxter referred to blue badge parking (at minute number 96/23) and clarified that although they each displayed a blue badge on their car it related to a family member.

Councillor H.D.N. Rone-Clark declared an interest in the second Motion on Notice relating to Out of Hours services (minute number 102/23) as he worked for the local NHS Trust.

Councillor J. Robinson declared that he volunteered at the Artrix, which was referred to in the Medium Term Financial Plan (minute number 96/23).

90\23 **TO CONFIRM THE ACCURACY OF THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COUNCIL HELD ON 24TH JANUARY 2024**

The minutes of the Council meeting held on 24<sup>th</sup> January 2024 were submitted for Members' consideration.

**RESOLVED** that

The minutes of the Council meeting held on 24<sup>th</sup> January 2024 be approved as a correct record subject to the following amendments:

- In minute number 84/23, Planning Enforcement Policy, to include reference to Councillor K. Taylor stating he was prepared to

submit the Planning Enforcement Policy to the Planning Committee for consideration, subject to seeking advice from the Monitoring Officer and the Head of Planning, Regeneration and Leisure Services about whether this was appropriate, and

- In minute number 86/23 - Reference to Councillor D. Nicholls to be changed to Councillor D. Nicholl.

91\23

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

Chairman

The Chairman made the following announcements:

“On 9<sup>th</sup> February 2024 the Government created some new peers. One of those ennobled was Charles Banner. Charles was brought up in Barnt Green and his proud mother, an ex-parish Councillor, still lives in the village. Charles has taken the name Lord Banner of Barnt Green in Worcestershire. This is a great honour for Barnt Green and we would like to offer congratulations to Lord Banner.” The Chairman thanked Councillor C. Hotham for bringing this to the Council’s attention and the Council joined in a round of applause in congratulating Lord Banner.

The Chairman also reminded Members that there was a comedy night due to take place on Friday 1<sup>st</sup> March at Bromsgrove Golf Centre in aid of the Chairman’s charity – Age UK. She suggested that if people could not attend the night, they might like to donate instead by means of raffle prizes or cash for the charity Age UK.

Head of Paid Service

There were no announcements from the Head of Paid Service.

92\23

**TO RECEIVE ANY ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM THE LEADER**

The Leader did not have any announcements for this meeting.

93\23

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

There were no comments, questions or petitions from members of the public.

94\23

**URGENT DECISIONS**

The Chairman advised that there had been no urgent decisions since the last meeting of the Council.

95\23

## **INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL RECOMMENDATIONS 2024/25**

The Council considered recommendations made by the Independent Remuneration Panel for the level of members' allowances for the financial year 2024-25.

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

In proposing the recommendations Councillor Hotham reminded the Council that the Panel was independent and operated at 'arms' length'. He suggested that the purpose of the allowances was to provide some recompense to Councillors who worked hard on behalf of their communities.

### **RESOLVED** that

The recommendations from the Independent Remuneration Panel for 2024-25 be accepted as follows:

- 1) A Basic Allowance for 2024-25 of £5,518, representing an 16.6% increase
- 2) A range of Special Responsibility Allowances as set out in Appendix 1
- 3) That travel allowances for 2024-25 continue to be paid in accordance with the HMRC mileage allowance
- 4) That subsistence allowances for 2024-25 remain unchanged
- 5) That the Dependent Carer's Allowance remains unchanged
- 6) That travel and subsistence payments made by Parish Councils to councillors (where they are paid) are made in accordance with the provisions set out in the report.

96\23

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE CABINET MEETING HELD ON 14TH FEBRUARY 2024 (TO FOLLOW)**

Recommendations from the Cabinet meeting held on 14<sup>th</sup> February 2024 were presented for the Council's consideration.

### **Governance Systems Review**

Councillor C. Hotham introduced and proposed the recommendations which had originated from the Governance Systems Task and the Constitution Review Working Groups, and he thanked both for their work on the proposals. Councillor P. McDonald seconded the

recommendations and referred to them fulfilling the wishes of the Council.

**RESOLVED** that

- 1) The proposed amendments to the Committee Terms of Reference, at Part 5 of the Constitution, in respect of special provisions as to the Chairmen of the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee and the Overview and Scrutiny Board, be approved; and
- 2) The proposed amendments to the Council Procedure Rules, at Part 8 of the Council's Constitution, in relation to the appointments of the Chairman of the Council and the Chairmen of the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee and the Overview and Scrutiny Board, be approved.

**Carbon Reduction Strategy – Annual Review**

Councillor S. Colella presented the report and proposed the recommendations. In doing so he thanked the officers who had brought forward the report. He reported it was important that the Council continued to pursue net zero and welcomed the support of members, officers and fellow Cabinet members in this regard.

