

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

22ND APRIL 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, S. A. Robinson and H. D. N. Rone-Clarke

Observers:

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

Councillor K. Taylor (Cabinet Member for Planning, Licensing and WRS)

Councillor S. A. Webb (Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing and Strategic Housing)

Councillor M. Marshall

Officers: Mr. G. Revans, Ms J. Willis, Mrs. C. Felton, Mr S. Parry, Mrs. J. Bayley-Hill, Mr M. Austin, Mr. M. Bough and Mr. M. Dunphy, and Mr. M. Sliwinski

98/23 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES**

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillor J. D. Stanley.

99/23 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND WHIPPING ARRANGEMENTS**

Councillor A. Bailes declared an Other Disclosable Interest in relation to Agenda Item Number 15, Minute Number 112/23 – Parking Enforcement Consultancy, as he was a Manager of a Consultancy specialising in Transport Planning, Traffic Engineering, Sustainable Transport, Parking, and Transport Economics. Councillor A. Bailes confirmed that the Consultancy did not operate in Bromsgrove District.

Councillor A. Bailes remained in the meeting for consideration of this item and took part in the debate thereon.

There were no further Declarations of Interest.

100/23 **GOVERNANCE SYSTEMS REVIEW - IMPLEMENTATION PROGRESS UPDATE**

The Head of Legal, Democratic and Property Services introduced the report which provided details of the outcomes of the last meeting of the Constitution Review Working Group (CRWG) which took place on 12th March 2024. It was reported that various changes to the Council's constitution were discussed at that meeting, details of which were included in the report. The Board was asked to determine whether to endorse the CRWG recommendations for onward consideration by Cabinet and full Council.

Following the presentation, Members asked a number of questions and the following was noted:

- Proposal to remove reference to the former Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership (GBSLEP) from the Joint Arrangements document – It was noted that reference to GBSLEP was being removed from the Council's constitution because the organisation was no longer in existence.
- Changing the location of Planning call in process in the Council's Constitution – The review of the Council's constitution found that guidance in respect of the call in process for planning applications was not placed in the most logical position. It was therefore proposed that it should be incorporated into the Planning Procedure Rules at Part 14 of the Constitution, as detailed in Appendix B to the report.
- Arrangements regarding Planning site visits – It was proposed by CRWG that temporary arrangements regarding site visits, introduced as a result of the covid-19 pandemic, be removed from the constitution. In response to a question about frequency of planning site visits, Members were advised to contact the Head of Planning, Regeneration and Leisure Services separately about the subject.
- Clarification on the proposed changes to the Scrutiny Procedure Rules in respect of the types of items that would not be accepted for Overview and Scrutiny Board consideration and in respect of when a subject might not be debated by the Board – Members were of the view that the term 'significant' was imprecise when used in the last sentence of the first bullet point of paragraph 3.14 in the report. This stated: *"It is therefore proposed that the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules should be amended so as to clarify that a subject may not be considered at a meeting if it has previously been debated at a meeting of the Board held in the preceding 6 months, unless there has been a significant change in circumstances"*
- It was felt by Members that the closing clause of the above sentence should read: *"significant in the opinion of the Chairman, having discussed it with Officers"*. Officers undertook to incorporate this into the updated document to be presented to Cabinet.

- Reference was made to the Member Enquiries Guidance - 'Best Practice for Handling Members' Enquiries' - document proposed as an appendix to Part 22 of the Council's Constitution. It was felt that this document was much needed in terms of defining the level of service that Councillors could expect from Officers, and responsiveness to elected member enquiries.

Following the discussion, recommendations as printed in the report were proposed, seconded, and, being voted upon, agreed.

RECOMMENDED

- 1) That the Joint Arrangements, at Part 7 of the constitution, be updated, as detailed in Appendix A;
- 2) That the Planning Procedure Rules, at Part 14 of the constitution, be updated, as detailed in Appendix B and the Planning Call In process be removed from the Officer Scheme of Delegations at Part 6 of the constitution;
- 3) That the Scrutiny Procedure Rules, at Part 12 of the constitution, be updated as detailed in Appendix C;
- 4) That the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee Procedure Rules, at Part 13 of the constitution, be updated as detailed in Appendix D;
- 5) That the amendments to the Member Officer Relations Protocol, at Part 22 of the constitution, whereby the Member Enquiries Guidance should be added as an appendix to that part of the constitution, be approved; and
- 6) That the Committee terms of reference for the Licensing (Miscellaneous) Sub-Committees A and B for the number of Councillors be amended as detailed in Appendix F.

101/23

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 at its meetings on 15th March 2024 and 16th April 2024. Members were provided with a written copy of the updates provided by Councillor B. Kumar. Some of the points highlighted for Members' consideration included:

- An inspection of the Herefordshire and Worcestershire Health and Care NHS Trust (including Hill Crest Mental Health Ward) had taken place, and the Trust was given an overall rating of 'Requires Improvement' by the Care Quality Commission (CQC). Concerns

were raised in particular about staffing levels and patient experience at the Hill Crest Mental Health Ward in Redditch.

