

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MEETING OF THE COUNCIL

WEDNESDAY 25TH JANUARY 2023, AT 6.00 P.M.

PRESENT: Councillors R. J. Laight (Chairman), A. J. B. Beaumont (Vice-Chairman), S. R. Colella, R. J. Deeming, G. N. Denaro, S. P. Douglas, A. B. L. English, M. Glass, S. G. Hession, C.A. Hotham, R. J. Hunter, J. E. King, A. D. Kriss, L. C. R. Mallett, K.J. May, M. Middleton, P. M. McDonald, S. A. Robinson, H. D. N. Rone-Clarke, C. J. Spencer, P.L. Thomas, M. Thompson, J. Till, S. A. Webb and P. J. Whittaker

Officers: Mr. K. Dicks, Mr P. Carpenter, Mrs. C. Felton,
Mrs. R. Bamford, Mrs. J. Bayley-Hill and Mrs J. Gresham

71\22

TO RECEIVE APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors S. Baxter, R. Jenkins, H. Jones, A. Kent, M. A. Sherrey and K. Van Der Plank.

72\22

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

73\22

TO CONFIRM THE ACCURACY OF THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COUNCIL HELD ON 7TH DECEMBER 2022

The minutes of the meeting of Council held on 7th December 2022 were submitted.

During consideration of this item Councillor C. Hotham highlighted that Councillor S. Baxter was a member of the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) and not the Royal Council of Parish Councils as stated in Minute number 59/22.

In addition to this the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Governance stated that the Council's insurer had been contacted, as requested at the last meeting, and that the Council's insurance providers were aware of the no assurance audits and that the insurance policy was still valid. In

response to further Member queries, the Interim Section 151 Officer confirmed that this was the case.

RESOLVED that, subject to the amendment as detailed in the preamble above, the minutes of the meeting of Council held on 7th December 2022 be approved as a true and accurate record.

74\22

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

The Chairman reported to Members that in response to a letter of condolence sent following the death of Her Royal Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, the Council had received a reply from His Royal Majesty King Charles III thanking Bromsgrove District Council for the kind words at such a sad time. The Chairman informed Council that it was his intention to have the reply framed and to gift it to the Council for future reference.

There were no announcements from the Head of Paid Service on this occasion.

75\22

TO RECEIVE ANY ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM THE LEADER

There were no announcements from the Leader at the meeting.

76\22

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

There were no comments, questions or petitions from the public for consideration at the meeting.

77\22

URGENT DECISIONS

The Chairman confirmed that there had been no urgent decisions taken since the previous meeting of Council.

78\22

CHANGES TO COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

The Chairman informed Council that Councillor S. Colella had replaced Councillor K. Van Der Plank for the Bromsgrove Independent Group as a Member of the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee.

Councillor C. Hotham was invited to speak, as leader of the Bromsgrove Independent Group, and in doing so he thanked Councillor Van Der

Plank for her long service on the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee and wished Councillor Colella success for the future as the new Chairman of the Committee.

RESOLVED that the changes to the Committee membership, as detailed in the preamble above, be noted.

79\22

TO RECEIVE AND CONSIDER A REPORT FROM THE PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR LEISURE, CULTURAL SERVICES AND CLIMATE CHANGE

The Portfolio Holder for Leisure, Cultural Services and Climate Change presented an annual report which outlined the work that had been undertaken under his remit as portfolio holder over the preceding 12 months.

Council was informed that consideration of the report would be taken in two parts: the first being the Leisure and Cultural Services area followed by the Climate Change Services area.

Members were advised that there were Strategic Purposes aligned to Leisure and Cultural Services and that the main progress, since the last report, was the launch of the Leisure Strategy in October 2022. It was explained that the strategy had provided vision and detailed the aims for the Council in this area and supported individuals in shaping their own leisure activities. Information was provided in respect of the recommendations contained within the strategy that had already been achieved.

The Portfolio Holder for Leisure, Cultural Services and Climate Change explained to Members that there had been a number of activities that had taken place over the year, which had included the Queen's Baton Relay in Sanders Park as part of the Commonwealth Games, the Green Fair and the light show which took place in Sanders Park in Autumn 2022.

Council was informed that there had been several partnership initiatives designed to encourage physical activity and sports participation among residents in the District. It was noted that external funding of £46,610, had been received from the Department of Education to fund these sessions.

During the presentation of the Leisure and Cultural Services area of the report, reference was made to the key milestones for the future. These

included the development of a capital investment plan for enhancing parks and open spaces, working to establish a volunteer plan and a clear approach to working with Friends groups and the launch of a pilot project for self-management of allotment sites across the District. In addition to this, it was reported to Members that the Council was looking to deliver a pilot project to understand how the Council managed land and could deliver Biodiversity Net Gains.