Councillor Colella reported that a focus on positive performance would be supported through the use of a dashboard to help monitor progress in the forthcoming year.

Councillor S. Baxter seconded the recommendations.

During consideration of the item the following were the main points raised:

- In response to a suggestion that the Council research using a tool to measure the carbon footprint of the District and carry out roadshows to promote carbon reduction, Councillor Colella reported that the Council was looking at the potential to use an appropriate tool to give a consistent measure of progress. It was also intended to use the services of Act on Energy as the Council's preferred contractor for engagement with the public.
- A member asked when District heating would be delivered. Councillor Colella responded that officers had been urged to accelerate this. The Council was seeking business partners to support this initiative.
- Whether there was scope to include a target for tree planting as trees contributed to reduction in carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. Councillor Colella reported that the biodiversity action plan would be coming forward to the Council and trees were an important part of it. The Council would seek to work with

partners such as the County Council to maximise opportunities beyond using Council land.

- A member suggested that the Council should seek to influence the actions taken by others across the District as the Council was responsible for only part of the carbon emissions. Councillor Colella agreed that the Council had a part to play in leading the community in the actions it could take. The action plan included a piece of work to review the Council's procurement arrangements to ensure that the companies it engaged with met the Council's requirements in terms of reaching net zero.
- A member queried how the action plan requirement to ensure that new developments included biodiversity net gain would be agreed and enforced. It was noted that current live developments were addressed by the planning department. The Environment Act 2021 set out clear guidance and responsibilities for local planning authorities to develop biodiversity action plans. The National Planning Policy Framework required Councils to ensure that a developer should 'bring betterment' to a development but if this could not be achieved on site it must be delivered elsewhere.
- A member suggested that reference in the action plan to a Working Group monitoring progress against targets would discourage those members not directly involved from contributing and that it would be more appropriate for the Overview and Scrutiny Board to carry out this work. Councillor Colella commented that he would welcome involvement of all Councillors. It was noted that the Overview and Scrutiny Board could set its own agenda and the Chairman of the Board, Councillor P. McDonald, commented that he would welcome the issue being considered there. The usual practice of inviting all interested members to attend and take part would be continued.
- A member commented that carbon reduction and biodiversity were interlinked and both should be cross cutting issues for the Council.

**RESOLVED** that

- 1) The findings of this annual review of the Carbon Reduction Strategy be endorsed
- 2) The proposal to align Carbon Reduction Strategy measures to the Climate Action Scorecard into an accessible performance dashboard be accepted.

**Non-Domestic Rates Discretionary Rate Relief Policy**

Councillor S. R Peters declared an Other Disclosable interest in this item as he was involved in the management of Wythall Village Hall which benefitted from discretionary relief.

Councillor C. Hotham, the Cabinet Member for Finance and Enabling, introduced the report and proposed the recommendation.

The Discretionary Rate Relief Policy was periodically reviewed. Recent changes to legislation had removed a 6-month limit on backdating claims for relief applications and gave flexibility to Councils. The Council's policy had been amended in the light of this change. It was proposed that backdating would only be considered for the current year where the application was made or decided within 6 months of the year end and in other specific circumstances.

Councillor K. May seconded the recommendation.

**RESOLVED** that the amended Non-Domestic Rates Discretionary Relief policy be approved and adopted from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024.

### **Pay Policy 2024/25**

Councillor C. Hotham, Cabinet Member for Finance and Enabling, presented the report and proposed the recommendation.

The Council was required to consider and approve the policy on an annual basis. Councillor Hotham set out the main elements of the policy. The pay of the lowest paid employee was £22,366 per annum and the Chief Executive's pay was 6.3 times the pay of the lowest paid employee. The Council was responsible for setting the policy relating to recruitment, pay, employment conditions and severance. The Appointments Committee was responsible for recommending to Council the Head of Paid Service, the Section 151 Officer and Monitoring Officer appointments.

Councillor K. May seconded the recommendation.

**RESOLVED** that the Pay Policy 2024/25 be approved.

### **Medium Term Financial Plan (including Treasury Management Strategy, Capital Strategy, Minimum Revenue Provision and Investment Strategy) (Tranche 2)**

Councillor C Hotham, the Cabinet Member for Finance and Enabling, introduced the report and proposed the recommendations. In doing so he thanked the Finance Team for their work in preparing the budget and the Budget and Finance Working Group for its input.