- Acute Dermatology Service Provision – It was reported that a series of resignations and retirements by Consultants and the Trust's difficulty in recruiting permanent staff, were having an adverse impact on dermatology services, including longer waiting times. However, the Trust had made interim arrangements and a contract with a private sector provider, HealthHarmonie, had eased the impact.
- Cancer detection in Worcestershire – Worcestershire was reported as having good rates of cancer detection at 60 per cent which compared favourably with the England average of 54.1 per cent. Various agencies were involved in optimising early cancer detection, for example the use of Faecal Immunochemical Test (FIT) in primary care to identify patients at risk of having colorectal cancer. It was noted that take up rates for cancer screening, including cancer screening programme for women, bowel cancer, breast screening rates were higher than the national average in Worcestershire.
- Routine Immunisation – It was reported that there was a high level of take up of the MMR vaccine in Worcestershire at 90 per cent compared to 83 per cent nationally.

Following the update, Members asked about an improvement plan for the Hill Crest Mental Health Ward in the context of long-term issues at that setting. Councillor B. Kumar explained that there were persistent issues with this Mental Health Ward which included a shortage of staff and contract arrangements in place whereby in the event of lack of beds at the facility patients were being transferred to a unit in Wales. Furthermore, the Ward was old and dilapidated.

A reference was made to the Impact of Heatwaves Short Sharp Review currently taking place and the importance of the Council providing awareness, particularly the young and people with fair skin, about the dangers of direct exposure to strong sunlight.

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

102/23

IMPACT OF HEATWAVES SHORT SHARP REVIEW - TERMS OF REFERENCE

Councillor M. Marshall introduced the item, having been appointed Chairman of the Impact of Heatwaves Short Sharp Review at its first meeting. Councillor M. Marshall recapped on the background to the decision to launch this review. It was noted that full Council agreed on 24th January 2024 to commission the Overview and Scrutiny Board to undertake a review of the impact of extreme heat events.

Councillor M. Marshall provided a detailed explanation of the aims of the Short Sharp Review as set out in the Terms of Reference. It was reported that the first meeting was held on 26th March 2024, which was attended by Public Health Officer from Worcestershire County Council and a representative from Applied Resilience, an organisation providing Emergency Planning service to the Council.

It was highlighted there was plenty of resources already available to the public regarding heatwave risk and protection. A number of public agencies were aware of this issue and had procedures in place. The key aims of this Review were to identify ways to improve coordination between agencies with regard to heatwave events planning and to ensure there were readily accessible resources available advising residents on how to prepare for heatwaves.

In response to a question, it was reported that the next meeting would be held on 24th April 2024. It was planned that meetings of the Short Sharp Review Group would take place once per month and it was hoped the investigation could be concluded by July 2024.

RESOLVED that the Terms of Reference for the Impact of Heatwaves Short Sharp Review be approved and that Councillor M. Marshall be confirmed as the Chairman of the Short Sharp Review.

103/23

REPROFILING OF CAPITAL FLEET REPLACEMENT BUDGET - DOMESTIC WASTE FLEET

[At the discretion of the Chairman of Overview and Scrutiny Board, this item was moved forward to be considered as item 6 on the agenda].

The Environmental Services Manager provided a report on reprofiling of capital fleet replacement budget and in doing so noted that in 2021, as part of a review of Council finances, the decision was taken to extend the life of operational refuse fleet vehicles by an extra year, from 7 to 8 years, before replacement. At that time, it was also decided to start refurbishing Waste Collection Vehicles to extend their life by a further period in order to reduce capital expenditure on new vehicles and make savings that could be put towards the future purchase of more expensive energy efficient vehicles, as part of the Council's carbon reduction ambitions.

It was reported that as part of the decision in 2021, no appropriate allowance was made for the operational impact that refurbishment, which removed multiple vehicles from use for extended periods and required the use of hire vehicles to support service delivery. This had resulted in unbudgeted revenue pressure. In addition, the first few vehicles took around 12 months to be refurbished due to parts and supply issues that were affecting the sector in 2022-23. Subsequent vehicles had also overrun on planned refurbishment timescales, resulting in significant unbudgeted costs on hire vehicles.

The delays in refurbishment timescales and the need to prioritise work on the Waste Collection fleet (Domestic & Commercial) had impacted on the availability of other vehicles required for statutory services such as road sweepers, Place Team vans for litter picking and fly tip removal. There had also been impact on discretionary and chargeable services such as the District Public Toilet cleaner's vehicle, and WRS's dog warden van, impacting on income generation of these services.

