

**BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD**

**11TH MARCH 2024, AT 6.00 P.M.**

PRESENT: Councillors P. M. McDonald (Chairman), S. T. Nock (Vice-Chairman), A. Bailes, R. Bailes, A. M. Dale, E. M. S. Gray, R. J. Hunter, B. Kumar, J. Robinson (Substitute), M. Marshall (Substitute) and D. J. A. Forsythe (Substitute)

Observers:

Councillor S. J. Baxter (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Regeneration),

Councillor C. A. Hotham (Cabinet Member for Finance and Enabling),

Councillor P. J. Whittaker (Cabinet Member for Environmental Services and Community Safety (including Car Parking))

Officers: Mr. G. Revans, Ms J. Willis, Mrs. C. Felton (on Microsoft Teams), Mr. M. Dunphy (on Microsoft Teams), Mrs L. Berry (on Microsoft Teams), Ms. B. Houghton (on Microsoft Teams), Ms. M. Worsfold (on Microsoft Teams), and Mr. M. Sliwinski.

84/23

**APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J. D. Stanley, H. D. N. Rone-Clarke, and S. A. Robinson, who were substituted at the meeting by Councillors D. J. A. Forsythe, M. Marshall, and J. W. Robinson respectively.

85/23

**DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND WHIPPING ARRANGEMENTS**

There were no declarations of interest nor declarations of party whip.

86/23

**TO CONFIRM THE ACCURACY OF THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD HELD ON 12TH FEBRUARY 2024**

The minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting held on 12<sup>th</sup> February 2024 were considered.

It was requested by a Member that, in relation to the minute record for item 72/23 – Libraries Unlocked – Worcestershire County Council Presentation, the following verbatim record of questions asked by Members and responses provided, be appended to the minutes record for the meeting of Overview and Scrutiny Board on 12<sup>th</sup> February 2024:

**Question:** *“You talked about positive customer response [to Libraries Unlocked]. How did you go about getting that information? How many people were surveyed? I would also like to know how you are going to work through the detail of the future of the Libraries Unlocked as you will be aware that Alvechurch Library is under PFI arrangement and any change in the opening hours would be a cost to the County Council and [the Libraries Unlocked] will actually mean a decrease in some of the groups that are very successful and very well respected in the area”*

**Response:** *“You are absolutely right about Alvechurch and whilst I cannot provide a definitive yes or no in terms of Libraries Unlocked, bearing in mind the PFI limitations of what we can do, it feels it is more likely to be a no in terms of Libraries Unlocked perspective. As part of the business case that we did to identify the 12 potential libraries going forward (for implementation of phase two of Libraries Unlocked), there was a return on investment for each library where we introduce Libraries Unlocked as there is a capital investment to introduce the new technology. We have to assess the return based around staffing reductions, then obviously taking into account increasing revenue, costs, usage, etc. [The libraries are] examined in turn to make sure that return on investment is still valid. It may well be that at Alvechurch there is no return on investment because of the PFI aspects, but we have not finalised [return on investment assessment] yet.” [Response was also provided about customer satisfaction: that a survey of Libraries Unlocked customers was undertaken in October 2022. Officers undertook to provide a response to Members about the results of this survey in a separate communication once information were retrieved.]*

**Question:** *“...My concern at the moment through is the staff, because when they go to work, they are trying to be really positive. They are superb. They are not just librarians. They are knowledge managers. And what they are finding is they get into work, and they have builders or surveyors come in working around them. I mean, it is an appalling way to treat people.”*

**Response:** *“We have run staff engagement sessions, staff awareness sessions as part of implementing libraries unlocked and so staff are aware of the situation. We have also held on to so many vacancies. We are pleased that up to this point there have been no need for any staff redundancies or anybody losing their job and we would look to continue with that approach throughout any further implementation of Libraries Unlocked. We have run staff consultations and we have had some positive response to Libraries Unlocked from staff and they are formally consulted at each library if we think that Libraries Unlocked is going to be implemented at that library. The decision on whether Libraries Unlocked is to be implemented has not yet been made in Alvechurch, Wythall or Hagley, and it has for Rubery and Bromsgrove (Town) libraries where the scheme will be going ahead.*

**Question:** *“What does scale-up mean?”*

**Response:** *“It means we are able to keep libraries open if we need to make more efficiencies. It is a way of keeping libraries open but still delivering further efficiencies should we need to. There are no plans but if there is a requirement to deliver savings, then we have a way of doing it which protects libraries from closing.”*