Budget setting was a two-tranche process and when the Council agreed the first tranche in January 2024, a deficit of £172k had been predicted for 2024/25. However, since then the Government settlement had been confirmed, the Council had been permitted to increase Council Tax by an additional 1%, planning fees could also be increased and the Council's share of business rates was due to increase. Adjustments to projections for the impact of the pay award also increased the amount available in the budget. However, £649k of budget pressures had been identified, including:

- £33k for food standards staff
- £66k for changes to parking enforcement
- £85k for resourcing changes to planning and other enforcement work
- Revenue implications from the Play Audit of £500k by 2026/27
- £71k for the housing strategy monitoring implementation of the renter reform requirements
- £40k additional democratic services resource to support the Council's new governance arrangements
- £372K North Worcestershire Economic Development and Regeneration restructure
- £30k Business rates adjustment
- £33k for Members' allowances
- £10k reinstatement of grant to the Citizens' Advice Bureau
- £54k as a cautious approach to the pay award
- £50k one off amount for the planned review of car parking
- £150k capital regeneration seed fund
- £1k implications arising from the £25k per year identified for landlord obligations at the Artrix, which would increase to £5k during the period of the Medium Term Financial Plan.

Further grant funding from the Government announced in January 2024 had enabled the proposal to be made for a balanced budget without the use of reserves. The proposals also included provision for a ward fund for members to be piloted, investment in bus shelters, and free blue badge parking.

Councillor K. May seconded the recommendations. In doing so she referred to three strands in the budget: investment in the Council's infrastructure, the ward budgets and supporting growth. An earmarked reserve would seed fund approved district wide capital regeneration priorities. Changes to the parking charges were aimed to attract and retain increased footfall in the town centre. The ward budget proposal would allow individual ward members to invest in the areas they were closest to. There were pressures, such as increased investment in the Private Sector Housing team and Worcestershire Regulatory Services, which were in response to increased Government expectations. In her view risks to the Medium Term Financial Plan remained including the outstanding accounts and maintaining control over employee costs.

During consideration of the report the main views expressed were:

- It was difficult to justify an increase to Council tax during hard times, but there had been welcome cross party working to arrive at the proposals.
- The employment of additional staff to deliver services would benefit residents.
- The reinstatement of blue badge holders having free parking was welcomed by a number of members.
- Free parking after 6pm and for up to 30 minutes was welcomed although other increases in parking charges were regretted. It

was noted that the Council had last reviewed its car parking charges in 2011 and in conducting the current review it had engaged with stakeholders including businesses and this had resulted in the proposed changes to the structure of charges.

- Investment in recreation grounds was welcome through funding the outcomes from the play audit. It was suggested that the Council should pursue installing water fountains in its parks to counteract the tendency to purchase soft fizzy drinks.
- Local members should support improvements to recreation grounds in their wards to encourage greater use of them.
- The Ward fund addressed a perception that investment did not spread beyond the urban areas; it would enable local members to pump prime community initiatives. Whilst the view was expressed that it might have been structured in a different way, it had the potential to support improvements in localities.
- The proposed additional resource for private sector housing enforcement was welcome to support addressing rogue landlords.
- The resources for bus shelters and accompanying plan was welcomed.
- The commitment for additional funding to support the Artrix building was also welcomed. Councillor R.J. Hunter expressed the view that further resources should be put in place to support the volunteers who were enabling the Artrix to continue. In response to a request from the Chairman, Councillor Hunter reported that he believed the Liberal Democrat Group had a mandate from the Artrix Holding Trust to seek additional resources from the Council.
- In response to a question, Councillor S. Baxter confirmed that the deadline to use the Levelling Up Fund contributions for the Market Hall and Windsor Street projects was September 2025 and the Council was on track to meet this for both. The Leader, Councillor K. May, added that the Council's 10% contribution to the Market Hall was due to be committed in the final weeks of the project. Currently it did not appear that further Levelling Up Funding would be available, although UK Shared Prosperity Funds should be available for bids in due course.
- In response to a question Councillor C Hotham clarified that the capital receipt of £1.8m referred to the sale of properties at Burcot Lane.

In accordance with the Local Authorities (Standing Orders) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2014, the Medium Term Financial Plan (including Treasury Management Strategy, Capital Strategy, Minimum Revenue Provision and Investment Strategy) (Tranche 2) was subject to a named vote.