It was reported that in light of the increased costs and operational challenges arising from extended operational lifespans of the vehicles, overruns on refurbishment periods, and staffing issues within the workshop, it was proposed to revert to a seven-year replacement cycle on the Council's Waste fleet, and to re-profile the Capital Fleet Replacement budgets to support the purchase of replacement vehicles.

It was proposed that revenue funding be increased to support the ongoing use of hire vehicles to safeguard operational service delivery of the waste service during 2024-25. Revenue pressures were anticipated at £88,000 in 2024-25, £342,000 in 2025-26, and £372,000 in 2026-27 before a reduction in revenue payments as a result of bringing the replacement costs forward would result in predicted revenue saving of £339,000 in 2028-29, £660,000 in 2029-30, and £644,000 in 2030-31. The next vehicle replacement cycle would then be due in the 2031-32 financial year, when alternative types of vehicles, including electric-powered refuse vehicles, might become a more viable option for the Council.

It was also proposed that as part of reprofiling of capital fleet there be a purchase of 10 new internal combustion (ICE) refuse collection vehicles (at £210,000 per vehicle) in the 2024-25 financial year with a further 10 vehicles over 2025-26 and 2026-27 financial years. It was noted that with no current timescale for the rationalisation/relocation of the Council Depot Spaces, it was unlikely the Council would be in a position to invest in alternative-fuel vehicles before 2030. It was planned that instead, in 2024-25 the diesel internal combustion engine (ICE) fleet vehicles would be used with 30 per cent use of HVO (Hydrogenated Vegetable Oil) to support the Council's carbon reduction objective.

Following the report presentation, a number of matters were discussed by Members as follows:

- Approaching other authorities about purchase of refuse vehicles – It was reported that the Council did approach other authorities regarding how they utilise refuse vehicle fleet. Based on those conversations, it was apparent that many authorities continued to use internal combustion (ICE) vehicles. It was noted that there was an additional complexity in the Council approaching other authorities about the purchase of refuse vehicles in that Bromsgrove was one of only two authorities in the country having diamond lift bins. This led to considerable difficulties as the authority would need to find vehicles on the second-hand market

with compatible lifting mechanism (diamond lift) and such vehicles were highly uncommon across the UK.

- Member consultation on investment in refuse vehicles in 2024-25 – Members requested that, given the scale of investment in new refuse vehicles, an update be provided to Overview and Scrutiny Board once the process of purchasing of the 10 refuse vehicles had progressed to procurement stage.
- Costs set out in the report were solely for Bromsgrove District Council. It was noted that a similar fleet replacement programme was in place for Redditch. Due to joint service arrangements with Redditch, the Redditch fleet was able to support Bromsgrove service, for example when Bromsgrove vehicles were being serviced or undergoing statutory inspections. Costs were clearly delineated between the two authorities.
- Number of refuse fleet in stock at Bromsgrove Council – It was noted that the combined collection fleet consisted of sixteen 26-ton vehicles, one 18-ton vehicle, and three smaller trucks operating from the Bromsgrove Depot. There were three additional vehicles on the Council's commercial waste service, with a different lifting mechanism.
- Possibility of employing apprentices at the Depot and to operate refuse vehicles – It was highlighted that currently the Council did not have sufficient staffing capacity to maintain the fleet, and needed to recourse to hiring agency staff to maintain service operation. The Council was looking at restructuring the workshop to engage fitters and fan mechanics (at slightly lower experience level) and put in place arrangements to upskill through a skill-based pay system. It was commented that once the Council was in a position of having sufficient staff to support the workshop fully, opportunities around apprentices would be explored.
- It was noted that the Council had apprentices in the past, with some of the mechanics currently employed by the Council coming through the apprentice route. An example was given of one of the apprentices working at the Redditch workshop who had recently been appointed as a senior mechanic.
- Apprentice programme – It was reported that the last apprentice programme run by the Council for HGV mechanics was undertaken approximately 6-7 years ago.
- Staffing – It was noted that HGV mechanics from Birmingham and other areas were being approached about joining Bromsgrove District Council.
- Additional revenue costs already incurred – It was reported that there had already been additional costs incurred as a result of the

need to hire waste vehicles in 2021-22, 2022-23 and 2023-24. Additional revenue of £150,000 was proposed to be allocated in 2024-25 for hire costs. This was based on hope that the supply of new vehicles would take approximately 40 weeks. Additionally, it was hoped that garden waste fleet, which stops operating over winter, could be used to support the service to reduce costs.