**Question:** *“My next question is relating to free meeting room hire by partners. What does partners mean and why are you doing it for free?”*

**Response:** *“We have a wide range of partners that we work with across our library network from your local voluntary sector organisation that will run things for children, knit and natter group, through to formalised sessions with youth workers. So there is a full range and we have purposely offered free meeting space within libraries unlocked hours to encourage people to use the space. We can review that over time in terms of whether it is well used. We do charge for meeting rooms in libraries. We are proposing to not put a fee on meeting rooms’ hire during libraries unlocked hours. There would still be an expectation in terms of how the meeting rooms are used during those hours.”*

During the consideration of this item, the Board moved into exempt session to discuss specific points within the exempt minutes record of the meeting of Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting which took place on 12<sup>th</sup> February 2024. It was thus:

**RESOLVED:** that under Section 100 I of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended, the public be excluded from the meeting during the remainder of consideration of the following item(s) of business on the grounds that it/they involve(s) the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Part I of scheme 12A to the Act, as amended, the relevant paragraph of that part, in each case, being as set out below and that it is in the public interest to do so:-

Item No	Paragraph
3	3 and 4

Following discussion of the exempt matters, the Board moved to go back into the public session. It was then:

**RESOLVED** that, subject to the amendment in the pre-ambule above, the minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting held on 12<sup>th</sup> February 2024 be agreed as a true and correct record.

(During the consideration of this item, Members discussed matters that necessitated the disclosure of exempt information. It was therefore agreed to move to exclude the press and public prior to any debate of exempt matters on the grounds that information would be revealed which related to the financial and business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information) and which

related to any consultations or negotiations, or contemplated consultations or negotiations, in connection with any labour relations matter arising between the authority or a Minister of the Crown and employees of, or office holders under, the authority).

87/23

### **GOVERNANCE SYSTEMS REVIEW - IMPLEMENTATION PROGRESS UPDATE**

The Head of Legal, Democratic and Property Services provided an update on the work that was being undertaken to implement the recommendations arising from the Governance Systems Task Group review that was completed in September 2023. It was reported that since Council approved the group's recommendations on 20<sup>th</sup> September 2023, the Constitution Review Working Group (CRWG) had already made a number of recommendations which were approved by Members at meetings of full Council. This included approval of Cabinet Advisory Group (CAG) terms of reference, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for Cross Party Working, and certain amendments to the Committee Terms of Reference and Council Procedure Rules.

The next meeting of the CRWG was due to take place on 12<sup>th</sup> March 2024. Any recommendations arising from that meeting which relate to the outcomes of the Governance Systems Task Group report would be reported for the consideration of the Overview and Scrutiny Board at its April meeting.

Members queried when guidance would be released with respect of the Cabinet Advisory Group (CAG). It was noted that this would be released in advance of the new municipal year. A Member also requested that Terms of Reference for the CAG be provided. It was explained that this was previously provided and would be recirculated to Members.

**RESOLVED** that the update in respect of progress with the implementation of actions arising from the Governance Systems Task Group be noted.

88/23

### **LOCAL HERITAGE LIST STRATEGY - PRE-SCRUTINY**

The Principal Conservation Officer presented the Local Heritage List Strategy report. During the presentation it was highlighted that this report provided an update on progress of the Local Heritage List Strategy adopted in 2016. It was noted that there had been progress in compiling the list, however, there had been issues faced, particularly with the public engagement element of the Strategy. The report therefore asked for an updated version of the Strategy to be approved.

Members' attention was drawn to the summary of the Local Heritage List Strategy contained within the report which included information regarding the value of heritage assets to local communities. It was noted that Bromsgrove District Plan (2017) acknowledged the importance of

adopting a Local List to formally identify the locally important heritage assets within the District.

Officers reported that criteria for inclusion on the Local Heritage List had been identified, and included Age, Authenticity and Rarity, Architectural Interest, Historic Interest, and Townscape / Villagescape / Landscape Interest. Of these criteria, an asset needed to satisfy the first criterion (Age) and at least one of the other four criteria in order to be included on the List.

Historic England provided guidance in respect of Local Heritage Listings. This guidance underscored the importance of community engagement within local heritage listing process. It was explained that prior to the work on the Local Heritage lists for Beoley and Dodford, public consultation events were held to gain public feedback on the draft conservation areas for both Beoley and Dodford. At these events, the Local Heritage Lists were publicised. It was noted by Officers that public response had been limited, however, with only a handful of nominations received from the public. Officers clarified that there were around ten responses in total.

