

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MEETING OF THE COUNCIL

27TH FEBRUARY 2019, AT 6.00 P.M.

PRESENT: Councillors C. J. Spencer (Chairman), M. J. A. Webb (Vice-Chairman), C. Allen-Jones, S. J. Baxter, C. J. Bloore, M. T. Buxton, S. R. Colella, B. T. Cooper, R. J. Deeming, G. N. Denaro, R. L. Dent, M. Glass, C.A. Hotham, R. E. Jenkins, H. J. Jones, R. J. Laight, L. C. R. Mallett, K.J. May, C. M. McDonald, P. M. McDonald, S. R. Peters, S. P. Shannon, M. A. Sherrey, C. B. Taylor, P.L. Thomas, M. Thompson, L. J. Turner, K. J. Van Der Plank, S. A. Webb and P. J. Whittaker

78\18 **TO RECEIVE APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

The Chairman invited a representative from St. Basil's, based at Aston Fields, to give a short presentation on the work the organisation carried out with the young people.

The Chairman held a minutes silence in memory of the late Mrs J. Luck a former Member of the Council. Members and officers stood in silence in tribute to her memory.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor J. Griffiths and it was noted that Councillor R. Jenkins would be a little late.

79\18 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

The Monitoring Officer reminded Members that at the Audit Standards and Governance meeting on 16th July 2015 it was resolved that a dispensations under Section 33 (2) of the Localism Act 2011 to allow all Members to participate in and vote at Council and Committee meetings when considering the setting of the Budget, Council Tax and Members' Allowances. At the same meeting a dispensation to allow Members to participate and vote at Council and committee meetings when considering the adoption of any new or updated Non-Domestic Rates – Discretionary Rate Relief Policy and Guidance affecting properties within the District. This would apply for the purpose of the discussions in respect of the Council Tax Support Scheme later in the agenda.

Councillors C. Bloore and L. Mallett declared an other disclosable interest in respect of Minute No. 89/18 the Motion on Notice for litter pickers. Councillor Bloore clarified that through his Worcestershire County Council divisional funds he had given some funding to Keep Bromsgrove Beautiful. Councillor Mallett clarified that he was also in the

process of providing some funding to Keep Bromsgrove Beautiful through his divisional funds.

80\18

MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of Council held on 23rd January 2019 were submitted.

During consideration of the minutes the following areas were raised as a matter of accuracy:

- Councillor M. Thompson asked for it to be recorded that under Minute No 69/18, that the matter had also been discussed at Worcestershire County Council (WCC) and that a number of “dual hatted” Members who had supported the motion at District level they had not done so at County level. It was further clarified that the dual hatted Members from the Labour Group had voted for it on both occasions.
- Members briefly discussed matters which were discussed at both County and District level and whether it was relevant to accept motions which were to be considered at both, as a different decision was often reached at County level. The Monitoring Officer confirmed that this Council considered things in its own right.
- Clarification in respect of the information provided by the Portfolio Holder for Leisure and Cultural Services in respect of the contract with BAM being signed. Minute No. 77/18 and the Motion from Councillor C. Bloore and whether the letter had been sent to the Prime Minister and a copy sent to the local MP. The Leader responded that his understanding was that the matter had, in the first instance, been referred to the Cabinet and a report on the matter would be received by them in due course.
- Councillor Hotham questioned how amendments to the Minutes were recorded and the Monitoring Officer clarified that any amendments would be shown in the next set of minutes received at the following meeting. Councillor Thompson highlighted that if someone was looking at the minutes as a standalone item, they would not be aware that any amendment had been made. The Monitoring Officer further clarified that this was the manner in which it had been agreed to take the minutes of each meeting.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of Council held on 23rd January be approved subject to the pre-amble above.

81\18

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

The Chairman provided details of the Houseman Commemoration to be held on Tuesday 26th March at 12.30 pm at the statue, followed by refreshments in the Parkside Suite.

82\18

TO RECEIVE ANY ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM THE LEADER

The Chairman reminded Members that under the Leader's announcement any questions should be in respect of clarification of items raised by the Leader. Any other matter should be directed to the Leader after the meeting or by email.

The Leader advised that he had received a further response from the Department of Health and Social Care in respect of hospital car parking:

"We have made it very clear that patients, their families and our hardworking staff should not be subjected to unfair parking charges. NHS Trusts are responsible for these charges and ensuring revenue goes back into frontline services and we want to see Trusts coming up with options that put staff, patients and their families first.

While we expect all NHS organisations to follow the published NHS Car Parking Principles, they have the freedom to make decisions on their car parking, including charges to reflect their local situation. If any excess is generated, income generation rules require that it is used to fund clinical services."

Councillor M. Thompson raised a point of clarification in respect of the closure of the Sports Hall and it was confirmed that this would be addressed under the Portfolio Holder's Annual Report item.

83\18

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

The Chairman invited Mr M. Worrall, a member of the public, to present his question.

Mr. Worrall explained that he was a Parish Councillor for Alvechurch Parish Council and chaired the Alvechurch Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group. At this evening's meeting Members would be considering the final stage of this process in considering the Plan and formally adopting it. He noted that there were several other Parishes throughout the district who were beginning this process and therefore put the following question to Council.

"I would like to remind members that the Alvechurch Parish Neighbourhood Plan has recently been formally adopted, the first, we hope, of several in the Bromsgrove District. I'd like to thank Mike Dunphy, and his current and former planning colleagues, for their support and encouragement over recent years. The Alvechurch experience showed the benefits of collaborative working and bringing a community along with you. Would members please explain how they will ensure other Parishes are similarly successful?"