- Building spare capacity into service delivery – It was noted that spare vehicle capacity was built into service plans as the Council was required to have an Operator’s Licence agreed with the Traffic Commissioner and the DVSA. As part of these rules, the Council had to undergo scheduled inspections that took place every 6-8 to ensure safety of vehicles. During inspections vehicles could be off the road for extended periods which required spare capacity to be built in to allow continuation of service.
- Waste fleet situation – It was highlighted that waste fleet was the area of the wider Environmental Services most at risk and therefore this area was being prioritised following review by the Environmental Services Manager. It was highlighted that domestic waste collection was a statutory service and delivery of consistent service in this area had to be prioritised over other services such as street cleansing.
- Street cleansing fleet – Concerns were expressed about the Council only having two street cleansing vehicles available and whether that was enough to cover Bromsgrove District.
- Accounting for inflation in the purchase of waste fleet vehicles – Inflation was accounted for in the costs of purchasing refuse vehicles with the cost for 2024-25 being £220,000 and in subsequent years this was uplifted by £5,000 per year. It was highlighted that this was an estimation at this moment.
- Modelling the number of waste fleet vehicles in need of replacement – It was reported that the entire fleet was in urgent need of replacement, with those vehicles that had been recently refurbished only having a couple of years of useful life left. The Environmental Service Manager commented that in his professional opinion obtaining new refuse vehicles was the only viable option to keep the waste disposal service in operation over the next couple of years.
- It was explained that Bromsgrove had different types of bins from Redditch. Bromsgrove had diamond lift bins. The reason for this was that in 2004 Bromsgrove received grant funding from central government to invest in new waste technology. Investment was made in a type of waste collection vehicle known as a side loader which allowed operation of reduced staff as the vehicle could pull alongside the bin by the curb edge, allowing the mechanism to reach out, grab the bin, and lift it in. The diamond mechanism helps

centre the bin on this automated mechanism. It was noted that difficulties were experienced with use of this type of vehicle and the Council had to revert back to conventional fleet service when those vehicles reached end of life.

- HVO fuel – It was reported that switching to part use of HVO fuel in ICE vehicles had no noticeable impact on fuel efficiency of fleet vehicles but resulted in a slight increase in moisture related issues when vehicles had been parked up for long periods.
- Commercial waste service – It was reported that the Council's commercial waste service, which operated across Worcestershire and parts of Warwickshire, achieved net profit of circa £180,000 in the last financial year.
- The Chairman questioned why the change to reprofiling of the Capital Fleet Budget towards the purchase of new waste fleet vehicles was not reported at the February 2024 meeting of full Council when the budget for 2024-25 was approved. The Chairman questioned why the proposal submitted to Members in February 2024 still included a plan to refurbish the fleet, and why this had changed radically as in this report in April 2024, which noted that refurbishment was not a viable option and waste vehicles had to be replaced. The Environmental Services Manager responded that the process of looking at options around the fleet started in December 2023. At the time concerns were raised by the Environmental Services Manager regarding the refurbishment of fleet vehicles as a viable option and that the waste collection service was at high risk of failure. The proposals with regarding to fleet budget were not able to being finalised before the budget setting in February 2023. However, these reprofiling proposals, including the need to provide £150,000 revenue budget for 2024-25, were presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Board at the earliest date possible after the full extent of risk became known to the Service.
- Risk of not meeting statutory obligations – The Environmental Services Manager reported that at this point the Council had not failed any of its statutory duties. The impact of the problems within the service had impacted on the timescales for removal of larger fly tips, which were taking around 6-7 days to remove but still within statutory timescales to provide cleansing duties. The concern was delivery of the Environmental Services fleet over the next two years and that if weaknesses within the fleet were not addressed the Council would breach its statutory duties.
- The Portfolio Holder for Environmental Services and Community Safety (including Car Parking) addressed the Board and in doing so noted that elected members had been provided with the opportunity to attend a presentation on the fleet, delivered by the Interim Executive Director. The Portfolio Holder commented that at

the moment he thought the move to electric for larger fleet vehicles would be impractical due to issues with range and infrastructure.

- A Member proposed that the option of leasing the fleet vehicles with a maintenance agreement should be considered given the issues with recruitment of HGV mechanics and running maintenance costs. It was responded that due to the nature of the work delivering waste collection service there were a large number of minor accident damage. In addition, there were risks of failure to sensors and components within the lifting mechanism at any time. As such, the leasing options that were investigated by Officers were not thought to be viable due to restrictions on those leases. However, routine maintenance was outsourced as much as possible. If, at the procurement stage, there were viable lease options available, these would be considered.
- The Board considered whether it was necessary to set up a Task Group investigation due to the seriousness of the situation with regard to waste services fleet. It was noted that the Board previously agreed to being provided with a presentation on waste and recycling and implications of the Environment Act, including on a requirement to introduce food waste. This presentation would be provided at a July meeting of Overview and Scrutiny Board. It was felt by most Members that this presentation should be considered in the first instance and that no Task Group should be set up for the time being.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

104/23

AGILE WORKING - UPDATE ON IMPLEMENTATION

An update in relation to Members' questions on the Council's Agile Working was provided. The responses were provided in the briefing note. The following additional queries were raised at the meeting:

- 1) Review of the title 'Agile working' as it might be misconstrued as in project management terms it was a way of implementing large projects. Officers undertook to review the title as the initiative was important for recruitment and retention.