It was reported that in the original Local Heritage List Strategy, nominations for inclusion on the list were to be assessed by an assessment panel which would consider the suitability of the nominated asset against the selection criteria. However, since the original strategy had been adopted, the resource available to the Conservation Team had doubled. This enabled internal benchmarking of the proposed lists to take place. Therefore, the assessment panel's role had become less relevant compared to the public engagement element, which continued to be considered extremely important. Due to this, it was proposed that the assessment panel be discontinued in favour of a more detailed public engagement.

A further change since the original strategy was adopted in 2016 was the increased use of the Council's website and social media resources for promotion. Officers explained that this extra resource would be utilised to increase public engagement as part of the proposed update to the process. In addition, there would also be engagement opportunities for local Ward Councillors, Parish Councillors and building owners as part of the new process.

One area highlighted was that a degree of confusion might have been caused when the public was originally being asked to nominate buildings or structures for the Local Heritage List, possibly because there was insufficient explanation of the difference between national and local listing, and what might qualify a building for inclusion on the Local Heritage List. It was hoped that by producing draft lists, which will include details of how the criteria were being met for each proposed structure, residents would be encouraged to suggest other buildings or comment on those proposed for inclusion.

The Principal Conservation Officer stated that heritage assets identified on the local list would be recognised by the Authority as having heritage significance, and would therefore merit consideration in planning matters. When considering planning applications which impact on heritage assets on the local list, the Local Planning Authority (LPA) would be required to take a balanced judgement having regard to the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the heritage asset, in determining the application.

In terms of how the draft lists would be presented, Officers stated that there would be a half page summary of the heritage asset, which included a brief description, the assessment of criteria and a location map of the site.

It was noted that draft lists had been prepared in respect of Beoley, Alvechurch, Belbroughton and Dodford. These lists added 140 properties to the draft Local Heritage List, and covered a diverse range of properties including houses, schools, village halls, places of worship and canal infrastructure. Work was now underway to prepare draft lists on Bromsgrove, Lickey and Blackwell and Wythall.

Following the presentation of the report, detailed discussion took place on the following aspects:

- Advantages of having a local heritage list – Officers stated that a local heritage list was not compulsory and not all authorities had such a list. However, there were advantages to having the list in that local heritage could be formally identified and its significance taken into account in planning applications affecting the building or the site in question.
- Involvement of Ward Members in identification of local heritage assets – Members expressed disappointment that to date there had been no direct involvement of Ward Councillors in preparing the draft lists. It was argued that Councillors had direct knowledge of their areas and were able to suggest heritage assets to Officers. It was agreed as a recommendation to Cabinet that Ward Councillors be directly involved in the consultation process for the Local Heritage List (LHL) in their respective ward areas. This recommendation was put to the vote and carried.
- Timeframe for finalization of Bromsgrove's Local Heritage List (LHL) –Members were of the view that that a final and formalised Local Heritage List would provide an important tool when considering planning applications and would also be a way of promoting heritage assets and thereby attracting visitors to the area. It was agreed for recommendation that a suitable timescale for completing works on the final local heritage list was eighteen months. This recommendation was put to the vote and carried. The Board also agreed that Officers should provide the Board with a quarterly update in respect of progress in compiling the

final LHL. A project plan for delivering the final LHL would be provided at the next meeting of Overview and Scrutiny in April 2024.

- Heritage asset designations – It was explained that non-designated heritage assets (NDHA) were buildings, monuments, sites, places, areas or landscapes identified as having a degree of significance meriting consideration in planning decisions because of their heritage interest but which did not meet the criteria for designated heritage assets listing (as defined in Annex 2 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)). As such the NDHA did not carry a heritage asset status in planning applications and was a lower-level recognition of a heritage asset than a Local Heritage List (LHL). In turn, locally listed buildings would include structures which would not quite meet the criteria for being nationally listed (and given legal protection), but which are still of architectural or historical importance in their local area.
- Heritage assets in unparished areas of the District – It was reiterated by Members that unparished areas within the District also needed to be given due consideration as part of the work on the Local Heritage List (LHL). The Chairman pointed to the example of Rubery ward, which had a rich history of local heritage properties such as Nailers' and Button Cottages. Members reiterated that local Ward Members could provide useful information in respect of the assets within their wards.

**RECOMMENDED:**

- 1) That District Ward Councillors be directly involved in the consultation process for the Local Heritage List (LHL) in their respective ward areas.
- 2) That the final Local Heritage List (LHL) for Bromsgrove, covering the whole district, be completed and published within the next 18 months.

