

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MEETING OF THE CABINET

13TH JANUARY 2021, 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 M. Thompson

Officers: Mr. K. Dicks, Mrs. S. Hanley, Mrs. C. Felton, Ms J. Willis,
Mr C. Forrester, Mr. M. Dunphy, Ms. A. Delahunty and
Ms. A. Scarce

51/20 **APOLOGIES**

There were no apologies for absence.

52/20 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest on this occasion.

53/20 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting of Cabinet held on 25th November 2020
were submitted.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of Cabinet held on 25th
November 2020 be approved as a true and correct record.

54/20 **MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY
BOARD HELD ON 23RD NOVEMBER 2020**

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

It was noted that the Board had pre-scrutinised the report in respect of
Homelessness Grant and Flexible Homelessness Support Grant
Allocation for 2021/22 at its meeting held on 11th January 2021 and had
made no recommendations at that meeting.

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Board
meeting held on 23rd November 2020 be noted.

The Leader thanked Councillor M Thompson, Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Board for attending.

With the agreement of the Leader Councillor Thompson asked if he could make a short statement.

Councillor Thompson advised Cabinet that he was resigning as Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Board and also from the Independent Alliance. He proposed to join the Conservative Group with immediate effect. He thanked officers who supported the Overview and Scrutiny Board for their hard work whilst he had been Chairman and also Councillor J Till and the other Members on the Board.

The Monitoring Officer confirmed to Councillor Thompson that officers would be in touch with him and the Leader to complete the necessary paperwork in order to action this.

The Leader and Cabinet thanked Councillor Thompson and welcomed him their Group and looked forward to working with him.

55/20

WORCESTER AND BIRMINGHAM CANAL CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL

The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Regulatory Services began by encouraging all Cabinet Members and Members watching to share the document as he believed it was a stunning document which was an advert for the Worcestershire Countryside and what this Council had in Bromsgrove in particular.

The Strategic Planning and Conservation Manager presented the report and credited his Team for all their hard work in preparing it. It was explained that this version was similar to that brought before Cabinet some 18 months ago and that whilst this Council did not own the conservation area it would continue to work with those who do. The purpose of the report was to report back on the initial consultation carried out. Responses were limited due to there not being many residents within the area. The relevant parish councils had also been spoken to, but as detailed in appendix 2 to the report. The majority of responses were from the Canals and Rivers Trust and the Canal Society and were therefore quite technical. However, a number of events, pre Covid-19, were held and the responses from these were also included in the report.

All comments had been taken onboard and included within the final document before Members this evening. The process going forward was for the document to become a material planning consideration at Planning Committee, so carried some weight and would be used for any planning applications which arose in and around the conservation area. It also provided a position in terms of the planning review going forward, in relation to the conservation area setting and likely impact of that. It was highlighted that significant amounts of land had been put forward

for development in the surrounding area and this provided an evidence base to move forward in assessing those.

It was suggested that the level of evidence in the report was something which should be used in the promotion of the District and a leaflet was being prepared to promote the tourism aspect, which would sit alongside this document without the more technical areas being included so it could be used as a marketing tool. This would be circulated in due course and prepared in time for when the current restrictions begin to ease.

The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Regulatory Services praised the document and again reiterated that it was a testament to what was available in the countryside and asked the Strategic Planning and Conservation Manager to provide all Councillors with a link to the document as it was really important to recognise the huge amount of work which had gone into its preparation. There was some really useful information within it, including key points of interest.

The Leader agreed that it was a marketing opportunity to promote the best of the District and reiterated the thanks to officers for an excellent piece of work. This was supported by all Cabinet Members.

RESOLVED that the Worcester and Birmingham Canal Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan and its contents be endorsed and approved as a material consideration for planning purposes.