It was asked whether space utilisation exercise was being undertaken on a regular basis to identify issues such as double-booking of hot desk spaces within Council Offices and/or under-utilisation of shared space. The Executive Director undertook to ascertain whether space utilisation checks were being carried out by the Agile Project Team in relation to the hot desking booking system.

The Interim Executive Director explained that the Agile Project Team had a Project Manager who reported to the Agile Board. The Board was chaired by the Council's Chief Executive. It was noted that the majority of office-based staff at the Council were signed up to agile working

arrangements. It was highlighted that some staff were required to be available on site during all contracted hours due to the nature of their jobs. This applied for example to refuse collectors or staff employed at the depot. In general, service requirements took priority over agile arrangements so, when necessary, working patterns were adjusted to suit service requirements. Members requested that they be provided with quantitative data on the take up (number and proportion of staff) of agile working across the Council.

- 2) Investigate the possibility of introducing a follow up to measure satisfaction with customers' interaction with services. For example, a form of trustpilot-style of providing feedback when customers interact with service areas.

A Member commented that the Council needed to be able to measure Members' satisfaction with responsiveness of service areas to elected member enquiries. A question was asked concerning why the Council used a survey company to create a pilot survey for customers. It was responded that surveys produced by the Council in house generally had low response rates; a survey company would offer expertise that was hoped would result in greater engagement with this pilot. Members requested that details with regard to the cost of engaging survey company be provided.

- 3) Progress on increasing responsiveness of officers to member enquiries and what progress had been made in looking at this issue so far by the project team.

It was noted that the 'Best Practice for Handling Member Enquiries' document, as presented under item 3 (Minute No. 100/23), was endorsed by the Board. This document provided details of the process which would be followed when Members raise complaints / compliments in relation to officer responsiveness.

In summary, the following information was requested by Members:

- Whether a space utilisation exercise was being carried out periodically to determine the effectiveness of hot desking;
- Number and proportion of overall Council staff that had taken up agile working;
- The cost of engaging a survey company to work on creating a pilot for capturing residents' feedback.

RESOLVED that the update be noted.

105/23

LOCAL HERITAGE LIST FOR BROMSGROVE DISTRICT - ACTION PLAN UPDATE

The Strategic Planning and Conservation Manager provided a briefing update, which set out the progress to date in creating the Local Heritage

List (LHL) and showed the proposed action plan for completion of the LHL in 18 months.

It was reported that four the parishes – Alvechurch, Belbroughton, Beoley, and Dodford – had been surveyed and draft LHL's for these areas had now been compiled. 129 buildings and structures were being proposed for the LHL from these parishes. Draft lists for these parishes were ready to be consulted on in late spring 2024. Areas currently being surveyed included Bromsgrove Town, Lickey and Blackwell Parish, and Wythall Parish.

It was noted that at the previous meeting of Overview and Scrutiny a recommendation was (subsequently agreed by Cabinet) that the final Local Heritage List (LHL) for Bromsgrove District be completed within 18 months. This provided a target date for completion of LHL of September 2025. The works on compiling a list for parishes / areas would be carried out in alphabetical order. It was highlighted that Officers could not be certain how much work was required in each area until a survey for a given area was carried out. As the work progressed, Officers would be providing quarterly updates on progress to the Overview and Scrutiny Board.

The Strategic Planning and Conservation Manager reported that during the process of creating LHL for their areas/wards, Ward Members would be contacted a minimum of three times: (1) when officers begin surveying; (2) on completion of the draft LHL for the Ward; (3) prior to adoption of the list for the area. It was highlighted that for parishes where survey work had been undertaken already, Ward Members would be contacted imminently to update on progress. This would also be the case for the three areas where survey work was being carried out at the moment.

Following the update, a Member thanked Officers for providing this briefing which set out a plan for completion of LHL and which included details of Member involvement in the process. A question was asked regarding whether submissions of proposals for inclusion on the LHL could still be made in respect of Lickey and Blackwell Parish. It was responded that the list creation was a continuous and iterative process and proposals for addition to the list could be submitted at any time.

In response to a question, it was noted that in areas which had parishes, Officers worked on the basis of parish boundaries rather than ward boundaries in respect of creating LHLs. A Member requested that it be highlighted and corrected in future documents that the correct name for Belbroughton Parish was Belbroughton and Fairfield Parish Council – the area covered by this Parish being the villages of Belbroughton and Fairfield (rather than only Belbroughton).

With respect to publicity for LHL consultations in each area, it was noted that Officers would be in contact with the Parish Councils. The LHL consultations would also be publicised at events in each local area.