89/23

**BROMSGROVE CENTRES ACTION PLAN REVIEW 2024-25 - PRE-SCRUTINY**

The Bromsgrove Centres Manager presented the Bromsgrove Centres Action Plan Review 2024/25 for Members' consideration. It was highlighted that the Bromsgrove Centres Strategy and Action Plan for 2023-2026 was approved by Members in January 2023. The Action Plan set out Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness and success of the Strategy and Action Plan. These KPIs included budget monitoring, and actions, and responses in respect of certain projects. Outstanding actions from the previous action plan would be carried forward and continued in the 2024/25 municipal year.

Following the presentation of the report there was a detailed discussion regarding aspects of the Bromsgrove Centres Action Plan. This included the following areas:

- Village Centres outside of Bromsgrove Town – Members reiterated that wards such as Alvechurch, Barnt Green and Rubery also had vibrant high streets. Members asked questions with respect of what initiatives had been planned in those Village Centres. Officers confirmed that initiatives such as Shopwatch scheme could be replicated in the outlying Centres. It was further stated that the Action Plan included specific actions with respect of Village Centres including Rubery, Alvechurch, Aston Fields, Catshill, Hagley and Wythall.
- The Board agreed that it be recommended to Cabinet that the action plan be named as Bromsgrove District Centres Action Plan to emphasise that it was intended to target all wards in Bromsgrove. On being put to the vote this recommendation was carried.
- Shopwatch Scheme and reporting of shoplifting to the Police – It was reported that the Shopwatch scheme would be launched in March / April 2024. Collaboration with Redditch Business Improvement District was embedded within the Scheme to ensure a linked approach in deterring shoplifting and anti-social behaviour in retail outlets across Bromsgrove and Redditch. The Scheme was supported by the Police, Bromsgrove and Redditch Councils, and the Community Safety Team. Some Members raised concerns that the Scheme was unlikely to be effective unless the Police increased its level of support and responsiveness that it provided to retailers. Officers responded that the Shopwatch Scheme was being launched on request of the retailers in Bromsgrove Town Centre. The Scheme would provide businesses with access to the Disc Platform, a digital reporting platform which shops and businesses could use to report shoplifting incidents. This would be important as it would allow retailers to log evidence of the incident. It was hoped that this would contribute to better response and prosecution of shoplifting.
- Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) in Bromsgrove Town Centre – Some Members expressed disappointment that despite a TRO being in force in the Town Centre, it was ineffective due to lack of bollards blocking the entrance to the Town Centre at Church Street. This meant vehicles were still able to access the pedestrian zone outside of loading hours. The Bromsgrove Centres Manager responded that feedback was being awaited from Worcestershire County Council. It was stated that amendments to TRO would require a consultation on delivery times and other requirements with businesses.

- Shop frontages enforcement – It was explained that the Council had taken steps to encourage businesses to improve the appearance of shop frontages. Through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF), shop frontage improvement grants were provided to the Council. As part of this, an additional member of staff had been in place to support the Bromsgrove Centres Manager in writing to businesses advising them of the grants available to help with improving shop frontages. For premises, where a poor quality of appearance was identified and which had not responded to communications from the Council, there were further possible enforcement options, including powers available to issue Community Protection Warnings (CPW), which could be upgraded to Community Protection Notice (CPN), if no action was being taken by the premises. The use of powers under Section 215 (s215) of the Town & Country Planning Act 1990 were also available, which provided a local planning authority (LPA) with the power, in certain circumstances, to take steps to improve the condition of buildings.
- Implementation of the Levelling Up Fund (LUF) public realm grant improvements – Members requested information on specific projects including timeframe within which repairs to flower baskets could be carried out in Rubery Centre. It was responded that approval would be required from Worcestershire County Council for this, however, the Officer undertook to provide information about the timeframe for this project.
- Bromsgrove Youth and Community Hub – It was noted that this initiative was operated by the voluntary sector. It was requested that Officers provide information on how much funding the Council provided to this initiative.
- Vacant Units on Bromsgrove High Street – It was reported that the number of vacant units were reported in November each year. The figure for Bromsgrove High Street was 15 vacant units as of November 2023. However, the more up-to-date figure was available for March 2024 which showed this decreased to 13 vacant units.
- Strategies to attract investment to Bromsgrove Centres – It was reported that Bromsgrove Centres Manager had been in direct contact with landlords and letting agents about opportunities to fill vacant units and attract business investment to Bromsgrove.