Councillor C. B. Taylor, Portfolio Holder for Planning and Strategic Housing thanked Mr Worrall for his kind words. He assured him that all Parishes would be treated with the same courtesy that Alvechurch

Parish Council had received and the Council was happy to work collaboratively with all those concerned.

84\18

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE CABINET MEETING HELD ON 13TH FEBRUARY 2019 AND 27TH FEBRUARY 2019

Cabinet Recommendations 13th February 2019

Environmental Services Business Cases for Investment in the Domestic Waste Service, Commercial Waste Services and Place Team

Councillor M. Sherrey, Portfolio Holder for Health and Well Being and Environmental Services proposed the recommendations for the Environmental Services Business Cases for Investment in the Domestic Waste Service, Commercial Waste Service and Place Team. These were seconded by Councillor G. Denaro.

In proposing the recommendations Councillor Sherrey explained that officers had drawn up three business cases to outline current pressures on Environmental Services, as well as opportunities for additional income generation.

The business cases reflected each area within Environmental Services and briefly consisted of:

- Commercial Waste – it was explained that having expanded its services significantly over the last two years and generated considerable additional income for the Council, the Commercial Waste Team now required additional investment to support continued growth. This investment was expected to generate additional income that fully balanced out the additional investment from year one, supporting the sustainability of the wider service at best value to the Council's residents.
- Domestic Waste – Having seen an increase in new housing across the District in the last few years, the current service has expanded within existing resources to support this, but has incurred unsustainable overspends as a result of high Agency costs due to a lack of resilience to cover annual leave and sickness. This lack of resilience eventually resulted in service failure during August/September 2018. In order to address this, the business case sets out the case for additional investment to secure the service without a reliance on Agency staff to cover standard services over the next few years, whilst a full service review is carried out. This would consider how best to deliver the service in a sustainable manner for the future, taking into account increased housing in the district and changes currently being considered by Central Government to what services the Council has to supply to residents, such as a free garden waste service and weekly dedicated food waste collections. Both of these

would require significant investment to be provided in addition to the current services.

- Place Teams – the cleaning and grounds maintenance services are carried out by the Place Teams across the District and as with the Domestic Waste, there has been a significant increase in their workload as a result of increased housing and traffic on the roads, which generate more litter and fly tipping. This takes considerable resources to manage and has limited the Council's ability to deliver the full benefits of Place working, resulting in a more reactive focus to some areas of work and lower standards.

Councillor Sherrey highlighted that the business cases and recommendation had been reviewed by the Overview and Scrutiny Board and Cabinet had approved all the recommendations as set out in the covering report and business cases attached to the agenda papers.

Following presentation of the report Members discussed a number of areas in more detail, including:

- Members were grateful that this had been looked at following the issues that had arisen in the previous year and hoped that this would mean that a similar situation would be avoided in the future.
- Whether consideration could be given to the new vehicles purchased being electric or more environmentally friendly than those currently used. Councillor Sherrey confirmed that a number of alternatives were being considered.
- A full scale review of the service was welcomed and the possibility of generating more revenue. However, Members were concerned as to the reasons for the disruption the previous year as housing growth throughout the District was something which was not unexpected and therefore should have been planned for in advance. It was agreed that this was due to a lack of foresight and lack of planning for the long term.
- Members took the opportunity to thank Matt Austin, the Environmental Services Manager and Guy Revans, the Head of Environmental Services for taking the time to attend the Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting and giving a detailed honest view of the situation the previous year and presentation of the business cases recently.

RESOLVED:

- a) that the Domestic Waste Collection Business Case and allocate £1456,646 revenue funding to Environmental Services to fund five members of staff, vehicle maintenance costs and running costs to support the service be approved;
- b) that the Capital Investment of £137,000 for one new Collection Vehicle which will incur annual borrowing costs of £21,823 from 2020/21 on the corporate financing revenue account be approved;

- c) that the Commercial Waste Business Case and allocate £184,558 additional revenue funding to Environmental Services to fund six additional members of staff, vehicle maintenance and running costs to support the service and the generation of additional income for the Council be approved;
- d) that the Capital Investment of £340,000 for two new collection vehicles, which will incur annual borrowing costs of £54,162 from 2020/21 on the corporate financing revenue account be approved; and
- e) that the Future Delivery of Place Team Working Business case, and allocate £166,697 additional revenue funding to Environmental Services to fund six additional members of staff to support the service on a phased implementation over the next three years be approved.

Alvechurch Parish Neighbourhood Plan

The recommendation from Cabinet in respect of the Alvechurch Parish Neighbourhood Plan were proposed by Councillor C. B. Taylor and seconded by Councillor G. Denaro.

In proposing the recommendations Councillor Taylor reminded Members that this matter had been well documented and discussed on numerous occasions. He advised Members that the referendum had received a good response, which was down to the hard work of officers and the Alvechurch Parish Council. Councillor Taylor reiterated the thanks which had been given earlier in the meeting to the Strategic Planning and Conservation Manager and his team.

RESOLVED that the Alvechurch Parish Neighbourhood Plan be 'made' (formally adopted) immediately, in accordance with the relevant legislation.

Medium Term Financial Plan 2019/20 – 2022/23

The recommendation from Cabinet in respect of the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) were proposed by Councillor B. Cooper and seconded by Councillor G. Denaro.

In presenting the recommendations Councillor Cooper suggested that it might be of interest to members to put the Council's position in perspective. He advised that the state of Local Government finance in England was challenging. A recent survey by the LGIU, had found that 80% of Councils were not confident that Local Government was sustainable. In the coming year 53% could only balance their budgets using cash balances, 30% were seeing a decline in their services, 25% were planning service reductions, and 97% were increasing Council Tax. 84% of Councils thought that it was a high priority, if not essential, that Councils explored other sources of income for example through commercialisation of council services, selling assets, investing in property. 53% of Councils had increased borrowing in the last year.