Members voting FOR the recommendations in the Medium Term Financial Plan (including Treasury Management Strategy, Capital Strategy, Minimum Revenue Provision and Investment Strategy) (Tranche 2):



Councillors Cllrs S. Ammar, A. Bailes, S. J. Baxter, S. R. Colella, A. M. Dale, D.J.A. Forsythe, E.M.S. Gray, D. Hopkins, C. A. Hotham, H.J. Jones, B. Kumar, M. Marshall, K.J. May, P.M. McDonald, B.M. McEldowney, S.T. Nock, S.R. Peters, H.D.N. Rone-Clarke, J.D. Stanley, K. Taylor, S.A. Webb and P.J. Whittaker (22)

Members voting AGAINST the recommendations in the Medium Term Financial Plan (including Treasury Management Strategy, Capital Strategy, Minimum Revenue Provision and Investment Strategy) (Tranche 2)

No Councillors (0)

Members voting to ABSTAIN in the vote the recommendations in the Medium Term Financial Plan (including Treasury Management Strategy, Capital Strategy, Minimum Revenue Provision and Investment Strategy) (Tranche 2)

Councillors S.M. Evans, R.J. Hunter, D.J. Nicholl, J.W. Robinson and S.J. Robinson (5).

The vote on the Medium Term Financial Plan (including Treasury Management Strategy, Capital Strategy, Minimum Revenue Provision and Investment Strategy) (Tranche 2) was declared carried.

**RESOLVED** the approval of

- 1) The Tranche 2 growth proposals.
- 2) The additional funding to the Council as per the final Local Government Settlement on 5th February 2024, including the estimated levels for 2024/5 and 2025/6.
- 3) The Tranche 2 savings proposals, including an increase of Council Tax of 2.99%.
- 4) The updated five year Capital Programme 2024/5 to 2028/29 along with its ongoing revenue costs.
- 5) The levels of Earmarked Reserve being carried forward into future years.
- 6) That a new Earmarked Reserve for Ward Budgets be set up and £234k allocated to it.
- 7) That a new Regeneration Reserve to seed fund projects linked to district wide capital regeneration priorities be set up for £150,000.
- 8) The level of General Fund balances following additions from the 2024/5 Medium Term Financial Plan.
- 9) Members take account of any feedback from the Tranche 2 consultation process undertaken.

### **Termination of shared service arrangement: North Worcestershire Economic Development and Regeneration**

Councillor S.J. Baxter, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Regeneration, proposed the recommendation relating to the termination of the shared service arrangement for North Worcestershire Economic Development and Regeneration.

In 2023 the Host authority for the shared service, Wyre Forest District Council, had indicated it wished to withdraw from the shared arrangement. The Council was proposing to set up a new shared Service between Bromsgrove and Redditch Councils to support economic development which was a priority for the District and sought confirmation of the additional budget for this. A shared service enabled both Councils to employ those with the best skill set to support continued focus on developing the local economy.

Councillor K.J. May seconded the recommendation.

**RESOLVED** that an additional budget of £72,836 be approved for the new structure.

### **Parking Enforcement Service Level Agreement**

Councillor S.J. Baxter introduced the report and proposed the recommendations. Wychavon District Council had delivered the Council's parking services and over the years this had evolved in a piecemeal way. A full review had last been undertaken in 2013 and it was now timely to carry out a full review of the District's requirements.

Councillor Baxter thanked the Overview and Scrutiny Board for its review of the Service Level Agreement. Although the charges from Wychavon District Council had recently been increased, the Council paid for services received, so for example costs had reduced when it had been difficult to recruit to vacancies in the service.

The proposed strategic review of parking services would include on and off street parking enforcement, and would support preparation of a business case for the future of the service. This was likely to present options such as extending the SLA, commissioning a provider through tendering for a service or delivering the service in-house. It was likely that the review would take 18 months to complete.

Councillor K.J. May seconded the recommendations and in doing so thanked the officers involved for their work so far.

During discussion of the recommendations the following were the main issues discussed:

- the review should examine public transport as some areas of the District did not have an alternative to using the car.
- how the issue of parking outside schools would be handled under the Service Level Agreement; Councillor Baxter responded that local members' knowledge about issues in their ward would be sought as part of the review.
- It was agreed that the review should go to Overview and Scrutiny Board for consideration prior to a decision being made.

**RESOLVED** that

- 1) An increased budget of £60K for Car Parking be included in the Medium-Term Financial Plan from April 2024.
- 2) A one-off budget of £50K be included in the Medium-Term Financial Plan to fund the proposed work.

97\23

**ALTERNATIVE BUDGETS (TO FOLLOW)**

The Chairman advised that no alternative budgets had been submitted for consideration.

98\23

**RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE CABINET MEETING HELD ON 21ST FEBRUARY 2024 (TO FOLLOW)**

**Council Tax Resolutions 2024/25**

Councillor C. Hotham, Cabinet Member for Finance and Enabling, introduced the Council Tax resolutions which had been considered at the Cabinet meeting held immediately prior to the Council meeting and proposed the recommendations.