Following the presentation of this section of the report, Members discussed the following points in detail:

- How the £2,500 grants were planned to be used by Cultural Compact. It was reported that the grants had been received from Arts Council England and specific details were not available for each project. However, Members were informed that Cultural Compact were a partner of Bromsgrove District Council and therefore work would be undertaken in partnership. Members also expressed an interest in the work that was being undertaken with partners outside of the District e.g. Redditch and Birmingham. It was highlighted to Members that it was important to work with a range of partners, inside and outside of the District, in order to provide wide ranging activities and to help deliver the Leisure and Culture Strategy outcomes.
- Whether there was the potential to keep the 'Bromsgrove Pound' in the District. For example, the use of the sailing facilities in Upton Warren were commented on and Members questioned whether there would be more financial benefit by utilising the sailing club at Barnt Green which was located within the District. The importance of the Leisure Strategy was again referred to and in particular the need for communities to shape their ambitions. Members were encouraged to contact community leaders to understand how best to carve out ambition and to see what their needs were alongside the strategy.
- Whether the Street Theatre events that had taken place previously would return. Council was informed that Members could engage with their residents to understand if there was an appetite for these kinds of events or whether the funds would be better utilised for other events. It was noted that, as part of the Bromsgrove Centres Strategy, which had been approved in January 2023, improved joined up working would be undertaken in the future and that Members could contact the Bromsgrove Centres Manager for further information and potential plans for the future.

- The establishment of Walking Football and Couch to 5k in Hagley. Members congratulated the Portfolio Holder for providing the residents with these activities and commented that it had been welcomed by the residents. However, Members questioned how the short breaks for young people with disabilities had been allocated. Members were advised that Officers would be asked to obtain further information on this subject.
- Section 106 funding and how it was allocated. Members were keen to understand how Section 106 funding was allocated and it was mentioned that in recent housing developments it appeared that the monies had already been allocated with little consultation. It was reiterated to Members that they played a key part in the communities they represented and that they could provide information in this area. It was also hoped that the capital plan for enhancing parks and open spaces, as outlined in the Portfolio Holder's report, would provide a more strategic approach to the use of Section 106 and other funding. It was suggested by some Members that there was a need for the redevelopment of parks and open spaces in and around the Town Centre and Members were encouraged to speak to Officers regarding this matter.
- Meetings of The Artrix Holding Trust. It was highlighted that there had been a limited numbers of meetings during the 2022/23 municipal year. Members were advised that whilst there was Officer led support given to the Holding Trust, ultimately it was the Holding Trust who had responsibility under the Trust Deed for determining its future. It was explained that Members and representatives from Heart of Worcestershire (HoW) College who sat on the Trust were due to meet in February 2023; in order to consider the work that had been carried out by external consultants on the future viability of the site. Members understood that there would inevitably be local interest in the Artrix, but the Council could not interfere at this stage of the process. It was confirmed that the Artrix Holding Trust must be allowed to carry out their duties and provide a mandate for moving forward.
- The self-management of allotments. There were some queries as to whether the pilot would result in the Council not carrying out its obligations in respect of allotments. However, it was confirmed that this plan would be designed in the hope that those using the allotments would be able to have more control over their own future.
- The suggestion that there needed to be more varied cultural event opportunities within the District that were targeted at specific demographics, particularly older people who lived in Bromsgrove District.

Following a detailed debate, the Portfolio Holder for Leisure, Cultural Services and Climate Change presented the annual update on the Climate Change service area.

Council was informed that Bromsgrove District Council had declared a Climate Change Emergency in 2019 and that as a result of this the Carbon Reduction Strategy was introduced in October 2022. It was reported that the delay in the introduction of the Strategy had been due to the Covid-19 pandemic and as it was important to ensure that the plan was robust and effective. Members were advised that included in the Strategy was an aim to achieve a 50% reduction in carbon dioxide by 2023 and net zero by 2040.

Reference was made to the key activities included within the report. These included the Salix grant funding received in order to install low carbon heating and PV solar panels at The Artrix. In addition to this, further information was provided on the introduction of solar panels at Parkside, the purchase of green energy for the Council, the Green Fair that had taken place in Sanders Park and the use of hydrotreated vegetable oil (HVO) in the Council's diesel fleet. It was explained that the use of HVO was a measure that had been implemented as work was currently being undertaken in respect of replacing the Council's fleet with electric or hydrogen vehicles. It was noted that this would be costly, and that further investigation in this emerging market was needed in order to ensure the Council was making the most appropriate choice when replacing the fleet.