### **RECOMMENDED**

- 1) that the action plan be named 'Bromsgrove District Centres Action Plan' to emphasise that it is targeting centres in all wards of the District.

- 2) the Bromsgrove Centres Action Plan 2024/25 attached at Appendix 2 be approved.

90/23

**REVIEW OF THE WORK OF NORTH WORCESTERSHIRE COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP 2023-24**

The Community Safety Manager provided a detailed presentation updating Members on the work of the North Worcestershire Community Safety Partnership (NWCSP) in Bromsgrove District. It was highlighted that Bromsgrove Council's representation on the NWCSP consisted of the Portfolio Holder for Environmental Services and Community Safety, the Council's Chief Executive as Chair of NWCSP, and the Head of Community and Housing Services who acts as the Responsible Authority representative on the Partnership. The Community Safety Manager provided co-ordination support to NWCSP and manages the Council's Community Safety Service

It was explained that local authorities had a statutory duty to scrutinise the work of its local Community Safety Partnership, under Section 19 of the Police and Justice Act 2006. There was also a direct role for the Council in holding the West Mercia Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) to account through the West Mercia Police and Crime Panel (PCP).

The following information were highlighted for Members' consideration in the presentation:

- The NWCSP had a duty to produce a three-year rolling plan outlining how the Partnership intends to address key crime and community safety priorities, as identified through an annual strategic assessment based on research, evidence and intelligence from national, regional and local sources.
- The current priorities of the North Worcestershire Community Safety Partnership Plan 2021-24 were: Reducing Violence and Abuse, Reducing Theft and Acquisitive Crime, Reducing Anti-Social Behaviour, Damage and Nuisance, Protecting Vulnerable Communities. In addition, there were two cross cutting themes that the Partnership focused on across the four priorities, and these were Reducing the Harm caused by Drug and Alcohol Misuse and Reducing Re-Offending.
- The North Worcestershire Community Safety Partnership Plan 2021-24 was currently being reviewed. A new community safety action plan for North Worcestershire CSP for 2024 to 2027 was being developed in draft and was to be agreed by NWCSP in April / May 2024.
- As part of the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) CCTV Capital Fund, there had been significant funding allocated to develop and upgrade CCTV across the West Mercia force area. NWCSP first received an allocation of £195,000 for improvements to the area's CCTV scheme. This funding was used across the three Local Authorities (Bromsgrove, Redditch, Wyre Forest) to

modernise the CCTV infrastructure. As a result of this upgrade the whole CCTV scheme now had enhanced digital capability, improved image quality and a greater capacity to expand the scheme and/or link up to other digital systems across the region.

- Between 2020-22, the PCC allocated an additional £130,000 of capital funding towards CCTV that was used for continued enhancement of the capability and capacity of the CCTV scheme. The funding provided improvements to technological aspects of the Monitoring Centre. It also enabled recommendation from a Council Task and Finish Group to provide redeployable cameras to be funded and they are being used to respond to emerging areas of concern across the three areas in North Worcestershire. A further £20,000 funding was provided in 2022-23 but no further allocation for CCTV capital funding for 2023-24.
- Following a request by Overview and Scrutiny last year, an update on the use of anti-social behaviour tools and powers in the district was provided. It was reported that a total of 16 Community Protection Warnings (CPWs) were issued in the period 2023-24. The Community Safety Team issued 7 of these. The Police in conjunction with relevant Housing Associations issued 4 warnings and a Housing Association independently issued another 2 CPWs. Environmental Services issued 2 CPWs in relation to waste and unsightly property and Planning issued 1 CPW in relation to a derelict building.
- Only two formal Community Protection Notices followed the earlier issue of the CPWs and these were served by the Police during the same reporting period. This was reported as positive and mirrors the national experience that early use of CPW measures can deter escalation of ASB and prevent the need for more serious enforcement action.
- Details were provided of the various national and local campaigns which were supported by the Community Safety Team throughout 2023/24 to promote key safety messages and the work of NWCSP.
- Details of the NWCSP Core Funding spend for 2023-24, amounting to total of £139,250, were provided, in addition to Safer Bromsgrove – Tasking Fund 2023-24 which totaled £11,014.
- It was noted that the Community Safety Team within the Council had two College of Policing qualified Design Out Crime Officers (DOCO) who could review planning applications, making appropriate crime prevention and security recommendations with the aim of making future building developments less vulnerable to crime and disorder.

Following the presentation, a number of matters were discussed by Members.

