

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MEETING OF THE CABINET

25TH NOVEMBER 2020, AT 6.00 P.M.

PRESENT: Councillors K.J. May (Leader), A. D. Kent (Deputy Leader), G. N. Denaro, M. A. Sherrey, P.L. Thomas and S. A. Webb

Observers: Councillor S. A. Robinson (formerly Hughes)

Officers: Mr. K. Dicks, Mr C. Forrester, Mrs. C. Felton, Mr. G. Revans, Ms J. Willis, Mr O. Paparega, Mr. K. Hirons and Ms. A. Scarce

38/2020 **TO RECEIVE APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

There were no apologies for absence.

39/2020 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest on this occasion.

40/2020 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting of Cabinet held on 14th October 2020 were submitted.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of Cabinet held on 14th October 2020 be approved as a true and correct record.

41/2020 **MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD HELD ON 12TH OCTOBER 2020**

Officers confirmed that there were no recommendations from the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board held on 12th October or from the meeting held on 23rd November 2020.

RESOLVED that

- (1) The minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny board held on 12th October 2020 be noted; and
- (2) The minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board held on 23rd November 2020 be noted.

42/2020

WORCESTERSHIRE REGULATORY SERVICES BOARD
RECOMMENDATIONS - BUDGET 2021/22

Cabinet considered the minutes of the meeting of the Worcestershire Regulatory Services (WRS) Board held on 1st October 2020.

Members were advised that during the course of the meeting concerns had been raised regarding ICT support for WRS. Wyre Forest District Council, which provided ICT support and accommodation to the WRS team, had proposed an increase to the fees charged for these services. The WRS Board had agreed to defer making a decision about whether to increase those fees until further information had been provided for Members' consideration.

Following the WRS Board meeting on 1st October Members had requested clarification about the fees charged by Bromsgrove District Council as the host authority for WRS. There was the possibility that the Council would need to propose an increase to these charges to offset the impact of any increase that might be agreed to charges for ICT services and accommodation for WRS.

RECOMMENDED that partner authorities approve the following for 2020/21:

- 1.1 the additional partner liabilities for 2020/21 in relation to increase in WRS pension forward funding rate and recommend the increase to individual partner councils:-

Bromsgrove District Council	£11k
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- 1.2 the additional partner liabilities for 2020/21 in relation to the additional increase in pay award of 0.75% from the original estimated 2% and recommend the increase to individual partner councils:-

Bromsgrove District Council	£3k
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- 1.3 the refund to Wyre Forest in relation to the change of Pest Control Services and recommend the refund to individual partner councils:-

Wyre Forest District Council	£7k
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- 1.5 the revised budget for 2020/21 and partner percentage allocations for 2020/21 onwards, due to the change in pest control service at Wyre Forest:-

	£'000	Revised %
Bromsgrove District Council	468	14.59

43/2020

DISTRICT LEVEL ECONOMIC RECOVERY FRAMEWORK

The Head of North Worcestershire Economic Development presented the District Level Economic Recovery Framework. The framework was a live strategic document and would be updated on an ongoing basis to reflect changing circumstances.

Members were advised that the framework focused on 3 key priority areas:

- Supporting people – The main objective in relation to this priority was to support residents who had been made unemployed as a result of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. Support was also provided to residents considered to be at potential risk of redundancy as a result of the pandemic. In the short-term the framework focused on actions that could be taken by the Council and partner agencies to enable people in this position to secure employment. In the medium-term and long-term there would be a need to ensure that residents developed the skills needed by local employers. Increasingly the workforce needed to be able to adapt quickly to using new forms of technology in order to secure employment.

The framework took into account the need to plan for the future entry of children and young people into the workforce. These young people also needed to be provided with the skills needed by local businesses if they were to secure employment in the district.

- Supporting businesses – There were 4 workstreams underpinning the priority of supporting businesses. This included business information, guidance and support in relation to securing grant funding. Another workstream focused on start-up businesses and enterprises as there was evidence to suggest from the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) hubs that there had been a surge in demand for support with establishing start-up companies. The Covid-19 pandemic had provided many companies with an opportunity to innovate. The Council had recently acquired access to an online business directory which tracked businesses with high growth potential and approximately 50 Bromsgrove based businesses had been identified and listed on this platform. There was also a workstream focusing on larger and digital employers.