In terms of the key milestones for the next period, Members were informed that the Council would look to support Bromsgrove District Housing Trust (BDHT) in applying for funding to improve the efficiency of housing stock and to set up a rolling programme of works to improve energy efficiency in Council buildings with the highest consumption.

Members were advised that additional staffing resource was required in this area and that the Council would be looking to recruit a Senior Climate Change Officer in February 2023 and a Graduate Climate Change Officer during 2023. The Portfolio Holder for Leisure, Cultural Services and Climate Change extended his thanks to Mr. A. Pearson from West Midlands Net Zero Hub, who had provided support in the development of the Council's Carbon Reduction Plan.

Following the presentation of the Climate Change section of the report, Members discussed the following points in detail:

- Strategic purposes aligned to Climate Change. Within the report it stated that the current strategic purpose aligned to Climate Change was that of 'Communities that are safe, well maintained and green'. However, it was suggested that it might not be the most appropriate strategic purpose in relation to Climate Change. Instead, it was suggested that an additional strategic purpose potentially could be added which included reference to carbon neutrality. This was noted as something that could be looked at in the future.
- Achieving a 50% reduction in carbon emissions by 2030. Members queried whether this would be achievable as stated within the report. Council was informed that it was difficult to ascertain during such a turbulent period including a cost of living crisis, the war in Ukraine and the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic whether the target would still be achievable. However, it was what the strategy aimed to achieve.
- The use of HVO in the Council's fleet. Members queried how the estimated carbon saving of 530 CO₂ through the use of HVO had been calculated. Officers undertook to provide this information and circulate it to Members.
- Supporting BDHT in their applications for funding. Members queried what support was provided for BDHT in retrofitting public and private sector housing, particularly when looking at EPC ratings in these sectors. It was explained that there were limited powers in this area, however, partnership working with BDHT was a key milestone and had been included in the strategy as an action for the future.

Following the detailed discussion some Members expressed their views that they were pleased to hear the successes and hoped that residents would support the Carbon Reduction Strategy. It was noted, however, that there could be some further work in promoting the initiatives on the website and through social media campaigns.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

80\22

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE CABINET

The Chairman advised that four recommendations had been made at the meeting of the Cabinet held on 18th January 2023, which had been highlighted for Council's consideration.

CCTV Digitalisation Upgrade

The Leader presented the recommendation in respect of the CCTV Digitalisation Upgrade and in doing so, explained that this recommendation had been made by the Overview and Scrutiny Board at the meeting held on 21st November 2022; as a result of receiving a report from Officers. Members were advised that it was recommended that £48,600 be included in the Capital Programme and £6,030 per annum in the revenue budget as part of the review of the Medium Term Financial Plan for the upgrade of CCTV cameras at Brook Road (Rubery), Wythall and Alvechurch.

The recommendation was proposed by Councillor K. May and seconded by Councillor G. N Denaro.

RESOLVED that £48,600 be included in the Capital Programme and £6,030 per annum in the revenue budget as part of the review of the Medium Term Financial Plan for the upgrade of CCTV cameras at Brook Road (Rubery), Wythall and Alvechurch.

Council Tax Support Scheme

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Governance presented the report on the Council Tax Support Scheme. Members were advised that in October 2022, the Council had agreed to go out to consultation on an updated Council Tax Reduction Scheme. It was explained that the Council had received advice from its consultants that no Councils were reducing their Council Tax Reduction Schemes, and that many were increasing them to a scheme similar to the one Bromsgrove Council had introduced in 2021.

Council was advised that, having taken into account the Cost of Living crisis, Bromsgrove, Redditch and Wyre Forest were all increasing the support available to eligible residents in their schemes. However the three remaining Worcestershire Councils were not making any changes to their schemes.

It was reported that in the updated scheme, the Council was increasing its discount bands by 5% each and that certain childcare charges and critical payments would be disregarded in order for the scheme to be open to more residents.