Members enquired about the White Ribbon Domestic Abuse Campaign. It was explained that the Annual White Ribbon Domestic Abuse Campaign took place in the form of 16 days of action from 25<sup>th</sup>

November to 10<sup>th</sup> December 2023. During the 16 days, the Community Safety Team interacted directly with the public, hosting a Domestic Abuse Awareness stall on Bromsgrove High Street on 5<sup>th</sup> December and supporting various Domestic Abuse campaigns on social media sharing information and content from local and national support services and agencies. Officers were asked to explore the possibility of the Council signing up to the Women's Night Safety Charter.

Members highlighted that most of the community safety projects and initiatives set out in the report covered areas around Bromsgrove Town Centre and there were not many projects that operated in outlying wards. Questions were raised whether more community projects could be provided in outlying wards. Officers responded that efforts were being made to support local projects in the outermost areas; however, it often proved difficult to find suitable providers to undertake the projects in those areas. An example was provided of the Youth Services Funding which is commissioned by the Community Safety Team on behalf of Worcestershire County Council and through which £87,000 was provided to youth organisations in Bromsgrove. It was reported that in many areas of the district, no providers had submitted applications for this funding. Officers further explained that elected members had a significant role in raising awareness about the lack of specific provision in their communities. For example, in Hagley, a District Councillor raised a concern directly with the Community Safety Team about lack of youth club provision and in response to the publicity given to this issue a youth club provider was subsequently found.

Some Members raised concerns about lack of community safety outreach work in outlying wards in the district. It was responded by Officers that outreach work was undertaken by voluntary and community sector (VCS). Specific comments were made on the Asset Based Community Development in Rubery and a lack of suitably qualified youth outreach worker in the Rubery wards. Members were informed that elected Members were able to submit a request for outreach workers to the Community Safety Team.

Members raised concerns about pockets of anti-social behaviour (ASB) hotspots in Bromsgrove Town Centre, particularly around empty properties. A particular issue was highlighted with an empty property at Blackmore Lane which had been subject to arson. In this context, Members asked what the Council could do to encourage empty buildings back to life. The Officers commented that the Council had a role in identifying buildings causing risk to community safety and where this was identified the Council tried to work with the landowner(s) to bring properties back into use. The Council also had powers to intervene in limited circumstances where the properties were unsafe and adversely affected the community.

It was requested that ward Members be involved and notified by the Community Safety Team of actions taken in ASB hotspots such as the Nimmings Wood National Trust Car Park.

Questions were asked about the NWCSP funded knife arch. It was explained that this was a walkthrough metal detector which was placed at Bromsgrove Train Station to tackle potential knife crime including activity related to county lines. It was further explained that the knife arch use by NWCSP throughout 2023 with various operations and knife surrender campaigns. During the Knife Crime Awareness week in May 2023, members of the public were encouraged to hand-in unwanted knives to prevent them from getting into the wrong hands and being used in crime.

Members enquired about a Community Protection Notice (CPN) case study with respect of long-standing nuisance from off-road motorcycles. It was explained that this was an enforcement action which resulted in the issuance of CPN. Subsequently, substantial works to secure the land by the landowner were carried out, supported by the local authority and partners, which saw a dramatic reduction in the nuisance. However, there remained a few determined offenders who continued to gain access to the land creating nuisance to the residents living opposite. Due to the prior CPN process being largely successful in reducing the nuisance that residents experienced, they felt more confident to provide intelligence about the remaining offenders. As a result, the Council was able to issue seven Community Protection Warnings (CPW) to the registered keepers of vehicles transporting the off-road motorcycles to the site.

Some Members questioned what evidence there was of crime reduction that was a direct result of investment in CCTV through the CCTV Capital Fund. Some Members expressed the view that while CCTV was of sufficient quality to identify perpetrators, which was deemed to be of sufficient quality to identify perpetrators, there were issues with the agencies, including the Police, to use CCTV footage as evidence when prosecuting the perpetrators. Officers explained that there were strict Codes of Practice that public bodies needed to follow when utilising surveillance CCTV footage, including as evidence of crime. Members were invited to visit the CCTV Monitoring Centre located at Redditch Town Hall to observe the capability of the system. It was reiterated by a Member reiterated that not enough was done to ensure that CCTV was used to its full capability to prosecute offenders and felt disappointed that the Police was not invited to the meeting.

The Portfolio Holder for Environmental Services and Community Safety was invited to speak. The Portfolio Holder thanked the Community Safety Manager for the detailed presentation on the NWCSP and thanked the Community Safety Team for their work. The Portfolio Holder highlighted the great range of initiatives that the NWCSP was involved in and the difference this was making to community safety in Bromsgrove.