Council was informed that the report sought the formal approval of the Council Tax resolutions for 2024/2025. The report took into account the spending requirements of Bromsgrove District Council, Worcestershire County Council (WCC), the Police and Crime Commissioner for West Mercia, Hereford and Worcester Fire Authority and the Parish Councils.

The recommendations were seconded by Councillor K.J. May.

In accordance with the Local Authorities (Standing Orders) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2014, the Council Tax Resolutions 2024/2025 were subject to a named vote.

Members voting FOR the recommendations in the Council Tax Resolutions 2024/2025:

Councillors Cllrs S. Ammar, A. Bailes, S. J. Baxter, S. R. Colella, A. M. Dale, S. M. Evans, D.J.A. Forsythe, E.M.S. Gray, D. Hopkins, C. A. Hotham, R.J. Hunter, H.J. Jones, B. Kumar, M. Marshall, K.J. May, P.M. McDonald, B.M. McEldowney, D.J. Nicholl, S.T. Nock, S.R. Peters,

H.D.N. Rone-Clarke, J.W. Robinson, S.J. Robinson J.D. Stanley, K. Taylor, S.A. Webb and P.J. Whittaker (27)

Members voting AGAINST the recommendations in the Council Tax Resolutions 2024/2025:

No Councillors (0)

Members voting to ABSTAIN in the vote for the recommendations in the Council Tax 2024/2025:

No Councillors (0)

The vote for the Council Tax Resolutions 2024/2025 was declared carried.

**RESOLVED** that Council approve:

- 1) The calculation for the Council Tax requirement for the Council's own purposes for 2024/25 (excluding Parish precepts) as **£9,499,346.19**.
- 2) That the following amounts be calculated for the year 2024/25 in accordance with sections 31 to 36 of the Act:
  - (a) £46,946,051.69 being the aggregate of the amounts which the Council estimates for the items set out in Section 31A (2) of the Act (taking into account all precepts issued to it by Parish Councils) (*i.e., Gross expenditure*)
  - (b) £37,446,705.50 being the aggregate of the amounts which the Council estimates for the items set out in Section 31A (3) of the Act. (*i.e., Gross income*)
  - (c) £10,723,413.69 being the amount by which the aggregate of 1.2.2(a) above exceeds the aggregate at 1.2.2(b) above, calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 31A (4) of the Act, as its Council Tax requirement for the year. (Item R in the formula in Section 31B of the Act).
  - (d) £282.21 being the amount at 1.2.2 (c) above (Item R), all divided by Item T (1.1(a) above), calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 31B of the Act, as the basic amount of its Council Tax for the year (including Parish precepts).
  - (e) £1,224,067.50 being the aggregate amount of all special items (Parish precepts) referred to in

Section 34 (1) of the Act (as per the attached **Schedule 3**).

- (f) £250.00 being the amount at 1.2.2 (d) above less the result given by dividing the amount at 1.2.2 (e) above by Item T (1.1 (a) above), calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 34 (2) of the Act, as the basic amount of its Council Tax for the year for dwellings in those parts of its area to which no Parish precept relates.
- (g) The amounts shown in Column 3 of **Schedule 1**. These are the basic amounts of the council tax for the year for dwellings in those parts of the Council's area shown in Column 1 of the schedule respectively to which special items relate, calculated by the Council in accordance with Section 34(3) of the Act. (District and Parish combined at Band D).
- (h) The amounts shown in Column 5 of **Schedule 1** being the amount given by multiplying the amounts at 2.2.2(g) above by the number which, in the proportion set out in Section 5(1) of the Act, is applicable to dwellings listed in a particular valuation band divided by the number which in that proportion is applicable to dwellings listed in valuation band D, calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 36(1) of the Act, as the amounts to be taken into account for the year in respect of categories of dwellings listed in different valuation bands;
- 3) It be noted that for the year 2024/25, Worcestershire County Council, Police and Crime Commissioner for West Mercia and Hereford and Worcester Fire Authority have issued precepts to the Council in accordance with Section 40 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 for each category of dwelling in the Council's area as indicated below:

	Valuation Bands							
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£
Worcestershire County Council	1,025.95	1,196.94	1,367.93	<b>1,538.92</b>	1,880.90	2,222.88	2,564.87	3,077.84
Police and Crime Commissioner for West Mercia	185.00	215.83	246.67	<b>277.50</b>	339.17	400.83	462.50	555.00
Hereford and Worcester Fire Authority	64.81	75.62	86.42	<b>97.22</b>	118.82	140.43	162.03	194.44