Members were advised that the consultation period for the new Council Tax Support Scheme had now closed and that 87 responses had been received. This, it was noted, was an increase from the 55 responses

received during the previous consultation. Of the 87 responses received, Members were informed that 65% agreed with the widening of the bands, 82% agreed with the disregard to childcare payments and 80% agreed to disregarding critical payments.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Governance reported that Worcestershire County Council (WCC), as the major preceptor, had provided a view on the proposals. This was as follows:

“Whilst we would support in principle the ambition for many of the changes to your Council Tax Reduction Schemes, the net council tax income would reduce and that would mean the impact, however small, would ultimately be felt on the overall resources available across other district areas outside of Bromsgrove District Council and Redditch Borough Council. We would not encourage any cross subsidy and would ask that its impact is minimised or avoided if possible”

Members were advised that the Council had accepted this point from WCC. However it was highlighted that non-payment of Council Tax was likely to increase due to the present cost of living crisis. This would result in higher levels of default, in turn impacting on the precepting authorities with lower levels of income and the requirement to rectify in the following financial year through the collection fund. It was noted that although there were currently no definitive figures available, the proposed change would mitigate a degree of this risk and enable more of the families on low incomes in the District to pay reduced amounts, which would be a benefit to the precepting authorities.

Council was advised that the overall additional cost involved in the proposal was estimated to be £131k, with Bromsgrove District Council's proportion totalling £17k (13%).

Following the presentation of the report Members commented that this was a positive step forward in relation to the Council Tax Reduction Scheme and that the Finance and Budget Scrutiny Working Group had looked at this in detail prior to its consideration at this meeting.

The recommendations were proposed by Councillor G. N Denaro and seconded by Councillor K. May.

RESOLVED that Council approve the introduction of a revised and more supportive Council Tax Reduction scheme for working age applicants with effect from 1st April 2023 in line with the following:

The scheme be designed to assist the lowest income households and to allow the Council to operate the scheme more flexibly by:

- (a) Increasing the maximum level of support for working age applicants in certain income bands and to increase the income levels within the 'income -grid' scheme. Both of these changes are designed to provide more support to low income households;
- (b) Disregarding certain child care charges where an applicant (and their partner if they have one) are working more than 16 hours per week;
- (c) To disregard certain payments paid to taxpayers under special schemes (Local Welfare Provision); and
- (d) Where the Government makes emergency increases to national welfare benefits to assist in a crisis, the scheme would give the Council the discretion to disregard those increases if they had a negative effect of Council Tax Reduction.

Worcestershire Regulatory Services Board – Budget 2023/24 Recommendations

The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Regulatory Services presented the report in respect of the Worcestershire Regulatory Services (WRS) Board – Budget 2023/24 Recommendations. In doing so, Council was informed that there had been a WRS Board meeting on 17th November 2022, at which Board Members agreed to uplifts to the 2022/23 and future budgets due to the increases to the national pay award and cost of living crisis.

Members were advised that the overall increase in 2022/23 of £18,861 was due to the pay award and also additional hosting charges. The increase in salaries, took into account the 2022/23 pay award and a 2% increase for future years, increases in rent and hosting charges as well as pension back funding. It was reported that there were no inflationary increases in supplies nor in services and transport.

Council was informed that WRS would increase charges by 5% across the County in 2023/24 and that Bromsgrove District Council accounted for 14.52% (£510k) of the overall £3,507k base budget.

Following the presentation of the report, Members queried the amount paid by the Council for hosting charges and if there might be an opportunity to reduce the rent due to Officers working from home. It was reported that there was a contractual agreement in place, however

Officers undertook to find out the exact amount currently paid for rent and to provide this information to Members.

The recommendations were proposed by Councillor P.L. Thomas and seconded by G. N Denaro.

RESOLVED that

- 1) WRS contributions be increased by £18,861 in 2022/23 due to the national pay award of £1,925 per pay point and increases in hosting costs due to the “cost of living” crisis; and
- 2) WRS Budget contributions be increased to £510,000 in 2023/24 to take account of pay awards and the impact of the “cost of living” crisis.

81\22

TO NOTE THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE CABINET HELD ON 18TH JANUARY 2023 (TO FOLLOW)

During consideration of this item, it was confirmed that the Bromsgrove Centres Strategy 2023/2026 was concerned only with the eight Centres in Bromsgrove District and was not a shared strategy with Redditch Borough Council.

The minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 18th January 2023 were noted.

82\22

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE (TO FOLLOW)

The Chairman explained that 4 Questions on Notice had been received for the meeting. However, 1 had been answered during the update from the Portfolio Holder for Leisure, Cultural Services and Climate Change and the Member proposing that Question, Councillor R. Hunter, had agreed that it would no longer be considered during this item.

Council was informed that a period of up to 15 minutes was allocated for the asking and answering of questions and that the Questions would be considered in the order they had been submitted.

Question submitted by Councillor J. King

“I understand that some bus operators in Bromsgrove have not introduced the £2 cap on single bus fares this month and that this falls short of the promises made by the Secretary of State last September?

As Leader of this Council will you make representations to the local transport authority to see if the policy can be extended to all bus operators in Bromsgrove?”

