

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MEETING OF THE CABINET

17TH FEBRUARY 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 S. R. Colella, Councillor A. B. L. English,
Councillor C. A. Hotham and Councillor K. J. Van Der Plank

Officers: Mr. K. Dicks, Mrs. S. Hanley, Mrs. C. Felton,
Mr C. Forrester and Ms. J. Bayley

61/20 **TO RECEIVE APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

There were no apologies for absence.

62/20 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor Shirley Webb declared an other disclosable interest in Minute Item no. 66/20 – Catshill and North Marlbrook Neighbourhood Plan – due to her role as the ward Councillor for Catshill South. She remained in the meeting during the debate on the item and took part in the vote.

63/20 **TO CONFIRM THE ACCURACY OF THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE CABINET HELD ON 13TH JANUARY 2021**

The Minutes of the meeting of Cabinet held on 13th January 2021 were submitted.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of Cabinet held on 13th January 2021 be approved as a true and correct record.

64/20 **MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD HELD ON 11TH JANUARY 2021**

Cabinet was advised that there were no recommendations from the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board held on 11th January 2021 for consideration.

Members were also advised that there were no recommendations arising from the meeting of the Board held on 15th February 2021 requiring consideration at this time, though proposals would be considered at a future meeting.

During consideration of this item, Members welcomed Councillor C. Hotham, who had been appointed as the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Board at the meeting of the Board held on 15th February. Cabinet regularly considered proposals received from the Overview and Scrutiny Board and Councillor Hotham was advised that he would be welcome to attend future meetings of Cabinet to speak on behalf of the Board.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting held on 11th January 2021 be noted.

65/20

MOTION ON NOTICE - REFERRED TO CABINET

Motion on Notice – Bromsgrove Tree for Life Scheme – Councillor S. Colella

Councillor S. Colella presented a Motion on the subject of introducing a Bromsgrove Tree for Life Scheme in the district, which had been referred to Cabinet by Council. This Motion had been submitted to Council in September 2020 and Councillor Colella commented that he was keen to receive an update on progress.

A response was provided to this Motion by the Portfolio Holder for Environmental Services. Cabinet was informed that there was support for planting new trees in the district. However, this could not be funded using the £25,000 budget available for the use of the Council's Place Team, as that funding had already been allocated. Unfortunately, there was no other suitable budget available for this purpose. Therefore, Officers had been asked to investigate the potential to access external sources of grant funding. In addition, Members were advised that Worcestershire County Council had a programme of planting which could assist with this matter, though the programme could not be controlled by Bromsgrove District Council.

Cabinet was advised that additional information had been identified in relation to the National Tree Planting Scheme. Officers had been tasked with exploring the potential for Bromsgrove District to benefit from this scheme. Moving forward, the Council needed to work with partner organisations, including Worcestershire County Council, to address this matter.

66/20

CATSHILL AND NORTH MARLBROOK NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Regulatory Services began by thanking Catshill and North Marlbrook Parish Council for their hard work in preparing the Catshill and North Marlbrook Neighbourhood Plan. Cabinet was informed that a lot of work had been undertaken in the preparation of the plan by both the Parish Council and the Council's Planning Department. There had been hopes that the referendum in respect of the plan could take place on the date of the County Council

elections, in May 2021. However, unfortunately it was unlikely that these timeframes would be met.

The Strategic Planning and Conservation Manager presented the report and in so doing explained that Council Officers had provided advice to Catshill and North Marlbrook Parish Council on the preparation of the neighbourhood plan. The plan detailed policies pertaining to the parish of Catshill and North Marlbrook. The plan was forward thinking and referenced Bromsgrove District Council's Local Plan. Within the document, sites had been identified which could be suitable for future development and information had been provided about potential housing numbers at developments in the parish. The policies within the plan would help to inform future consideration of planning applications that were submitted for sites within the parish.

The Council's response to the neighbourhood plan had been provided for Members' consideration. Council responses to neighbourhood plans were issued at a time considered to be appropriate by the Council. Subject to Member approval, the neighbourhood plan would subsequently be the subject of public consultation and the public would be able to access the documentation in the plan on both Bromsgrove District Council's website and on Catshill and North Marlbrook Parish Council's website. Once the consultation process was complete, the neighbourhood plan would be considered at a public enquiry. At the end of that enquiry process there would be a local referendum. Unfortunately, it was not possible to gauge how long the examination process would take and for that reason it was not possible to guarantee that the referendum could take place at the same time as the County Council elections in May 2021.

RESOLVED that

- 1) The letter at Appendix 2 is sent to Catshill & North Marlbrook Parish Council as the District Council's response to the CNMNP submission version;
- 2) A six-week statutory ('Regulation 16') representation period on the Catshill and North Marlbrook Neighbourhood Plan is held by the District Council;
- 3) Delegated authority is given to the Head of Planning, Regeneration and Leisure Services to appoint an independent examiner to undertake examination of the Catshill and North Marlbrook Neighbourhood Plan following the statutory representation period; and
- 4) delegated authority is given to the Head of Planning, Regeneration and Leisure Services to arrange a referendum on the Catshill and North Marlbrook Neighbourhood Plan, subject to the recommendations set out in the examiner's report.

67/20

FINAL COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Enabling explained that the Council Tax Support Scheme had been pre-scrutinised at the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board held on Monday, 15th February 2021. Several queries had been raised during the debate on this item and Officers had undertaken some remodelling work in response. Further time was needed to complete this work and therefore it was proposed that this item should be deferred for consideration at the Cabinet meeting that was scheduled to take place on Wednesday, 24th February 2021.