- Improving places – The Chancellor of the Exchequer, in the November Spending Review, had announced that funding would be made available for place shaping purposes. The funding criteria remained to be confirmed but, should Bromsgrove be eligible, an application would be submitted to the Government. At present, work streams were focusing on repurposing the town centres in the district where needed.

New staff were being employed in the North Worcestershire Economic Development Unit who would provide targeted support to businesses based in Bromsgrove district. The support provided by these Officers also helped to enhance the offer that could be made to businesses considering operating in the district. Members were advised that there was a lot of support available to businesses and people considering establishing a business but it could be difficult sometimes to identify and therefore the support provided by these officers was invaluable.

During consideration of the report Members noted that the District Economic Recovery Framework had been debated at a recent meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board. The Board had had a very detailed debate and a number of useful points had been raised. At this meeting the potential for ward Councillors to be involved in work designed to enhance town centres and high streets had been discussed. The Board had been keen to ensure that ward Councillors could assist with this work if possible and had noted that Councillors would appreciate being kept informed of what was happening in their wards. At Cabinet it was noted that the Council would engage with ward Councillors as part of the process.

Reference was made to a typographical error in the report which should have referred to 45,000 eligible employments in the claims received up to 31st August 2020 for Bromsgrove.

Cabinet also discussed the number of residents in the district who were claiming out of work benefits and questioned the impact that the extension of the furlough scheme had had on unemployment levels in Bromsgrove. Data from the Office for National Statistics indicated that the number of people claiming out of work benefits had declined slightly in September and October after having peaked in August 2020.

The impact of Covid-19 on businesses in the district was debated. Members noted that, should pubs, restaurants and hotels have to remain closed after the end of the second national lockdown, this could have a negative impact on businesses in the hospitality industry in particular. Cabinet was informed that there was some uncertainty on the date of the meeting about which tier Bromsgrove district would be placed in after the end of lockdown and therefore it was difficult at the meeting to determine what restrictions would be placed on the hospitality industry over the festive period. Further clarity would be provided by the Government in an announcement due to be issued on Thursday, 26th November 2020.

RESOLVED that the report and the Bromsgrove Local Economic Recovery Framework (2020-2023) be approved.

44/2020

DOMESTIC ABUSE POLICY - IDENTIFYING ABUSE AND RESPONDING EFFECTIVELY

Cabinet considered the Domestic Abuse Policy focusing on action that could be taken to identify abuse and ensure that the Council responded effectively.

The report highlighted the Council's commitment to tackling domestic abuse and outlined action that would be taken to enable frontline staff to identify and support residents who were victims of or at risk of falling victim to domestic abuse. The policy would enable the Council to meet the requirements set out in the Domestic Abuse Bill. New legislative requirements would come into effect in April 2021 which would introduce a new legal duty for local authorities to provide support to victims of domestic abuse and their children. The bill would also introduce a statutory definition of domestic abuse which emphasised that domestic abuse did not just relate to physical violence but could also involve emotional, coercive, controlling or economic abuse. The Council already worked in partnership with a number of other organisations to support victims of domestic abuse.

Officers advised that the report was being presented on the national white ribbon campaign day. The white ribbon campaign was dedicated to highlighting the issue of domestic abuse and therefore the discussion at Cabinet was very timely. Communications had been issued by the Council in relation to this campaign which had been shared with partner organisations.

During consideration of this item reference was made to the form that had been developed for staff to complete when working with victims of domestic abuse and it was suggested that staff would need a high level of understanding about the matter in order to complete the form appropriately. These forms would need to be completed and victims interviewed at a time when they would be very vulnerable which might have an impact on their mental health and therefore it was important to ensure that staff adopted a sensitive manner. Officers confirmed that only trained staff would be required to complete these forms, such as employees working in the Housing Strategy team. Other staff would have general awareness raising training and they would be expected to raise any concerns by referring matters to the Council's safeguarding leads.