Councillor Cooper highlighted that in the Medium Term Financial Plan approved by Council a year ago, it was predicted that there would be an over spend of £625k at the end of the year 2019/20. The table 3.5 on page 181 showed Members how additions and subtractions were made across the table and it could be seen that the Council was now predicting a zero overspend; a great improvement on the prediction for the year. There were commentaries on each of the additions and subtractions in the text. However, Councillor Cooper highlighted the following points:

- Savings of £332k had been identified which would reduce the deficit.
- Other savings had not been identified in the past. In discussion with the auditors, it was felt that these unidentified savings should be included so £645k had been added to the deficit.
- The negative revenue support grant had not materialised so £740k could be taken out.
- As the Council had not built enough houses, the income from New Homes Bonus (NHB) was predicted to be less than envisaged in last year's MTFP, therefore £82k would be added to the deficit.
- For the same reason, as above the council tax income was predicted to be down by £140k.

In view of the Council's financial situation, particularly looking to years 2 to 4 of the MTFP, the Cabinet feel that it would not be prudent or responsible to leave the level of Council Tax unchanged. Therefore, it was with regret that Cabinet was recommending increasing it by 2.99%. The Council Tax paid on a Band D house would rise by £6.47 to £223 pa.

It was noted that the balanced budget had been achieved without the use of balances and without any reduction of services. Councillor Cooper suggested these were great achievements by the Council for the residents of Bromsgrove District, at a time when many other councils had reduced services or used balances or both to get anywhere near a balanced budget.

The Council's auditors required it to produce a four year financial plan. Therefore, in addition to the figures for as 2019/2020, the figures for the three years 2020/21, 2021/22, 2022/23 were also included. The figures were of concern, particularly as by the last year of the MTFP, the general balances could have fallen to £1.1m. This was the level below which Members had determined that it would not be prudent to go.

The reasons for this position were summarised as being the consequence of not enough houses being built in Bromsgrove, uncertainty over the future of the NHB scheme, additional costs of borrowing for our capital programme and perhaps even more importantly, a complete lack of certainty from Central Government about

funding for Local Government from 2020/21. As Members would know, there were national consultations this year on business rates retention reform and on the fair funding review of relative needs and resources. Members were reminded that up until recently the Council received £3m a year in revenue support from Central Government. From this current year onwards, it would receive nothing.

There would be increased borrowing costs and repayment of debt over the three years for the capital programme especially vehicles, and for the leisure centre, Parkside, and the Burcot Lane development and for contributions to the employee pension fund. However, Councillor Cooper stressed to members that the figures for years 2 to 4 of the MTFP represented the worst-case scenario and assumed that nothing would have been done to improve the situation. In the next year it would be important to review all costs and to identify more savings. The Council must reduce the total of what was currently described as unidentified savings and capital programmes might have to be reviewed. It was stressed that requests for new expenditure must be scrutinised very closely and be accompanied by a robust business case. The house building blockage needed be solved as it had led to a quadruple whammy - loss of Council Tax revenue, a reduction in NHB income, lower than expected income from planning applications, and the cost of Mott MacDonald to provide advice on infrastructure related to big planning applications. It was anticipated that projects such as Burcot Lane would generate income by the end of the four-year period. This income was not included in the MTFP. Councillor Cooper went on to advise Members that attached to the report were appendices which showed unavoidable pressures, new revenue bids, savings and additional income, capital bids, and the capital programme.

In conclusion, Councillor Cooper advised that whilst the three years after next would be challenging, he had no doubt that Members and officers would work together to ensure that the financial future of the Council would turn out to be not nearly as difficult as the MTFP suggested.

It was noted that the Council was required by law to approve a pay policy statement each year and this was included within the report. It was important to note that the Council complied with all current legislation in determining the pay and remuneration for all its employees. The policy took into account the changes to pay policy approved by Council at its previous meeting. The levels of remuneration were nationally determined by the National Joint Council. The salary points within a grade, up to grade 11, were nationally determined. The salary points above this were locally determined using an external assessor, West Midlands Employers, which was a stand-alone regional employers' organisation co-owned by 32 West Midlands councils.

Members were advised that the papers in respect of council tax setting were included within the second supplementary agenda pack. The levels of tax documented in the report took account of the requirements of Bromsgrove District Council, Worcestershire County Council, the

West Mercia Police and Crime Commissioner, Hereford and Worcester Fire & Rescue Authority and the various Parish Councils. The Council Tax resolutions that Council was asked to approve detailed the statutory approvals in relation to the 2019/ 2020 budget and the Council Tax to be recovered on behalf of WCC, the Police and Crime Commissioner and the Fire and Rescue Service

Councillor Cooper took the opportunity to pass on his gratitude for the input of the Members of the Finance and Budget Working Group to the budget process and also thanked Ms Pickering, Mr Forrester, Ms Goldey and the rest of the finance team for their hard work in putting together the budget and MTFP. He also paid tribute to the Heads of Service and their teams for engaging with and being supportive of the budget setting process, which had been much more robust this year than before.