- 4) That having calculated the aggregate in each case of the amounts at 1.2.2(h) and 1.2.3 above, that Bromsgrove District Council in accordance with Sections 30 and 36 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 hereby sets the amounts shown in **Schedule 2** as the amounts of Council Tax for 2024/25. for each part of its area and for each of the categories of dwellings.
- 5) That the Interim Director of Finance be authorised to make payments under Section 90(2) of the Local Government Finance Act 1988 from the Collection Fund by ten equal instalments between April 2023 to March 2024 as detailed below:

	<b>Precept</b>	<b>Deficit on Collection Fund</b>	<b>Total to pay</b>
	<b>£</b>	<b>£</b>	<b>£</b>
Worcestershire County Council	58,475,420	(277,545.53)	58,197,874.47
Police and Crime Commissioner for West Mercia	10,544,361.75	(50,083.00)	10,494,278.75
Hereford & Worcester Fire Authority	3,694,136.35	(17,875.34)	3,676,261.01

- 6) That the Interim Director of Finance be authorised to make transfers under Section 97 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988 from the Collection Fund to the General Fund the sum of £10,671,802.35 being the Council's own demand on the Collection Fund (£9,499,346.19) and Parish Precepts (£1,224,067.50) and the distribution of the Deficit on the Collection Fund (-£51,611.34).
- 7) That the Interim Director of Finance be authorised to make payments from the General Fund to Parish Councils the sums listed on **Schedule 3** by two equal instalments on 1 April 2024 and 1 October 2024 in respect of the precept levied on the Council.
- 8) That the above resolutions to be signed by the Chief Executive for use in legal proceedings in the Magistrates Court for the recovery of unpaid Council Taxes.
- 9) Notices of the making of the said Council Taxes signed by the Chief Executive are given by advertisement in the local press under Section 38(2) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992.

99\23

**TO NOTE THE MINUTES OF THE MEETINGS OF THE CABINET HELD ON 14TH FEBRUARY 2024 (TO FOLLOW)**

The minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 14<sup>th</sup> February 2024 were noted.

The meeting adjourned at 8.43pm and reconvened at 8.57 pm.

100\23

**KEY DECISIONS - FINANCIAL THRESHOLD (REPORT TO FOLLOW)**

The Council considered a report which set out proposals to increase the threshold at which 'key decisions' would be required to be made on procurement matters. Changes in procurement legislation which were due to come into force on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024 had prompted a review of the threshold and having considered an initial report about this in July, the Council asked for further details before a decision could be taken.

Councillor C. Hotham proposed the recommendation. He explained that if the threshold was not increased there would be a need for the Council to employ additional resources to support the procurement processes.

Councillor S. Nock seconded the recommendations.

In response to a query about where the report about procurement spend under £50,000 would be considered, Councillor Hotham confirmed that he anticipated a quarterly report to Overview and Scrutiny.

**RESOLVED** that

The Key Decision threshold is raised to £200K.

101\23

**QUESTIONS ON NOTICE**

The Chairman advised that one Question on Notice had been received for this meeting.

**Question submitted by Councillor D. Hopkins**

"Would the Leader of the Council be able to provide an update with regards to the progress made in lobbying Worcestershire County Council and Birmingham City Council on the full restoration of the 144 Bus Service?"

Councillor K. May responded that "This was raised at Council on 25<sup>th</sup> October 2023. As a result, the Council called upon myself to continue to lobby the County Council to ensure that the full route previously covered by the 144 bus is restored, because whilst the 20 bus route had been in place for some time it was currently failing to meet the needs of residents.

I did therefore write to County Councillor Mike Rouse, Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport at Worcestershire County Council, who thanked the Council for raising this. In his response he said that due to the success of the new 20 route it allowed the County to support the extension to the Queen Elizabeth Hospital, which is what passengers who use the service asked them for the most. Users also wanted improved frequencies and Sunday running, and this has been delivered. Customer satisfaction from those who use it is high and they value the service to the hospital. If the buses had to travel into Birmingham City Centre and back again, the frequency would have to be reduced to allow for this additional time. The County are regularly reviewing services and responding to the market demands as it changes. It may well be that travel behaviours change in the future, and the County can reconsider this option.

So, whilst our request to reinstate the 144 bus route cannot be supported by the County at this moment in time, they wish to work in partnership with us in the future.”

In addition, the Leader reported that she had spoken to local members where the number 20 bus service ran, and they reported that residents fed back that they preferred the bus as it was reliable and clean.