RECOMMENDED that

- (1) the draft Domestic Abuse Policy be adopted; and
- (2) the Head of Housing and Community Services be given delegated authority to update and amend the policy in line with any new legislation and guidance, as and when required.

45/2020

HOUSING STRATEGY

The Housing Strategy was presented for Cabinet's consideration. The Housing Strategy would replace a policy that previously applied countywide with a succinct strategy focused on housing needs in Bromsgrove district. The national, county and district context had all been taken into account when producing the strategy, which contained a clear set of priorities that would be reviewed regularly. The strategy had been drafted before Covid-19 emerged and the impact of the pandemic remained to be confirmed. However, the document acknowledged points raised in the Council's Recovery Plan.

The strategy was relatively brief in length. The decision had been taken to restrict the length of the document to ensure that it was user friendly for all the Council's stakeholders, including partner agencies. The Housing Strategy would be subject to consultation and it was possible that changes would be made to the document in response to any feedback that was received.

During consideration of this item reference was made to a recent debate at a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board where Members had stressed the need for more affordable housing in the district and it had been suggested that this should be referenced in one of the tables in the strategy. This suggestion had received Officers' and the Portfolio Holder's support during the meeting.

Cabinet was advised that the Housing Strategy and Economic Recovery Framework would both have a positive impact on the district moving forward. A lot of work was required to deliver on the proposals in both of these documents but this would place the district in a good position moving forward.

RESOLVED that

- (1) a period of public consultation for four weeks for the draft BDC Housing and Homelessness Strategy 2020-2024 be approved; and
- (2) a final version of the Housing Strategy, having considered any relevant consultation responses, be brought back to Cabinet for approval.

46/2020

QUARTER 2 FINANCE MONITORING AND MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN UPDATE REPORT

The Head of Financial and Customer Services presented the Financial Monitoring Report for the second quarter for the 2020/21 financial year.

During the presentation of this report the following matters were highlighted for Members' consideration:

- Significant overspends had been recorded for the strategic purpose 'run and grow a successful business'. There was a total forecast deficit of £1 million for this strategic purpose.
- A lot of the overspends in the budget were driven by the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, such as with the loss of income from car parking fees during the lockdown.
- The majority of the overspend for 'run and grow a successful business' could be attributed to the loss of income from car parking fees during the pandemic.
- A £169,000 overspend had been reported for the strategic purpose 'communities which are safe and well maintained'.
- There had been some challenges with waste management disposal costs resulting in overspends on overtime and call out hours at a cost of £219,000. This overspend was being reviewed at a corporate level.
- However, the Council had received £1.255 million in 4 tranches of Covid-19 grants from the Government. In total £390,000 of this funding had already been spent so that £865,000 remained to be spent and some of this funding could be used to mitigate the overspends in the budget.
- There were some underspends which had been achieved from salary savings, particularly in the tree management team.
- There were also underspends arising from temporary vacant positions in Customer, Democratic and ICT services of £194,000.
- In addition, there was a training underspend of £100,000.
- Disabled facility grants remained underspent and Officers were investigating this to ensure that the needs of the most vulnerable residents were being met.
- There was an £87,000 underspend on the strategic purpose 'living active and healthy lives' and this was mainly due to the impact of Covid-19 on Leisure Services. Additional grant funding had been secured to help support Leisure Services and would help to offset the additional fee that was likely to be requested by the Council's Leisure Service provider.
- By the date of the meeting Officers were anticipating a variance in the budget of £1.288 million.
- There was a recommendation about reprofiling the Burcot Lane project as the capital spending had not been able to proceed as quickly as had been anticipated. A grant had been agreed with Homes England for this project so was moving ahead.

Following the presentation of the report Members discussed the financial position and the possibility that further grant funding would be received by the Council to help manage the budget moving forward. The grant funding received to offset the loss of income from fees and charges would be allocated to particular service areas and Members were advised that it would be prudent to analyse the budget position and any gaps in the budget once these allocations had been confirmed.