Councillor M. Thompson responded to the presentation of the budget and advised that his Group would not be putting forward an alternative budget. However, he wished to highlight what he believed were a number of failures, including the estimated £1m given to the County Council for the Parkside offices, a failed IT system, unpaid rent at Sherwood Road and thousands of pounds wasted on an empty building at Burcot Lane. The £150k to be given to the Greater Birmingham LEP was questioned as the Council was also a member of the Worcestershire LEP. Councillor Thompson also raised concerns that the Council continued to pay Mott McDonald for work carried out to review planning applications, due to the Council's lack of confidence in the WCC's Highways Team and the models used. The amount of funds spent on legal consultants when the Council employed a Legal Team who should be able to advise the Council on legal matters. It was suggested that this wastage could be invested in frontline services and give back benefits to local communities, for example free swimming for the under 18s, rebuilding the sports hall and investment in green spaces and community gardens. Building cycle racks in the town centre and the reintroduction of pensioners' and free parking for the disabled were also suggested.

Councillor Thompson went on to ask a number of rhetorical questions of the Portfolio Holder for Finance:

- Why did the budget not contain anything aspirational – there had been talk at previous meeting of Bromsgrove becoming a centre for business and innovation but there did not appear to be any plans within the budget which reflected this?
- Why was it now costing to run the market when Members had originally been advised that it would be at no cost to the Council and may bring in a small income stream?
- Why had the planned savings reduced from £625k to £300k?
- Why there was no mention that the building company was going to bring in an income?
- Why was there no mention of the Burcot Lane site development?

Councillor Thompson also questioned what would happen in future years when the reserves were taken below the recommended limit. He believed that the budget was balanced on the assumption that the Council did not have to pay the Negative Revenue Grant and was concerned as he understood that this was only guaranteed for one year and what would be the likely outcome should this be reinstated in future years. Councillor Thompson urged the Council to be more imaginative and find ways of reigniting the local economy. It was important to approach WCC and have an open and frank discussion with them around the Mott MacDonald issue and ask for them to refund the cost of this work. It was important that the Council made better use of its assets and not selling them off. He also urged the Council to carry out a review of the senior management, highlighting that a saving had already been made by the transfer of the Head of Leisure and Cultural Services, as he did not believe it was necessary for this vacant post to be filled, as the leisure asset was run by a private company. He believed that the budget did not add up and that services were being cut whilst senior management salaries remained at their current rates.

An amendment to the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) were proposed by Councillor C. Hotham and seconded by Councillor S. Colella.

In proposing the amendment Councillor Hotham explained the Independent Alliance's budget was a simple budget which was designed to maximise the financial stability of the Council. He believed that the current budget merely ran down the Council's reserves with the hope that something would turn up in order to resolve matters. He explained that the Council needed to explore all possibilities to protect its position. As a recent CIPFA report had stated an attitude of "nowhere to run, nowhere to hide" was needed. Members were advised that the bulk of the proposals put forward were merely to deliver on previous promises. The current budget proposed running down reserves from £4.179m to £1.111m. Councillor Hotham believed that this was unacceptable and it was now time for action and for the Council to be ambitious in moving forward.

Councillor Hotham took Members through each line of the proposals, which were in the supplementary agenda pack 2 providing explanatory detail where necessary. He drew particular attention the New Homes Bonus Community Grants Scheme, which his Group believed had an important part to play in contributing to local communities and that they would also introduce a Member Ward Fund, to give Members the opportunity to fund small projects that they were aware of within their own Ward. He also confirmed that the budget allowed for any funds from the Business Rates Pilot Scheme to be invested back into communities in respect of community projects and further support for the Lifeline service. Councillor Hotham also made reference to the Efficiency Plan which had been completed at the request of Central Government, but which appeared to no longer be taken into consideration.

It was further explained that buried within the Medium Term Financial Plan, was financing for £20m of investment, but with no indication as to how this would be spent. It was proposed that by pushing for greater efficiencies, demanding the Council's fair consideration from WCC, improving parking control and supporting the local community at the same time as improving the Council's reserve position the Council would have a positive future.

In summing up, Councillor Hotham said he was proposing to push harder on achieving already promised efficiencies with an ambitious budget in order to try and secure the financial future of the Council with long term investment at the same time as supporting communities. If this was not supported he hoped that as had been suggested, some of the ideas put forward would be considered by Cabinet in the future.

In support of the amendment Councillor S. Baxter explained the ethos of her Group and how they had come up with the alternative budget, she had not presented this as it had been formulated by two of her Members who had taken part in detailed discussions through their roles on the Finance and Budget Working Group and therefore had a better understanding and knowledge of the Council's financial position. She reiterated the concerns raised in respect of the continued use and cost of Mott MacDonald and the need for this cost be recharged to Worcestershire County Council. She also spoke in support of the increase to the New Homes Bonus Community Grants Scheme and the introduction of a Member Ward Fund, as it was important that projects continued to be supported and encouraged.

Councillor Cooper thanked the Independent Alliance and suggested that there were some interesting ideas within it which would need to be developed more fully into business cases before any agreement or consideration could be given to them. He hoped that the charges for Mott MacDonald in this coming financial year would be the last ones.

Members discussed a number of areas considered within the amendment in more detail, including:

- The introduction of an energy plant to support the District's housing growth and where this would be located and more importantly the cost.
- The feasibility of such a plant.
- The importance of the Council having a vision and aiming to make improvements that would benefit all its residents.
- Councillor Colella asked for it to be minuted that he was disappointed with the ridicule that the Independent Alliance's budget had received and found the comments childish.
- The ongoing infrastructure problems in the District and how these would be addressed.
- The importance of libraries and the role they played in the local communities.

- The need to give residents the reassurance that the Council was doing its best for them.

Councillor Hotham thanked Councillor Cooper for acknowledging that some of the suggestions within the budget were worth further consideration and he hoped that if nothing else, these would be taken forward. He stressed the importance for the efficiencies to be carried through and the need for long term investments to be made in order for the Council to become as sustainable as possible in the future.

As required under the Local Authorities (Standing Orders) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2014 a named vote was taken on the proposed amendment.