Members were asked to liaise with Officers if they were aware of local events at which the Council could promote the LHL consultations.

Members requested that future briefings include a table setting out dates for completion of LHL at each area alongside a work programme outlining tasks to be undertaken in each area and progress in their completion. The Strategic Planning and Conservation Manager responded that detail would be added to the action plan table for the next update report.

RESOLVED that the update be noted.

106/23

DISABLED FACILITIES GRANT (DFG)

The Strategic Housing Services Manager provided an overview of the Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG). It was noted that these were mandatory grants to support the provision of adaptations to promote independent living within the home, subject to the provisions of the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996.

It was explained that the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) provided each local authority in England with a DFG allocation contained within the Better Care Fund paid to the County Council and passported to Local Housing Authorities (including Bromsgrove).

It was explained that the grant was means-tested and there was a robust process followed to arrive at grant allocation decisions, starting with a comprehensive assessment of the applicant's needs.

It was noted that it was considered good practice to offer a Home Improvement Agency (HIA) service to support an accepted applicant and their family through the complicated process of carrying out major building works. In Worcestershire a partnership of the 6 Local Housing Authorities and Worcestershire County Council commissioned a HIA referred as the Worcestershire Promoting Independent Living Service and this was provided by Millbrook Health Care under a contract until March 2025.

Performance data was provided on the use of DFG in 2022-23, including on the types of building jobs carried out to enable a home adaptation, expenditure on the home adaptations by type, breakdown of the types of recipients of DFG by tenure and breakdown by age. It was noted that over 50 per cent of DFGs were for bathroom and stairlift adaptations.

Following the presentation, Members asked questions regarding the DFG and the following responses were noted:

- Review of maximum amount of DFG grant amount that can be awarded – It was noted that the current maximum amount of DFG grant that can be awarded to an individual was £30,000 and currently there were no discussions nationally around increasing

that amount. However, the Council had the power to provide discretionary top-ups to DFG grants.

- Resistance of landlords to providing adaptations through DFG grant – It was noted that in cases where recipients of DFG grant were living in rented accommodation, the landlord could refuse an adaptation being installed in their property. The Council did not possess powers to force the landlord to have the adaptation installed. However, the Council would discuss the issue with a landlord, explaining why the adaptation was needed and what the benefits they could have from the work undertaken.
- It was highlighted that the Operational Therapists (OT) service used for the DFG provision was specifically used by the Council for provision of DFG service and not shared with NHS Acute Trusts.
- Median delivery times of delivering an adaptation – It was clarified that delivery time of adaptations for DFG recipients were calculated from the time of OT referral to the home improvement agency (HIA) to completion of the works.
- It was noted that there was a statutory requirement for the Council to assess and process DFG applications sent from HIA within 6 months. The Council was on average completing this stage in 11 days.
- It was noted that in the current tender with the HIA, there was a performance management framework which set delivery targets for DFG adaptation works. Foundations, the Government approved HIA, was helping the Council draft the specification for a new tender.
- The Deputy Leader addressed the Board and cited a case work with a resident where it took three years for an adaptation to be installed. The Deputy Leader raised that this was not due to the Council Officers but slow progress made by the current HIA provider, and it was hoped that in the new tender the right performance measures and targets would be included to ensure that HIAs met targets.
- DFG Capital Allocation – It was noted that a total of £745,068.99 Government's DFG allocation was allocated to recipients in 2022-23. Any unspent amount was carried forward to the next financial year.
- Land charge placed on the property in which adaptations were being done – It was noted that a charge for works from DFG was placed against a property. This meant that if the property where an adaptation had been installed was sold within 10 years, the costs of the works would be recovered from proceeds of the sale.

- A Member made a comment that data in the report was now over 12 months old. It was explained that data up to 31st March 2024 would become available within the next 6-8 weeks.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

107/23

FOODBANK & COMMUNITY SHOP PROVISION TASK GROUP - FINAL REPORT

The Chairman of the Foodbank and Community Provision Task Group, Councillor E. M. S. Gray, presented the final report of the Task Group. In doing so, Councillor E. M. S. Gray provided details of the final recommendations of the Task Group, explaining rationale behind each recommendation in detail.