During consideration of this item the Cabinet thanked the Head of Financial and Customer Services and the Financial Services team for their hard work managing the budget during the year. Members recognised that the team had had an increase in workload during the period due to the need to co-ordinate the provision of approximately £30 million in grant funding to businesses impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Reference was also made to the level of income that had been lost by the Council during the pandemic which would not be covered by grant funding from the Government. Members were advised that clarification was awaited in respect of the final position of the accounts and once this had been finalised further clarification could be provided.

RESOLVED that the current financial position in relation to revenue and capital budgets for the financial period April 2020 – September 2020 as detailed in the report be noted.

RECOMMENDED that the reprofiling of the Burcot Lane project in the capital programme 2020/21 due to officers completing a review of the Capital budget for 2020/21 – 2023/24 as detailed in appendix 3 be approved.

47/2020

CAPITAL STRATEGY 2020/21 INCORPORATING THE TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

The Head of Financial and Customer Services presented the Capital Strategy 2020/21, incorporating the Treasury Management Strategy for Members' consideration.

Members were advised that there was an annual requirement to consider and approve these documents. Usually, these strategies would be considered earlier in the year but in the first national lockdown some Committee meetings had been cancelled and so the item had been rescheduled for consideration later in the year.

A number of key changes to the strategies were highlighted for Members' consideration:

- There were intentions to use Money Market Funds a lot more during the year to handle any surpluses, as this would provide a greater return to the Council. In previous years the authority had used services through the bank of England but rates of return had been quite low.
- The Council did not have professional investor status so had had to work hard to encourage a number of Money Market Funds to work with the authority.
- As a lot of grant funding had flowed through the Money Market Funds there was the possibility that the Council would receive some interest from this funding at the end of the financial year.

- Bromsgrove District Council was maintaining the borrowing strategy for short-term borrowing from other Councils.
- The Government had announced that borrowing rates from the PWLB would return to 2019 interest rate levels. There was the potential that the Council could borrow from the PWLB to help fund the Burcot Lane project.
- Flexible use of capital receipts enabled the Council to capitalise receipts to help cover some revenue costs where usually that would not be possible. This would help to contribute to savings in the revenue budget moving forward.
- The investment strategy section of the documentation was the area that had been changed the most when compared to previous years. The strategy had been altered to allow investments to be made even in cases where no profit would be made or there might potentially be a loss in order to benefit the local business community at a difficult time for the economy.
- Any losses from investments that did not yield a high rate of return would be offset by investments that were made which would yield a higher rate of return.
- The MRP policy would be the same as in previous years.

RECOMMENDED that

- (1) the Capital Strategy as an appropriate overarching strategy for the Council be approved;
- (2) the Treasury Management Strategy for 2020/21 and the associated MRP policy be approved;
- (3) the policy for Flexible use of Capital Receipts be approved; and
- (4) the Investment Strategy be approved.

48/2020

FEES AND CHARGES

Cabinet considered the Council's proposed fees and charges for 2021/22.

During consideration of this item reference was made to the debate that had been held about the fees and charges at a recent meeting of the Finance and Budget Working Group. Members were advised that the group was largely supportive of the proposed fees and charges for 2021/22. However, there had been a number of areas that the group had wanted to highlight for the Cabinet's consideration:

- Concerns that the increase of the bulky waste charge by 50 pence might result in an increase in fly tipping. Members had been advised by Officers that it was not anticipated that this increased fee would have that impact.
- The group had supported the proposal that Garden Waste collection services should operate over a full 12-month period and had agreed that the impact of this should be monitored.

- Questions had been raised about Planning Enforcement charges and concerns raised that the increase was based on salary costs and not overheads. The Head of Planning, Regeneration and Leisure Services had responded to these questions during the meeting.
- Pre-application charges had also been raised and the Head of Planning, Regeneration and Leisure Services had answered Members' queries on this subject.