**RESOLVED** that the Scrutiny of the North Worcestershire Community Safety Partnership be noted.

91/23

## **COST OF LIVING FUNDING PROPOSAL - PRE-SCRUTINY**

The Head of Community and Housing Services presented the Cost of Living Funding proposal. In doing so, the following was highlighted:

- In 2020-21 the Council allocated £50,000 to support the Community Hubs initiative. Further allocations were made in 2021-22 and 2022-23 equalling a total budget of £150,000. It was confirmed that this budget was currently sat in earmarked reserves.
- In February 2020 the budget was approved by Cabinet as a revenue bid to support the development of Worcestershire County Council (WCC) Community Hubs in Libraries initiative across the District.
- Following a new direction of travel by WCC, this budget was never provided to the County Council. Therefore, the £150,000 funding remained within reserves.
- Due to the Cost of Living crisis, the report was asking for the funding to be directed to a Cost-of-Living initiative. This proposal followed a multi-agency Cost of Living Group was established with partners such as WCC, Bromsgrove District Housing Trust (BDHT) and other partners. Following discussions at this group, two surveys were carried out, in order to better understand the specific needs of local communities.
- The findings from the surveys highlighted that the cost-of-living crisis was affecting a broad range of residents not just those who were in receipt of state benefits or on lower income. The surveys also established that financial management advice might ease pressure on residents but that this could not be the only solution. It was suggested that more information was needed to provide support to mortgage holders who were struggling with their mortgages, those who had faced food insecurity in the last six months, and those residents who had gone without essentials, such as shower or cleaning items including clothes.
- Section 3.7 of the report included a proposal for allocating £150,000 earmarked reserve for one-off investments of a Citizen's Advice specialist housing adviser at £52,000, voluntary sector money adviser at £32,000, and enhancing the support of the Council's Financial Inclusion at £42,000. This would be for a 14-month period.

Following the presentation of the report, Members asked questions and discussed matters as set out below:

- It was queried why the amount outlined in the report equated to only £126,000 rather than the full amount of £150,000. It was confirmed that the amounts contained within the report were per annum and as the trial period took place over fourteen months the

outstanding amount of £24,000 would cover the final two months of the roles.

- Members commented that there were a number of voluntary and community organisations in the district, for example foodbanks, which were already providing budgetary advice to those residents accessing their provision. This was often done alongside the main work of those voluntary organisations. Officers responded that feedback received from the Bromsgrove's voluntary and community sector (VCS) was that a voluntary sector money adviser would greatly assist these organisations in providing budgetary advice to those residents who access these community services. The voluntary sector money adviser would be able to attend community support settings to provide specialist advice on aspects such as debt management, budgeting, benefits and entitlements, crisis intervention, emotional support and referrals. The voluntary organisations would be able to put forward proposals if they feel they and their users would benefit from this support.
- Members highlighted that there was a need for specialist housing advisers in many wards and queried how one specialist housing adviser would be able to cover all the wards in the district. It was responded that the specialist housing adviser would sit within Citizen's Advice Bureau (CAB) and the post holder would be expected to engage with voluntary sector organisations to identify residents in need of support. It was highlighted that the post holder would be in addition to the existing voluntary sector provision already available across the district.
- Members were informed that the emphasis of the roles would be on providing outreach services such as at libraries and in community settings. This would include liaison with the Parish Councils. As part of the Cost-of-Living Group, the posts were expected to join up across agencies and with all partners. The proposal in the report would be a trial for 14 months with a view to it informing a lottery bid by the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) to further sustain the work. If the lottery bid was successful any monies not spent on the project would be put back in to reserves.
- It was hoped the investments outlined in the report would help with timely processing of Household Support Fund (HSF) applications by the Citizen's Advice Bureau and the Council.
- It was clarified that the agreement in respect of the £71,000 for the housing strategy monitoring implementation of the renter reform requirements, agreed at the full Council meeting on 14<sup>th</sup> February 2024 as part of the Medium Term Financial Plan (Tranche 2) report, concerned an increase from 1.4 to 2.5 FTE Private Sector Housing Officers. This was to account for the increased statutory duties that are being placed on Private Sector Housing Teams considering recent damp and mould issues raised nationally.

- Funding proposed as part of this report was for a different type of housing support officer who would work within CAB and provide specialist housing advice to residents.