For the amendment: Councillors Baxter, Colella, Hotham, Peters, Turner, Van der Plank (6)

Against the amendment: Councillors Allen-Jones, Cooper, Deeming, Denaro, Dent, Glass, Jones, Laight, May, Sherrey, Taylor, Thomas, Mike Webb, Shirley Webb, Whittaker (15)

Abstentions from the amendment: Councillors Bloore, Buxton, Jenkins, Peter McDonald, Christine McDonald, Mallett, Shannon, Thompson (8)

The amendment was lost.

The Leader spoke in support of the substantive recommendation and highlighted that there were a number of investment projects which were underway, for example the Burcot Lane redevelopment, Homes England had agreed the Heads of Terms for this and discussions were underway in respect of developing the land, which was unfortunately at this stage confidential. Consideration was also being given to a digester system in partnership with Severn Trent Water.

Members discussed what the Council had achieved over the last three years, despite the cuts to its budget at a national level. Significant progress had been made and this had been recognised by the Auditors when the final accounts for the previous year had been presented to them. Councillor Colella commented that whilst the Auditors had been positive about the accounts, the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee had looked at the process which had improved and not the budget position. Councillor C. Bloore commented on the amount of cuts that had been made and that this level was unsustainable. The Council needed to stand up to Central Government to ensure that this did not continue, in order to ensure that services were not cut.

Councillor P. McDonald was concerned that cutbacks could impact on a number of areas and suggested that something similar to what happened at the Marlbrook Tip site could happen if the Council did not take the necessary action. He suggested that the removal of asbestos

from local schools was of concern. The Deputy Leader responded that this was a matter for the County Council.

In summing up Councillor Cooper said the suggestions made had been taken on board and needed to be developed further. The budget was for one year and for the following years the Council needed to ensure that the necessary improvements and savings were made.

As required under the Local Authorities (Standing Orders) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2014 a named vote was taken on the Medium Term Financial Plan 2019/20 – 2022/23, the Pay Policy Statement and the Council Tax Resolutions.

For the recommendations: Councillors Allen-Jones, Cooper, Deeming, Denaro, Dent, Glass, Jones, Laight, May, Sherrey, Taylor, Thomas, Mike Webb, Shirley Webb, Whittaker (15)

Against the recommendations: Councillors Bloore, Buxton, Mallett, Peter McDonald, Christine McDonald, Shannon, Thompson, Turner, Van der Plank (9)

Abstentions from the recommendations: Councillors Baxter, Colella, Hotham, Jenkins, Peters (5)

RESOLVED:

- a) that the Unavoidable costs as attached at Appendix1 be approved:
 - 2019/20 £366k
 - 2020/21 £240k
 - 2021/22 £243k
 - 2022/23 £245k

- b) that the Revenue Bids as attached at Appendix 2 be approved:
 - 2019/20 £67k
 - 2019/20 £42k
 - 2020/21 £25k
 - 2021/22 £25k

- c) that the Identified savings as attached at Appendix 3 be approved:
 - 2018/19 £332k
 - 2019/20 £335k
 - 2020/21 £355k
 - 2021/22 £459k

- d) that the Capital Programme bids as attached at Appendix 4 be approved:
 - 2018/19 £687k
 - 2019/20 £40k
 - 2020/21 £40k
 - 2021/22 £1,113k

- e) that the approval of the Pay Policy Statement as attached in Appendix 6 of the report be approved;
- f) that the Council Tax Resolutions as attached at Appendix 1 (to these minutes) to include the increase of the Council Tax per Band D @ 2.99% be approved; and
- g) that the release from reserves of £150k to fund Mott Macdonald in 2019/20 only be approved.

Cabinet Recommendations 27th February 2019

Council Tax Support Scheme

The recommendation from Cabinet in respect of the Council Tax Support Scheme were proposed by Councillor B. Cooper and seconded by Councillor G. Denaro.

In presenting the recommendations Councillor Cooper advised that the Council was required to review its Council Tax Reduction or Support Scheme for working age recipients each year and that support for pension age applicants was determined by Central Government.

Councillor Cooper reminded Members that last year there were several developments concerning the support scheme for working age applicants. In January 2018, Council approved the recommendation that there would be no change to the scheme for 2018/19 which gave up to 80% relief for working age claimants. It also passed a resolution promoted by Councillor Bloore, that a review was commenced to be concluded by September 2018 and at that time, a draft scheme would be put out to consultation to include an 'in principle' 5% increase in support. In April 2018, Council considered a resolution passed by WCC that all care leavers should have up to 100% Council Tax relief until the age of 25. This could not be incorporated into the scheme for the current year, so it was to be considered for inclusion in the next year's scheme. In the meantime, it was agreed that care leavers would be paid out of the hardship fund. Councillor Cooper further advised that In the autumn, a revised scheme was drawn up which included up to 100% relief for the care leavers and an increase in relief to a maximum of 85% for working age claimants which has gone out to consultation. The responses were shown within the report and indicated support for increasing the Council Tax relief up to 85%. The other preceptors, WCC, the Police and the Fire and Rescue Service did not support this increase. If the Council were to go ahead with the increase, it could cost the preceptors about £100k a year for the working age claimants and about £20k for care leavers.

Members were advised that a full review of the scheme in terms of its administration and the levels of support was thought to be necessary, particularly in view of the introduction of universal credit to Bromsgrove. Unfortunately, this review had not taken place last year in part because

of the long- term sickness of the senior officer who was tasked to carry it out and it was therefore proposed that this would be done in the coming year.