Cabinet discussed the points raised by the Finance and Budget Working Group and in so doing noted that the 50 pence increase on fees for the bulky waste collection service was being proposed at a time of high demand for the service. The Head of Environmental and Housing Property Services explained that the fees for bulky waste collection services had not been increased for a number of years. The Environmental Services team had suggested the 50 pence increase which was not considered to be a significant rise on the existing fee. Customers had the opportunity to make a payment based on the size of the bulky waste that they were disposing of and the fee was considered to be good value for money. Members questioned whether a 50 pence increase on the fee would impact on a person's decision about whether to fly tip and potentially risk having to pay a substantial fine for doing so.

Reference was also made during the meeting to some additional fees and charges which had been proposed for Leisure Services. This involved the introduction of an extra charge for electricity at the BirdBox.

RECOMMENDED that

- a) all fees and charges included in appendix 1 to the report be approved;
- b) an additional charge for the electric supply at the Birdbox be approved and
- c) all fees and charges included in appendix 1 are charged commencing 1st February 2021.

(During consideration of this item there was a brief pause of the meeting which lasted for 10 minutes.)

49/2020

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL CAR PARKS - CAPITAL WORKS PROGRAMME

The Head of Environmental and Housing Property Services and the Environmental Services Manager presented a report in respect of the Capital Works programme for Bromsgrove District Council car parks. Originally the focus had been on undertaking a review of the Car Parks Strategy and the capital works that needed to be completed in respect of the car parks. The two elements had subsequently been split and the document presented for Cabinet's consideration was an infrastructure report. A wider car parking review would be included within the work of the North Worcestershire Economic Development team.

The report addressed both pay and display and pay on foot car parking arrangements. Officers were proposing a 5-year programme for the maintenance of the car parks. A comprehensive schedule of planned works had been provided in the report which would ensure that all the car parks were maintained at a safe and acceptable standard. The work that would be undertaken would include replacement of the pay and display machines to enable the introduction of a cashless payment option, introduction of more efficient LED lighting, resurfacing all the car parks, introducing a virtual permit system, installing CCTV in North Bromsgrove Car Park and the inclusion of the infrastructure for future vehicle electrical charging points. The infrastructure would be introduced at the same time as resurfacing works would be undertaken in order to minimise disruption. Should Members decide to dispose of a car park in the future or to not undertake some of the scheduled works this could be accommodated within the plan.

During consideration of this item Officers clarified that Members were not required at this stage to determine whether the proposed increase in funding in 2021/22 should be funded from balances or through borrowing. This would instead need to be determined in the Medium Term Financial Plan 2021/22 to 2024/25.

RECOMMENDED that

- (1) the preliminary offer made by a third party, to take over the running and maintenance of the Recreation Road South Car Park be accepted;
- (2) delegated powers be given to the Head of Environmental and Housing Property Services, Head of Finance and Customer Services and the Portfolio Holder, to explore, negotiate and agree the final lease details with the third party, be approved;
- (3) a decrease in the 2020/2021 Capital Programme of £34.5k to provide a total budget of £85.5k for replacement of parking machines be approved;
- (4) an increase of £432.0k, £307.0k or £267.0k in 2021/2022 to be funded from borrowing or balances following consideration as part of the medium term financial plan review be approved;
- (5) an increase of £136.0k to the 2022/2023 Capital Programme to be funded from borrowing or balances following consideration as part of the medium term financial plan review be approved;
- (6) an increase of £116.0k to the 2023/2024 Capital Programme to be funded from borrowing or balances following consideration as part of the medium term financial plan review be approved; and

- (7) an increase of £441.0k or £121.0k in 2024/2025 to be funded from borrowing or balances following consideration as part of the medium term financial plan review.

50/2020

APPOINTMENT OF EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF RESOURCES

The Chief Executive advised that recently an Appointments Committee had met in accordance with the Council's constitutional requirements. The Appointments Committee had been convened to consider the appointment of an Executive Director of Resources, following a rigorous recruitment exercise. The Appointments Committee had been unanimously in favour of appointing Mr James Howse to the position and Mr Howse had accepted the offer.

This appointment would be reported for Members' consideration at the Council meeting due to take place on Wednesday, 2nd December 2020. Council would need to formally ratify the appointment of Mr Howse to the statutory position of Section 151 Officer.

The meeting closed at 7.35 p.m.

Chairman