56/20

BROMSGROVE HOMELESSNESS GRANT AND FLEXIBLE HOMELESSNESS SUPPORT GRANT ALLOCATION FOR 2021/22

The Portfolio Holder for Strategic Housing and Health and Well Being presented the report and explained that this was brought to Members annual and had previously included the flexible homelessness support grant and the homelessness reduction grant, which had now been combined. The report requested approval of the allocation of grants which provided a variety of services and initiatives which helped to prevent homelessness or support for those actually experiencing homelessness. Its allocation was detailed in paragraph 3.7 of the report and these services provided an important role in assisting people experiencing adversity and provided pathways to help them deal with the effects of being homeless and assist the statutory service in the prevention of homelessness.

The Portfolio Holder for Strategic Housing and Health and Well Being highlighted a mis-calculation in the table at 3.5 of the report due to the inclusion of crash-pad income in the draft report that has now been removed due to the notification of the final grant award which had been uplifted to cover all grant funding for 2021/22. The report stated in the table that homelessness grant including young persons' pathway worker grant of £127,200 and this should be £123,200 which gave a total of £281,794.

The Portfolio Holder for Strategic Housing and Health and Well Being thanked officers for all their hard work and the prevention work they carried out alongside the service provider.

The Leader highlighted the importance of the grants particularly at the current time and in light of the pandemic and the Head of Community Services also welcomed the support of the voluntary sector in supporting this really vulnerable group in these very challenging times.

RESOLVED that

- a) the initiatives in 3.7 of the report receive allocation of funding 2021/22 be approved; and
- b) delegated authority to the Head of Community and Housing Services following consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Strategic Housing to use any unallocated Grant during the year or make further adjustments as necessary to ensure full utilisation of the Grants for 2021/22 in support of existing or new schemes be approved.

57/20

COUNCIL TAX BASE CALCULATION 2021/22

The Head of Finance and Customer Services presented the report and explained that it was a technical document which sets out the detail of the accounting calculation of the District's tax base, for Council Tax setting purposes. The suggestion was that the Council Tax Bases for 2021/22 be set at £37,186.55. This included a provision of non-collection of 1% of the tax base that was being set. This also took into account the potential impact of Covid-19 in the bad debt provision. Appendix 1 to the report detailed the parish precept and had been informed of these, responses were awaited in order for the Council Tax to be set for the year.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources commented that this was the first time in his memory that this figure had gone down.

The Leader thanked the Head of Finance and Customer Services and his team for all their hard work at this difficult time and in particular in respect of the grant payments being made.

RESOLVED that the amount calculated by Bromsgrove District Council as the Council Tax Base for the whole area for 2021/22 at £37,186.55 as detailed at Appendix 1 to the report, to include individual parish elements, be approved.

58/20

MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN 2021/22 - 2024/25 - UPDATE PRESENTATION

The Head of Finance and Customer Services gave a presentation which provided an update in respect of the Medium Term Finance Plan

2020/21 to 2023/24. The presentation has been included as an appendix to these minutes. It was explained that this was a work in progress which showed the current position with further work being undertaken over the coming days. The following areas were highlighted:

- Improvements to budget position (including additional New Homes Bonus for one year only and a new Lower Tier Service Grant, again for one year only). It was noted that these grants had not been expected.
- Additional costs which were against the Council's budget position (the Government had capped the maximum Council Tax percentage increase the Council could make).
- The third slide showed the position in respect of the General Fund Revenue and changes to the budget gap which had taken place. It was highlighted that there was a small use of reserves planned. It was further noted that the Council Tax based had actually shrunk for this year and it was understood this was due to the local Council Tax Reduction Scheme coming into place and Covid-19 driven issues.
- Medium Term Budget Gap currently stood at £79k climbing to £1,153k in 2022/23 and final £1,482 in 2023/24.
- Further detail was provided in respect of the funds planned to be released from reserves and the difference that the Lower Tier Services Grant had made this year. It was noted that the unavoidable pressures included areas such as the lost car parking income due to Covid-19 projected losses from income due to Covid-19. The grants received in respect of Covid-19 had not as yet been factored into the calculations as there continued to be a shortfall from these.
- It was noted that the capital programme was being further revised which would reduce the MRP principal and interest payable. There would also be a reduction in the investment income which was predicated on investing in assets. It was hoped that the market would stabilise over the next 12 months which would hopefully be a safe position for the Council to invest in and receive good value.
- It was noted that there was much work to be done in future year as the gap was significant, this was being worked on at the moment.
- Details were provided in respect of savings being made to date – a significant number of which were from Environmental Services. Other areas continued to review these to see what other savings could be made.
- There were a number of pressures for 2021/22 including the car parking income. It was noted that there was an error in the original business case for Commercial Waste. The service was not underperforming, this was merely a correction.
- There were a number of bids for 2021/22 in respect of ICT support and the Corporate GIS.