Following the opening remarks by the Chairman of the Task Group, Members discussed the following aspects of the work undertaken by the Task Group:

- Funding provision to foodbank organisations –It was noted that one of the areas considered by the Task Group was distribution of funding to foodbanks in the District. Following visits to the foodbanks, it was deemed imperative for Members to understand mechanisms through which funding was provided to foodbanks. Members also asked for updates on which foodbanks operating in the District were being funded by the Council and/or via the funding that was distributed by the Council.
- An explanation was provided that Bromsgrove District Council did not provide any funding to foodbanks from its General Fund (the Council's budget). The Council had awarded the Government's Household Support Fund (HSF) to local organisations. This money had been provided to the District Council from Worcestershire County Council in the form of a Memorandum of Understanding. The purpose of the Fund was to support vulnerable households through lead local authorities as part of the support linked to the increase in the cost of living. This fund specifically related to providing assistance to vulnerable households in most need of support to help with energy and water, food, wider essentials, advice services and housing costs.
- As part of HSF grant funding distribution, foodbanks were awarded some funding. The requirement to receive funding was that the foodbank had been in existence for a minimum of 12 months as of the start of each new phase of Household Support Fund (HSF). It was reported that in March 2024 the HSF had been extended for an extra six months, and five foodbanks in the District benefited from this round of HSF funding. Information with regard to which foodbanks had been awarded this funding were published on the Council's website.

- It was reported that several organisations listed in the report provided other support services alongside foodbank operation. These organisations could also bid and receive funding from the Council in respect of other areas of their operation. For instance, some organisations received Homelessness Prevention Grant Support, approved annually by Cabinet, in respect of housing support. This funding was subject to its own eligibility and monitoring processes as detailed in Cabinet reports.
- Residents in need of travel across local authority boundaries to access foodbank provision – It was highlighted that in the course of investigation, Task Group Members highlighted anecdotal evidence of residents in wards bordering other local authorities, such as in Rubery and Hagley, accessing foodbanks across district boundaries. This was attributed to lack of foodbank provision in the outlying wards in Bromsgrove. A question was asked with respect of whether this issue was also identified in the Belbroughton and Romsley ward. It was responded that the Task Group Members were not aware of evidence of this in respect of Belbroughton and Romsley.

With respect of recommendation 4 of the Task Group Final Report, there was a suggestion that the wording of that recommendation be changed to:

“Where there is evidence that there is a need and no facility currently exists (such as Rubery), the Council will continue to support local communities to create food banks.”

It was noted that this amendment was proposed as it was felt that the current recommendation 4 contained a financial implication for the Council and the amended wording would provide a clarification as to the role that the Council would be able to provide in respect of supporting creation of new foodbanks. This proposal was not seconded and not subject to the vote.

Most Members were of the opinion that recommendation 4 as currently printed in the Task Group Final Report should not be changed and remain as follows:

“That the Council endeavour to investigate, under the auspices of existing arrangements available to the Council, such as the Bromsgrove Partnership, whether communities in areas of the district that do not currently have foodbanks require this provision, and that the Council make best effort to create a foodbank in Rubery where a need has already been identified.”

Members of Overview and Scrutiny Board and the Portfolio Holder for Health and Wellbeing and Strategic Housing took the opportunity to thank the Task Group Members for their investigation and comprehensive final report.

On being put to the vote the Foodbank and Community Shop Provision Task Group report recommendations, as printed in the Final Report submitted, were agreed as a recommendation to Cabinet.

RECOMMENDED:

- 1) That the Council update its website to include contact details of all foodbanks in the district which wish to be on the list. The Council will ensure that the webpage links to the foodbanks' websites and/or other contact details, such as telephone and social media, are up-to-date and that information on how to get in touch is easily accessible.
- 2) That all organisations providing foodbanks receive the appropriate and necessary support and resources from Bromsgrove District Council, which is proportionate and equivalent to their size and what they require. In the transition period, if the organisation is growing, appropriate support and funding needs to be allocated.
- 3) That the Council develop a consistent universal understanding / guidelines of what level of recording of users' personal information is required for the needs of the community engaged in the foodbank service without breaching the GDPR legislation. That the Council recognise there might be specific recording requirements as conditions attached to accessing specific funding streams.
- 4) That the Council endeavour to investigate, under the auspices of existing arrangements available to the Council, such as the Bromsgrove Partnership, whether communities in areas of the district that do not currently have foodbanks require this provision, and that the Council make best effort to create a foodbank in Rubery where a need has already been identified.
- 5) That the Council continues to develop opportunities to enable foodbank organisations to come together as part of a network to support each other and to promote the sustainability of the help being provided to the community across the district. That the Council makes clear that joining the network is a pre-requisite if applying for Council funding, should this become available in the future.

108/23

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD ANNUAL REPORT 2023-24

The Overview and Scrutiny Board Annual Report 2023-24 was submitted for Members' consideration. The Chairman reported that together with the Vice-Chairman of the Board he was due to meet with Officers to propose that the number of meetings of Overview and Scrutiny be increased in future municipal years. An outcome of this discussion would be reported to Members at the next meeting of Overview and Scrutiny Board.

A typographical error on page 9 of the Annual Report with respect to the membership of the Finance and Budget Working Group was reported. It was noted that the Member represented on the Finance and Budget Working Group was Councillor R. Bailes, not Councillor A. Bailes.

RESOLVED that subject to the amendment in the preamble above the Overview and Scrutiny Board Annual Report 2023-24 be noted.