Councillor Cooper clarified that In the meantime, Cabinet was proposing to Council that the Local Council Tax Support scheme was revised for 2019 / 2020 as detailed in the report.

RESOLVED:

that the Local Council Tax Support scheme is revised to provide:

- a) Increase to maximum level of support for working age claimants from 80% of liability to 85% of liability;
- b) Care Leavers under 21 years of age are treated as a protected group and provided 100% Local Council Tax Reduction (LCTR);
- c) Care leavers aged 21 years or over and under 25 years of age are treated as a protected group and provided up to 100% LCT;
- d) The scheme is uprated in line with national welfare benefits; and
- e) Council Tax Hardship Scheme is amended to enable transitional support to be provided to care leavers under 25 whose income results in significant withdrawal of support

85\18

ALTERNATIVE BUDGET PROPOSALS - INDEPENDENT ALLIANCE

The alternative Budget Proposals from the Independent Alliance were considered under the Medium Term Financial Plan item as detailed in Minute No. 85/18.

86\18

TO NOTE THE MINUTES OF THE MEETINGS OF THE CABINET HELD ON 13TH FEBRUARY 2019

The Minutes from the Cabinet meeting held on 13th February were submitted for information and noted by Members.

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TO RECEIVE AND CONSIDER A REPORT FROM THE PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR LEISURE, CULTURAL, COMMUNITY AND WORCESTERSHIRE REGULATORY SERVICES

A request was made and accepted to allow questions to be asked as the report was presented page by page. Councillor P. Whittaker, the Portfolio Holder for Leisure and Cultural Services, Community Services and Worcestershire Regulatory Services, was happy to do this and advised Members that he was not proposing to give a lengthy introduction to his detailed report and if he was unable to answer any questions would be happy to respond outside of the meeting.

Before presenting his annual report Councillor Whittaker provided Members with an update in respect of the Sports Hall. He advised that there had been a number of occasions of trespass and vandalism on the site therefore officers undertook a full health, safety and security

assessment last Friday (22nd February 2019). During this review some issues relating to security and health and safety were identified and officers recommended closure of the site to ensure the safety of all users and staff. The issues included limited lighting provision, water ingress and damage to exit and access arrangements. Officers had commenced a programme of installing additional security fencing and hoarding to ensure access to the site was restricted.

It was confirmed that whilst the current casual users of the Sports hall had been contacted by Everyone Active, officers had also asked for a contact list so that they could be contacted to understand their current position. Councillor Whittaker was also able to confirm that in respect of the use of the Sports hall at North Bromsgrove High School, the signed Heads of Terms were with BAM for their sign off and the final contract was also with their legal team.

Councillor P. McDonald asked a question in respect of the new food businesses as detailed on page 35 of the agenda pack. He asked what the procedure was when people moved in to new premises. He was aware that this had happened and if a number of residents had not alerted Worcestershire Regulatory Services (WRS) they would have been unaware of the business. He was particularly concerned that there may be other businesses that did not meet the legal requirements for food businesses which were operating without WRS's knowledge.

Following discussion, Councillor Whittaker agreed to take this matter up with WRS to get a clear picture of the process in place and to ensure that if there was a gap in that process it would be addressed. Councillor Whittaker agreed to provide Councillor McDonald with the outcome of his findings outside of the meeting.

Councillor Hotham also raised a question in respect of page 35 and the number of premises rated at Level 2 or less in respect of Food Hygiene and what actions were taken to support improvement at these premises. Councillor Whittaker advised that the "scores on the doors" system had been introduced some time ago and aimed to provide users with the information in respect of premises. Those premises wishing to make improvements would be supported by WRS officers and where there were particularly low rating targeted inspections would be made if appropriate.

Councillor Whittaker confirmed to Members that he had been involved in the writing of the report with the support of a number of officers. A number of Members disputed the statement on page 37 which referenced the revocation of the Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) on the Kidderminster Road, Hagley. It was believed that the levels were in fact rising further and that the way in which the monitoring had been carried out was not accurate. Councillor Whittaker assured Members that the monitoring carried out was in line with DEFRA guidelines and met the necessary requirements. There was disappointment expressed that this section of the report did not provide more around a subject

which was of such importance and was seen as the biggest threat. It was also noted that consideration was being given to a further AQMA in Wychbold and it was confirmed that whilst this was on the border of the District, the AQMA would be under the jurisdiction of Wychavon District Council. Councillor R. Laight, as the Chairman of the WRS Joint Board, assured Members that air quality was something which he brought up with officers at regular intervals as he appreciated that it was of concern to both Members and many residents. Regular reports were also received by the Joint Board in respect of this matter and he would continue to be proactive in any way he could to ensure that it remained on the agenda.

On page 38 of the report, reference was made to MATES, a form of multi-agency working which had been used by Licensing Officers and the Police. Members asked what this stood for and Councillor Whittaker agreed to confirm this outside of the meeting.

In respect of the Health and Physical Activity (Sports Development) section of the report Members raised a number of points, including that Bromsgrove showed a higher than average level of excess weight in adults and what actions were being taken to address this. Reference was made to the closure of the Sports Hall and its impact on the groups using it, for example the Over 50's badminton, whilst it was suggested that there were facilities in Barnt Green, this was not considered to be a suitable alternative. Sponsorship of roundabouts and "street furniture" was also discussed and whether this was appropriate. Councillor Whittaker responded that he understood that this was subject to planning permission in some cases.

The Chairman reminded Members that there was a thirty minute time limit on this item and Councillor Whittaker advised Members that he was happy to take any further questions outside of the meeting if Members wished to contact him directly.