**RECOMMENDED** that:

£150,000 contained within earmarked reserves be allocated as a one-off investment to support the estimated costs of the following cost of living initiatives as set in section 3.7:

- (a) Citizen's Advice specialist housing adviser - £52k
- (b) Voluntary sector money adviser - £32k
- (c) Enhancing the support of the Council's Financial Inclusion Team - £42k

92/23

**IMPACT OF HEATWAVES SHORT SHARP REVIEW - MEMBERSHIP REPORT**

The membership of the short, sharp review was confirmed. It was agreed that the Review Group would elect a chairman at its first meeting. The terms of reference would also be agreed by the task group at its first meeting.

**RESOLVED** that Councillors S. Ammar, R. Bailes, B. Kumar, M. Marshall, B. McEldowney, and J. Robinson be appointed to the Impact of Heatwaves Short Sharp Review Group.

93/23

**FOOD BANK AND COMMUNITY SUPERMARKET PROVISION TASK GROUP - FINAL REPORT**

This item was deferred to the next meeting.

94/23

**FINANCE AND BUDGET WORKING GROUP - UPDATE**

The Chairman introduced the Finance and Budget Working Group update and in doing so noted that the last meeting of the Group took place on 8<sup>th</sup> March 2024. It was reported that at the meeting Members were informed of a continued improvement in staff turnover rates, which stood at only 8.8 per cent. The Council was significantly under the national average rate of staff turnover (15.6 per cent). The Chairman reported that the Group was also updated on the outstanding statements of accounts which the Council had yet to submit to the external auditor. The other issues discussed at the meeting included the Dolphin Centre redevelopment and the key decision threshold.

With reference to the Council's refuse fleet refurbishment, it was noted that there had been a reappraisal of costs. The Interim Executive Director explained that the company hired to undertake the refurbishment had struggled to refurbish the vehicles in time and there was now a backlog of vehicles waiting to be refurbished. It was reported that it was more viable in this context to purchase new vehicles rather

than undertake refurbishment works. It was agreed that a briefing note on this subject would be submitted to the next Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting.

**RESOLVED** that the Finance and Budget Working Group Update be noted.

95/23

## **WORCESTERSHIRE HEALTH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - UPDATE**

The Council's Representative on the Worcestershire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC), Councillor B. Kumar, updated the Board on the matters discussed by HOSC on 19<sup>th</sup> February 2024. Members were provided with a written copy of the update provided by Councillor B. Kumar and the following points were highlighted for Members' consideration.

It was reported that over 5.5 million appointments had been delivered in General Practice across Herefordshire and Worcestershire in the last year of data. This was 19 per cent more appointments per year than before the Covid-19 pandemic. However, the Representative highlighted that no information was provided on how many of the appointments within last year were face-to-face and how many telephone consultations. It was noted that patient satisfaction rates with GP services in Worcestershire were low compared to neighbouring counties / metropolitan boroughs and were continuing to decline in Worcestershire.

It was highlighted that a particular issue in Worcestershire was people being unable to get GP appointments being referred to 111. It was noted that there was no data available on how many GP patients who called 111 landing in A&E. The Representative highlighted that the Herefordshire and Worcestershire Primary Care Access Recovery Plan had two main ambitions: to tackle the '8am rush' and to enable patients to know on the day they contact their practice how their request will be managed.

The Representative highlighted that another issue discussed at the meeting was that pharmacists were now allowed to issue prescriptions for health matters such as high blood pressure, contraceptive pill or shingles.

During discussion of the report, a question was raised as to why in Worcestershire 40 per cent of people who live in affluent areas find it difficult to access GP appointments as compared to 51 per cent of people in deprived areas. It was noted that the reasons behind these might be due to better digital accessibility in more affluent areas as well as variance between individual GP practices that might affect the outcome.

**RESOLVED** that the Worcestershire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee Update be noted.

96/23

**CABINET WORK PROGRAMME**

The Cabinet Work Programme was presented for Members' consideration.

**RESOLVED** that the Cabinet Work Programme be noted.

97/23

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD WORK PROGRAMME**

The following items were agreed to be added to the Overview and Scrutiny Board work programme:

- Food Waste Recycling – progress update to be provided at a date to be determined in the new municipal year.
- District Heat Network Revisions – pre-scrutiny – This report would be scrutinised before presentation to Cabinet.

It was also requested that the work programme be updated with items as discussed earlier in the meeting.

**RESOLVED** that the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme be updated as per the pre-amble above.

The meeting closed at 9.10 p.m.

Chairman