Birmingham City Council did not contribute financially to the service and the Council would continue to liaise with the County Council which was responsible for funding the current route.

Councillor Hopkins asked a supplementary question, “for those who still feel the 20 bus service didn’t represent their needs or requirements, how do they raise it with the County Council?”

The Leader responded that Councillors and residents could contact the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport at the County Council, Councillor M. Rouse. Councillor May also offered to arrange to meet with Councillor Rouse and interested District Councillors to discuss the situation, potentially meeting in Bromsgrove.

102\23

### **MOTIONS ON NOTICE**

The Chairman reported that three Motions on Notice had been submitted for the meeting.

#### **Options for a Relief Road**

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

“Council notes the loss of the proposed route for the western relief road as a result of planning permission being given for housing development. Council believes a detailed study into alternative options for a relief road is now urgently required in order that chronic traffic congestion can be



addressed. Council further believes that Bromsgrove District Council should commission its own independent study, as part of the development of the next local plan and calls on officers to produce a business case for the Cabinet to consider within the next six months.”

In proposing the Motion Councillor Hunter referred to the increasing concern from residents in Bromsgrove about the level of congestion in the town. Although some of this had been caused by temporary work on the roads, he considered it demonstrated a lack of resilience in the road infrastructure in the town. He did not consider that anticipated modal shift to public transport and cycling would be achieved, for example as there was a lack of availability of public transport in Bromsgrove. He suggested that new road infrastructure could be constructed in a more sustainable way than it might in the past and it was now an appropriate time to consider the options available to relieve traffic in the town centre to inform future debate.

The Motion was seconded by Councillor J. Robinson.

During debate on the Motion the view was expressed that the Strategic Transport Assessment would address this issue. A separate report was not necessary as it would duplicate work being undertaken in the Assessment at taxpayers' expense.

Councillor P.M. McDonald proposed, and Councillor H.D.N. Rone-Clark seconded an amendment that consideration of the Motion be deferred until the outcome of the Strategic Transport Assessment was known.

During consideration of the amendment, the view was expressed that the Assessment would not address the issues that the proposed study would consider, such as the viability of routes for a relief road. The study was therefore needed to inform debate about the potential options available and deferral was not appropriate.

Another member referred to the Strategic Planning Steering Group meeting in November where members had been briefed about the Strategic Transport Assessment. There would be the opportunity to attend future meetings about the modelling being used and to influence the content. In their view this meant that a separate study was not needed.

A member expressed the view that the nature of transport would be changing over time and the most effective way to address future needs was to participate in the Strategic Transport Assessment rather than keep the possibility of a separate study by deferring discussion of it.

On being put to the vote the amendment was lost.

During further consideration of the Motion, the view was expressed that a stand-alone report justifying a solution without looking at the bigger picture was unlikely to be successful. Wider options should be part of

the approach to take into account sustainable transport and public transport so that this was in place for consideration of future development sites. A member suggested that current works on the road infrastructure would not improve the traffic situation in Bromsgrove. Residents on the west side of the town would still have to go through the centre to cross the town and this meant consideration should be given to a study which would give options for addressing this issue.

In accordance with Procedure Rule 18.3 Councillor J. Robinson asked for a recorded name vote and votes were recorded as follows:

Members voting FOR the proposal to commission a study about a relief road:

Councillors S.M. Evans, R.J. Hunter, D.J. Nicholl, J.W. Robinson and S.A. Robinson (5)

Members voting AGAINST the proposal:

Councillors S. Ammar, A. Bailes, S. Baxter, S.R. Colella, A.M. Dale, D.J.A Forsythe, E.M.S. Gray, D. Hopkins, C. Hotham, B. Kumar, M. Marshall, K.J. May, P.M. McDonald, S.T. Nock, S.R. Peters, H.D.N. Rone-Clarke, J.D. Stanley, K. Taylor, S.A. Webb and P.J. Whittaker (20)

Members ABSTAINING from the vote:

Cllr B.M. McEldowney (1)

(Councillor H. Jones left the room during consideration of the Motion and prior to the vote so was not included in the recorded vote).

On being put to the vote the Motion was declared lost.

### **Out of Hours Service**

The Council considered the following Motion on Notice submitted by Councillor Stewart, which was proposed by Councillor Rone-Clark in his absence:

“Out of hour GP services play an important role in reducing the pressure on Accident and Emergency Departments. Currently arrangements in Worcestershire mean that patients, a significant number being children or elderly, have to travel to Redditch, Worcester or Kidderminster for appointments. Services are provided locally in smaller towns, namely Malvern and Evesham. There is not an out of hours Primary Care Centre in Bromsgrove District. Facilities at The Princess of Wales Hospital could be used to provide this service locally for Bromsgrove residents.