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QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Question submitted by Councillor S. Colella

"As the Leader stated at the Full Council meeting of 23rd January 2019 that there was to be a joint BDC and WCC Leadership meeting on 25th January in relation to Highways issues and that officers would circulate briefing notes from that meeting to Cabinet members, Group Leaders and the Chair of Overview and Scrutiny, can the Leader explain why details of what was discussed at that meeting were not reported to the Cabinet meeting of 13th February, can he confirm briefing notes have indeed been circulated to all relevant members mentioned above and indeed can he now take this opportunity to give a detailed update to Full Council of that meeting?"

The Leader responded that he was surprised that Councillor Colella had not seen the note he had issued on 6th February to all Group

Leaders, as it had merely set out procedural matters going forward. Officers would be monitoring the position and recommendations would be made through the Overview and Scrutiny Board and Strategic Planning Group to Cabinet in due course.

Questions submitted by Councillor S. Baxter

“Please can the leader report on the amount of business rates that have been paid for on the Burcot Lane site since the Council vacated the site and what the expected total bill for business rates will be by the time the old council offices are demolished.”

The Leader responded that £320k had been paid in Business Rates with a £45k reduction in the ensuing year.

Question submitted by Councillor S. Shannon

“Has the Leader noticed the current condition of Bromsgrove High Street, after a splendid resurface job carried out a couple of years ago the High St surface is now despoiled with hundreds, possibly thousands of lumps of discarded chewing gum also oil and diesel fuel stains. Worst of all, a large section of the former pristine paving in front of the Specsavers store has been excavated and replaced with poor quality black-top. After several months of this temporary surface sinking, a tripping hazard has developed for pedestrians, some with eye sight issues frequenting this section of the High Street. Can the Leader give notice of any planned cleaning/maintenance schedule for what has now become a rather grubby High Street?”

Councillor K. May, Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Economic Development, the Town Centre and Strategic Partnerships responded that she had met with officers from Worcestershire County Council (WCC), officers from this Council and the County Member who represents the Town Centre on 26th February, to discuss the issues that Councillor Shannon had raised and that she had previously noted. WCC were to meet with the utility companies to discuss the standard of their re-instatement work on the High Street and address the issues which had been raised. The Place Team were to introduce a cleaning programme, which Councillor May would be looking at closely.

Question submitted by Councillor R. Jenkins

“With Worcestershire Councils including this Council having been chosen to take part in the Government’s 75% business rates retention scheme for 2019/20 and with all Worcestershire Councils agreeing that the extra income is to be spent on projects which then reduce spending on social care, can the Leader state how soon members will be able to submit applications for investing this additional income in their ward areas?”

The Leader responded that as Members were aware from the initial bid, it had been agreed that the collective gain from being a pilot would be invested in District and County services that prevented or reduced the cost of social care.

The formal Governance arrangements were currently being developed with the aim that business cases for new and innovative projects to reduce social care be approved by the Worcestershire Leaders Board. Once the arrangements were finalised, officers would be working with Members to identify areas of spend, which could include:

- Funding community transport to help reduce isolation.
- Additional work with Housing providers and District to plan and build facilities for the most vulnerable, including care leaves and those young people at risk of homelessness.
- Additional spending above the Disabled Facilities Grant to help people live in their homes longer and support disabled children and young people to live at home.
- Districts taking more responsibility for running community facilities.
- Joint work with Districts to focus on residents' debt for the most deprived in communities.
- Fostering greater independent living through District run schemes.
- Enabling local businesses with relief to support schemes such as fostering and disability employment.

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MOTIONS ON NOTICE

Library Services

Members considered the following Notice of Motion submitted by Councillor C. McDonald:

This Council condemns any measures by Worcestershire County Council that would reduce Library services throughout the District. In addition seek assurances from the County Council that no Library will be closed or services cut.

The Motion was proposed by Councillor C. McDonald and seconded by Councillor P. McDonald.

In proposing the Motion Councillor C. McDonald explained that the role of the libraries went much further than simply the loan of books, in many places they had become the hub of the community, a place where a huge range of information could be accessed in a variety of ways. It was often the only place some people were able to go and freely access the internet, particularly those from disadvantaged low income families. Councillor C. McDonald said it may be the only access they had so was a vital part of their education and learning. For those older more vulnerable residents it was a place where they could get help too,

whether it be accessing things online, which was in many cases, the only way that some services were accessible.

Councillor P. McDonald told Members that the libraries were much more than a place of learning, for example, many Members held their surgeries for residents there and local groups were able to use the facilities to meet, so the library had become a focal point for the local community. He was concerned that whilst the County Council was holding a consultation, it would result in those hubs of the community being greatly depleted, yet the County Council continued to spend thousands of pounds on other, less worthwhile, projects. They gave young people an opportunity to further their education and were a vital part in the process of being able to better themselves.

The Leader thanked Councillor C. McDonald for the motion and suggested that whilst he and his Group were committed to ensuring that libraries remained open, in Bromsgrove District. The County Council were currently in a period of consultation that would lead the Council to understand what proposals there were for alternative delivery for libraries in the area. He was therefore happy to agree to support the motion if it were amended slightly to the effect that:

“this Council remains committed, where possible, to ensure that all libraries remain open in the Bromsgrove District and that the Leader seek assurances from the County Council that libraries remain open in the District.”

He also assured Councillor McDonald and Members that he was committed to working with the County on this and a myriad of other matters, to ensure that any local provision that may be required to secure the longevity of library services in the District, as has been considered by Worcester City, would be considered fully at a local level.

After consideration Councillor C. McDonald said she was minded to accept the suggested amendment.

On being put to the vote the amendment was carried.