109/23

CABINET WORK PROGRAMME

The Cabinet Work Programme was presented for Members' consideration.

RESOLVED that the Cabinet Work Programme be noted.

110/23

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD WORK PROGRAMME

It was requested that an item with respect to new build affordable housing be added to the Board's work programme for the next meeting. It was requested that this report cover the topics of the current number of affordable houses in the District, affordable housing targets and whether the Council was meeting its targets, as well as projections for future demand.

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

111/23

TO CONSIDER, AND IF CONSIDERED APPROPRIATE, TO PASS THE FOLLOWING RESOLUTION TO EXCLUDE THE PUBLIC FROM THE MEETING DURING THE CONSIDERATION OF ITEM(S) OF BUSINESS CONTAINING EXEMPT INFORMATION:-

RESOLVED: that under Section 100 I of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended, the public be excluded from the meeting during the consideration of the following items of business on the grounds that they involve 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

15 3

16 3, 4

17 3, 4

112/23

PARKING ENFORCEMENT CONSULTANCY

The Interim Head of Environmental and Housing Property Services introduced this report and in doing so recapped that at the meeting of full Council on 21st February 2024, the Parking Enforcement Service Level Agreement with Wychavon District Council was considered and Members agreed to undertake a strategic review of parking services. The review would include on and off street parking enforcement and would support preparation of a business case for the future of the service. At 21st February 2024 full Council, it was agreed that a one-off budget of £50,000 be included in the Medium-Term Financial Plan for 2024-25 to fund the proposed strategic review, including through engagement with consultants.

It was noted that the brief for the strategic review included three key deliverables:

- A review of existing parking requirements including supply and demand for now and in the future;
- A review of car park management arrangements with solutions identified to reduce the need for off street parking enforcement;
- Review of On-Street Enforcement will be carried out to address member and resident concerns around coverage of activities.

It was highlighted that through the strategic review the consultants would be engaging with Ward Members and Parish Councillors to identify local issues with regard to parking.

- Timeline for the consultants' work – It was anticipated at this point that the appointed consultants would begin work on the strategic review in mid-May with the work to take three months to complete. Final consultants' report was anticipated in September 2024 with regular meetings to ensure that the review remained on track.
- Number of car parks operated by Bromsgrove District Council – A Member commented that the Council operated 9 car parks and not 11 car parks, as stated under paragraph 2.1 of the report. The Member stated that this figure probably included Churchfield Car Park which was closed and one other should not be included. The Officer responded that part of the work was about understanding demand and currently 2 of the car parks, although closed currently, had uncertainty with regard whether they would be used in the future, hence the report stated a figure of 11 Council-operated car parks.
- Specialist parking consultants – The need to ensure that the Council employed specialist parking consultancy as part of this strategic review was highlighted by a Member. It was noted that understanding the specific parking issues and needs in areas outside of Bromsgrove Town Centre such as: occupancy and duration of use in car parks, the impacts of overspill into surrounding streets. It was highlighted by a Member that

involvement of the County Council in the strategic review was needed in order to ensure its success.

- Understanding how traffic wardens are operating – The Interim Head of Environmental and Housing Property Services reported that there was regular monthly reporting by Wychavon District Council to catalogue what areas the parking wardens were visiting and at what frequency.
- A Member commented that he thought an on-the-ground survey of parking provision in Alvechurch needed to be undertaken as a priority before the summer holiday period. The Member cited serious parking issues in that ward including loss of 40 parking spaces over the next few months (which represented 50 per cent of parking provision). The Officer responded that over the next few weeks conversations would be held with consultants and Ward Members, including assessment of the severity of the individual cases/areas. Based on these conversations, decisions would be made as to how the review would be undertaken in each ward/area.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

(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))

113/23

INTERIM UPDATE ON THE TRANSFER OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT UNIT (EDU) FROM WYRE FOREST DC TO BROMSGROVE AND REDDITCH COUNCILS

An update was provided on the progress in the transfer of economic development unit (EDU) from Wyre Forest DC to Bromsgrove and Redditch Councils, including on the recruitment to the key posts in respect of the proposed new Economic Development, Regeneration and Property Service.

RESOLVED that the update be noted.

(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).

114/23

TO CONFIRM THE ACCURACY OF THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD HELD ON 11TH MARCH 2024

The minutes of the meeting of Overview and Scrutiny Board held on 11th March 2024, including the record of the confidential matters discussed at the meeting, were considered.

There was a request for an amendment to the minutes record in respect of the inaccuracy in the confidential minutes record of the subject matter that was considered in exempt session (Minute Item 86/23 – To confirm the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board held on 12th February 2024). It was resolved that the inaccuracy would be corrected.

RESOLVED that subject to the amendment in respect of the confidential minutes record, the minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting held on 11th March 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).

The meeting closed at 9.38 p.m.

Chairman