Following the presentation the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources commented that the Council was in an excellent position so far taking into consideration that it still had £800k of grants to allocate. It was for Cabinet to decide how this would be used. He thanked officers for bringing the deficit down to a very manageable position. The Leader echoed these comments and thanked officers.

Officers responded to a query in respect of what Polygonisation of BLPU's referred to, it was believed to be in respect of work that was being done in calculating the areas of buildings, but further clarification would be provided outside of the meeting.

The Deputy Leader took the opportunity to highlight the difficulties in preparing a budget let alone in the current circumstances with everyone working remotely and also having to allocate the amount of grants that had been made available and thanked the Head of Finance and Customer Service. It was noted that officers were under an immense amount of pressure and all the work from the team was very much appreciated.

The Chief Executive took the opportunity to thank the Deputy Leader for highlighting this and he reiterated the myriad of grants that the Head of Finance and Customer Services team had had to deal with together with a very challenging audit in these difficult times. Special thanks were given to Kate Goldey, Senior Business Support Accounting Technician who it was noted had gone the extra mile on numerous occasions. He further commented that this was the most difficult time he had known to pull a budget together. This was currently a work in progress but it was hoped that with further work the gaps in years two and three would be reduced, albeit an ongoing piece of work. The Chief Executive also thanked the Head of Finance and Customer Services for stepping up to the role of Section 151 Officer in these difficult and challenging times.

The Leader thanked all those involved and noted the ongoing work that was being done to meet the challenges that everyone was facing and commented that whilst the building was closed the Council certainly was not closed for business, with the productivity levels the highest they had ever been with people working from home.

59/20

WORCESTERSHIRE REGULATORY SERVICES -
RECOMMENDATIONS BUDGET 2021/22

The Portfolio Holder for Strategic Planning and Regulatory Services presented these recommendations and reminded Members that some of these had been considered at the previous meeting and agreed at full Council, with the base budget being in place at that time. However, there had been a number of areas which he had asked for clarification on before being agreed. For completeness, all recommendations were being considered at this meeting.

Clarification had been sought, together with a full report, in respect of the accommodation and ICT charges, as detailed at minute No 23/20 of the Worcestershire Regulatory Board's meeting held on 19th November 2020 (pages 4/5 of the additional papers pack).

The remaining recommendations were detailed at minute No 26 (pages 12/13 of the additional papers pack).

RECOMMENDED that

- a) the additional partner liabilities for 2021/22 in relation to the increase in accommodation charges and ICT hosting from Wyre Forest District Council be approved as follows;

Bromsgrove District Council	£2k
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- b) partner authorities approve the following 2020/21:

- 1.1 the 2021/22 gross expenditure budget of £3,739k as shown in appendix 1 of the report;
- 1.2 the 2021/22 income budget of £529k as shown in appendix 1 of the report;
- 1.3 the revenue budget and partner percentage allocations for 2021/22 onwards –

	£'000	Revised %
Bromsgrove District Council	468	14.59

- 1.4 the additional partner liabilities for 2021/22 in relation to unavoidable salary pressure –

Bromsgrove District Council	£9k
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- 1.5 the additional partner liabilities for 2021/22 in relation to three technical officers.

	Tech Officer Income Generation £000	Tech Officer Animal Activity £000	Tech Officer Gull Control £000
Bromsgrove District Council	5	6	-

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There was no other business to be discussed.

Cabinet
13th January 2021

The meeting closed at 6.40 p.m.

Chairman