Litter Pickers

Members considered the following Notice of Motion submitted by Councillor P. McDonald:

There is growing concern throughout the District regarding the amount of rubbish littering our streets. This has been highlighted by ‘Keep Bromsgrove Beautiful’ who are now having to clean our streets, because of the Council failing in its legal obligations and duty to maintain a clean environment. Therefore, we call upon this Council to uphold its legal responsibilities and increase the number of litter pickers and make the District of Bromsgrove a pleasant place to live.

The Motion was proposed by Councillor P. McDonald and seconded by Councillor S. Shannon.

In proposing the motion Councillor McDonald stressed his concern that litter had the potential to cause harm to human health and that people should be paid to do this job rather than have to rely on volunteers. It could impact on people in many different ways, for example people no longer had pride in their community, it could lead to anti-social behaviour, which in turn led to social isolation for some more vulnerable groups in the community and impacted on their mental health. This was in addition to the impact on the environment and the harm it could cause to it.

Councillor McDonald advised Members that in many cases the job could be dangerous and if those carrying it out did not have the correct training or equipment it could be potentially hazardous to the volunteers concerned. The Council had a legal duty to provide this service and as such the Council should carry out that duty by employing sufficient litter pickers throughout the District. By employing more litter pickers, the Council would be providing much needed jobs in the area. He did not believe that volunteers should not be expected to keep the streets clean.

In seconding the Motion Councillor Shannon echoed its sentiments and commented that he had spoken to the founder of the Keep Bromsgrove Beautiful Group and had been led to believe that it was not a political group, however from his experience he did not believe this to be the case. He reiterated Councillor McDonald's concerns around endangering jobs and the health and safety risks of litter picking. On numerous occasions extra litter picking had been requested for particular areas and this had been carried out, but he felt it would be more appropriate for regular litter picking to be carried out with sufficient staff to provide that service. He gave an example of Aston Fields which was becoming a vibrant busy area with a number of new food outlets which, whilst this was good to see, brought with it extra litter problems, hence the need for an increased service.

In supporting the Motion Councillor L. Mallett highlighted that he believed the Council could do more, particularly in respect of fly tipping and it was important that paid staff carried out these duties. However it was important that the Council worked collaboratively with organisations such as Keep Bromsgrove Beautiful and other voluntary organisations, which played an important part in bringing people together and enabled them to learn new skills and helped to combat social isolation. It was clear that more litter pickers were needed and that this needed to be acted on.

Councillor C. B. Taylor commented that the volunteers did a good job for the community, and that if there was a particular problem in an area, then if the relevant officers were contacted this would be addressed. He believed it was more important to educate people about the problems that dropping litter caused rather than employing extra litter pickers.

People needed to realise that dropping litter of any kind was not acceptable.

Councillor S. Colella advised Members that if they referred to page 23 of their agendas they would see that the Council had just approved a number of additional staff which he believed would address the matter being discussed and therefore there was no need for the Motion to be considered further.

Councillor S. Webb spoke in support of the excellent work carried out by the Place Team and the work they carried out on a regular basis in her Ward. She further commented that the Parish Council and local schools, as part of educating young people about litter, carried out litter picks in the local area. She believed that educating people as to the damage litter did was as important as its collection.

In responding to the Motion the Leader advised that he was sure all would agree that dropping litter was damaging to both the look and feel of communities and also to the environment and she did not believe that the Council would be acting responsibly if it just continued to tolerate litter and the harm that it caused.

The Council was committed to working with schools and voluntary community groups to educate communities on the damage that litter could cause and to encourage pride in the areas where they lived. Officers worked in a holistic way and the litter picking events were merely a part of the educational process that the Council was attempting to achieve throughout the District. Having spoken to officers it was confirmed that the volunteers saw themselves as an enhancement to services delivered by the Council and they took huge civic pride in the work that they carried out. In addition to this Members were advised that many volunteers got a social connectivity from working with fellow citizens and that in some cases officers had been told that it provided a valuable community cohesion event for isolated people.

A number of the organisations picked litter on private land that fell outside of the Council's control and as a result places like the station, were regularly targeted by the volunteer teams. Members were advised that a concerned community volunteer had contacted them as they felt that the comments that had been made by some councillors criticising these groups had been greatly upsetting. The volunteer had felt upset that they had not been asked to comment on the work that they did and that their group was specifically named in the critical article presented on this topic in the press. The volunteer had taken pains to point out that they were in no way politically affiliated and they do not wish to be used as an example in this way as they were very proud to be making a positive difference to their community. It was further confirmed that the Head of Environmental Services would be happy to talk about this and in particular the social inclusion and educational benefits that it provided.

Councillor S. Baxter supported the need to develop pride in our local communities, but as Councillor Colella had already stated, the Council had agreed to additional staff in the Place Team earlier in the meeting.

Councillor M. Sherrey confirmed that whilst working with volunteers, it was always important to education people in the damage litter dropping did. Community litter picking was about much more than just collecting litter, it was about raising awareness and community pride. She also reiterated that many of the litter picks were on private land, which was not the responsibility of the Council and confirmed that by approving the recommendations earlier the Council had committed to further support in the Place Teams over the next three years.

Councillor R. Laight also highlighted a number of groups of young people who enjoyed the camaraderie and feeling of making a difference when taking part in helping keep their communities tidy. These groups were well supervised and never put in danger as had been suggested. It was important for them to learn to keep the environment tidy and the impact that litter had on it.

In summing up Councillor McDonald confirmed that he appreciated the work being carried out by volunteer groups and the benefits from it, but that it should be used to enhance the work of the Council and not as a replacement for staff. It was a statutory duty of the Council to carry out litter picking and this should be done by paid staff.

On being put to the vote the Motion was lost.

The meeting closed at 8.47 p.m.

Chairman