We therefore call upon the Leader of the Council to write to Hereford and Worcestershire Integrated Care Board to ask them to address this inequality of provision of care.”

In proposing the Motion, Councillor Rone-Clark referred to discussions at a recent Overview and Scrutiny meeting about the lack of accessible primary care for Bromsgrove residents. He referred to primary care playing an important part in preventing the escalation of care and treatment needs.

The Motion was seconded by Councillor B. Kumar. He referred to the increase in the population in Bromsgrove, in particular an ageing population and the potential for long term illness which could be treated effectively in primary care. The current difficulty patients experienced in accessing GP services meant they used the Out of Hours service by telephone and online (NHS 111) and were often referred from that to the Alexandra Hospital in Redditch. This added travel issues and cost to the patient’s experience. There were often delays in seeing health professionals at the hospital which compounded frailty issues. There had been an out of hours service at the Princess of Wales Hospital in Bromsgrove until the Covid pandemic, so the infrastructure was available. Councillor Kumar referred to a recent Health Overview and Scrutiny meeting at the County Council where the Chief Executive of the Integrated Care Board had reported that there would be new funding available for out of hours services. He suggested that the Council should put together a case for the reintroduction of out of hours services in Bromsgrove.

The Leader referred to excellent access to GP services in parts of the district but it was not consistent. She supported the Motion and reported that the procurement of the Out of Hours Service was due to begin this year with the new contract starting in July 2025.

**RESOLVED** that

Out of hour GP services play an important role in reducing the pressure on Accident and Emergency Departments. Currently arrangements in Worcestershire mean that patients, a significant number being children or elderly, have to travel to Redditch, Worcester or Kidderminster for appointments. Services are provided locally in smaller towns, namely Malvern and Evesham. There is not an out of hours Primary Care Centre in Bromsgrove District. Facilities at The Princess of Wales Hospital could be used to provide this service locally for Bromsgrove residents.

We therefore call upon the Leader of the Council to write to Hereford and Worcestershire Integrated Care Board to ask them to address this inequality of provision of care.

## **Awareness of Private Sector Housing Support**

The Council considered the following Motion on Notice submitted by Councillor J. Robinson:

“Bromsgrove District Council’s private sector housing team plays a vital role in protecting tenants from poor quality housing. However too many residents in need of help are unaware that the service exists.

Council resolves to run a full awareness campaign about the help available to those in substandard housing as soon as possible so nobody in our community is left to suffer in poor quality housing.”

Councillor Robinson proposed the Motion and referred to the excellent support that officers in the Private Sector Housing Team provided for residents and landlords of private sector housing and to Councillors who were dealing with such issues in their wards. He suggested that although there were many good landlords, some did not ensure their properties were at an appropriate standard. Many landlords and members of the public were not aware of the support available and a dedicated publicity campaign was necessary to encourage residents and landlords to approach the Team for help at an early stage.

The Motion was seconded by Councillor S. Robinson.

Councillor M. Marshall proposed an amendment to the final sentence of the Motion, replacing the words ‘to run a full awareness campaign’ with ‘to build on the current awareness campaign’. Help was already available and the Council had committed to extending work on its housing strategy as demonstrated by including additional resource in the budget for 2024/2025.

The amendment was seconded by Councillor S. Webb, who referred to an awareness campaign already being undertaken and details of the services available would be included in the information circulated with Council Tax bills. She suggested that the Renters Reform Bill currently going through Parliament and expected to achieve Royal Assent in the Autumn would place additional enforcement duties on the Council, and it would be a suitable time to undertake an additional campaign of awareness for the Private Sector Housing Team and the services it would provide to both renters and landlords.

The amendment to the Motion was accepted by the proposer and became the substantive Motion.

During consideration of the Motion members expressed their appreciation for the work carried out by the Private Sector Housing Team and noted that officers were working on a presentation for Councillors on housing services which would include details about the role of Bromsgrove District Housing Trust. The view was expressed that once the Renters Reform Bill became law then the Council could tailor

the publicity campaign appropriately. It was suggested however that if there was a delay in the Renters Reform Bill becoming law a full campaign should still go ahead.

**RESOLVED** that

Bromsgrove District Council's private sector housing team plays a vital role in protecting tenants from poor quality housing. However too many residents in need of help are unaware that the service exists.

Council resolves to build on the current awareness campaign about the help available to those in substandard housing as soon as possible so nobody in our community is left to suffer in poor quality housing.

The meeting closed at 9.06 p.m.

Chairman