68/20

MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN 2021/22 - 2024/25 INCLUDING CAPITAL PROGRAMME

The Head of Financial and Customer Services presented the Medium Term Financial Plan 2021/22 to 2023/24 and in so doing highlighted the following points for Members' consideration:

- The budget had been prepared at a difficult time, in the midst of a global pandemic and at a time of uncertainty for local government finances.
- District Councils could increase Council Tax by a maximum of 2.99 per cent or £5. Officers were proposing that Council Tax should be increased by £5 in Bromsgrove as this would result in a slightly higher rate of return to the Council.
- There had been a sizable gap in the budget for 2021/22 which had had to be addressed in balancing the budget.
- Additional pressures, including loss of income from car parking fees, had needed to be taken into account, though some of the losses in income from parking had been offset by the financial support provided by the Government.
- The Corporate Management Team (CMT) had reviewed the Council's budget on a line-by-line basis and had identified a number of savings and income opportunities in doing so.
- Many of the savings that had been reported were relatively small. However, cumulatively the savings contributed to balancing the budget for 2021/22.
- Funding had been received from the New Homes Bonus (NHB) for 2021/22. However, there was uncertainty about the availability of funding from this or a replacement scheme in future years.
- The proposed budget would result in a return of £22,000 to balances in 2021/22. However, there remained gaps in the budget in 2022/23 and 2023/24 which would need to be addressed moving forward.
- The Council would be using £638,000 from reserves to help balance the budget in 2021/22. This funding could not be reused in future years.

- The Council's balances remained in excess of £1 million. The strength of the Council's balances compared favourably with other district Councils.
- A significant bid for capital funding had been included for Disabled Facilities Grants, though Members were asked to note that these were not funded by the Council.
- There was a large bid for capital funding for electric vehicle charging points, though Cabinet was advised that some of these costs could be met through grant funding.
- The Covid-19 pandemic had added to the uncertainty regarding local government finances. The continuing impact of the pandemic was difficult to predict.
- Brexit was also adding to uncertainty about the future financial position of the Council. There was the possibility that Brexit would impact on local businesses and subsequently on future business rate collections, though this remained to be clarified.

Following the presentation of the report, the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Enabling thanked the Financial Services team for their hard work. It was acknowledged that budget preparation had been particularly challenging during the Covid-19 pandemic and that this had occurred at a time when the Financial Service Team were also working hard to distribute grant funding to local businesses. However, Members commented that despite this, the Council was proposing a balanced budget.

Cabinet was informed that 2021/22 would be the first year in which the Council Tax base would decline, by £74,000. In part, this was due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, as fewer houses had been built during 2020/21 as a consequence. In addition, the proposed changes to the Council Tax Support Scheme would result in a lower rate of return to the Council, as extra support would be provided to the most vulnerable residents.

Members welcomed the proposed funding that would support the green thread in the Council Plan. This included the proposed capital funding for electric vehicle charging points and, as well as supporting the green agenda, Members commented that this would support initiatives to encourage people to return to the town centre once the pandemic had ended, to the benefit of local businesses. Cabinet also welcomed the proposed capital funding for the purchase of a new electric bus, which would help to connect Bromsgrove town centre to Bromsgrove Railway Station. Members commented that this would enable more people to access Bromsgrove town centre moving forward, which would help the local economy.

During consideration of this item, Members highlighted a typographical error in respect of the figures that had been provided for Council Tax. In the report it had been recorded that there would be demand on the collection fund to meet the Council's needs at £8.64 million but later in the report it had also been reported that in 2021/22 a total of £8.665

million was due to be collected. Officers agreed to check the accuracy of the figures provided prior to Council.

RECOMMENDED that

1) The Unavoidable costs be approved:

2021/22 £524k
2022/23 £340k
2023/24 £409k

2) The Revenue Bids be approved:

2021/22 £65k
2022/23 £48k
2023/24 £25k

3) The Identified Savings be approved:

2021/22 £426k
2022/23 £474k
2023/24 £405k

4) The General Fund Capital Programme bids be approved:

2021/22 £578k
2022/23 £1.123m
2023/24 £1.018m

5) The General Fund capital programme be approved:

2021/22 £13.323m
2022/23 £4.867m
2023/24 £2.906m

6) The net general fund revenue budget be approved.

2021/22 £11.988m
2022/23 £11.673m
2023/24 £11.683m

7) The increase of the Council Tax per Band D at £5 for 2021/22 be approved; and

8) The transfer to Balances of £22k for 2020/21 be approved.

69/20

PAY POLICY STATEMENT

The Pay Policy Statement 2021/22 was considered by Cabinet. Members were advised that there was a statutory requirement for this report to be considered each year as part of the budget setting process.

The report detailed the pay scales of staff employed by the Council, from the Chief Executive to the lowest paid staff. Staffing costs were shared with Redditch Borough Council due to the shared services arrangements that were in place with that local authority.

RECOMMENDED that the Pay Policy Statement 2021/22 be approved.

(Prior to the end of the meeting the Chairman thanked the Senior Democratic Services Officer for Bromsgrove, who was shortly due to leave the Council, for her hard work and support and wished her a long and happy retirement.)

The meeting closed at 6.33 p.m.

Chairman