The Leader responded to the question and in doing so advised Members that the Government had announced funding to help bus operators to cap single adult fares at £2 per journey from January to March 2023. It was explained that the move was to help passengers with travel costs for work, education, shopping and medical treatments over the winter months while facing pressures from the rising cost of living.

Members were advised that the introduction of this scheme sat with the Department for Transport (DfT). It was explained that it was optional for operators to sign up, and WCC had no powers to compel operators to take part in the scheme. The Leader noted that it was regrettable that the predominate operator in Bromsgrove, Diamond Buses, had decided not to take part in the scheme. However, Members were advised that the Leader was aware that WCC were in constant communication with Diamond Buses and that the matter would be raised with the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport at Worcestershire County Council.

Question submitted by Councillor S. Robinson

“I am concerned that the introduction of the requirement for voter ID for the first time in this coming May’s local elections represents a threat to our democratic right to vote. As well as the information provided on BDC’s website and social media, what are you going to do to reach out to all our community and make sure nobody in Bromsgrove is prevented from voting because they cannot provide ID?”

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Governance provided a response and in doing so explained that the Electoral Commission were running an extensive campaign on the changes in voting and how an elector could get a free voter authority certificate if they had no accepted form of photo ID. Furthermore, the Electoral Commission had provided a suite of resources for Councils to use.

Council was informed that Officers were drawing up a communications strategy which would include providing information in the Council Tax leaflet, Voter ID booklets, (which would be available at the Council offices, libraries and for any individuals who made enquiries), an email reminder (where Electoral Services held an email address), and they would also provide information that campaigners could use in the run up to the May 2023 elections.

Members were reminded that Officers had provided a Member briefing on the detail surrounding this and that they had advised that this would be a living document so when new initiatives occurred, they could be considered and acted on. It was confirmed that the suggestion made at the Member briefing held on 10th January 2023 would be investigated and Officers in Electoral Services welcomed any further suggestions.

Question submitted by Councillor A. English

“Throughout my Ward I often get queries about missing wheelie bins and have heard that the bin lorries sometimes ‘eat’ the bins. Does the portfolio holder for Environmental Services and Community Safety know how many bins disappear in this way and how much this costs the Council?”

In the absence of the Portfolio Holder for Environmental Services and Community Safety, a response was provided by the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Regulatory Services. It was reported to Members that 1,150 replacement green recycling bins had been delivered during 2022 to residents across the District. This was either due to the bin being lost during collection or reported as missing. In addition to this, it was reported that 1,288 grey residual waste bins had also been delivered during 2022. It was clarified that during this same timeframe, the Council had emptied approximately 2,058,000 wheeled bins, which equated to a loss rate of approximately 0.12% of bins being emptied.

Council was informed that bins could be lost for a number of reasons. These were reported as follows:

- failure of the plastic bin due to plastic becoming brittle over time and/or excessive weight in the bin.
- mechanical failure on the lifting mechanism that secured the bin whilst upside down; or
- operative error when loading a bin onto the lifter.

Furthermore, it was explained that wheeled bins were introduced across the District in 2004, therefore a large number of the Council’s bins were now quite old which increased the risk of failure and/or incremental wear on the area clamped by the bin lifters. It was explained that budgets were in place to support replacement bins for this reason. Members were advised that this was a known problem faced by all Local Authorities operating wheeled bin services.

Finally, it was reported that once a wheeled bin had fallen into the rear of a vehicle, it was not possible to retrieve it safely and therefore the bin had to be replaced.

83\22

MOTIONS ON NOTICE (TO FOLLOW)

The Chairman explained that 4 Motions on Notice had been received for consideration at this meeting, including 1 urgent Motion on Notice submitted by Councillor Robinson.

It was explained that in advance of the meeting, it had been agreed by the Councillors who had submitted their Motions, that the order in which they would be considered would be changed from that shown in the supplementary agenda pack. Therefore, Members would start by considering Councillor McDonald's Motion, followed by Councillor Robinson's Motion, before then going back to Councillor Hotham's Motion and ending with Councillor Hunter's Motion. Members were informed that this change had been made to ensure that the urgent Motion could be considered earlier in the meeting.

Excess Winter Deaths

Council considered the following Motion on Notice that was submitted by Councillor P. McDonald:

"The Office for National Statistics recorded a six-fold increase in excess winter deaths last winter — 63,000 compared to 10,320 in winter 2020/21. Many of the excess deaths were attributed to cold related illnesses including pneumonia. This shows just how seriously the economic crisis is impacting on our oldest and most vulnerable and teachers spotting the signs that pupils haven't eaten.

Many fear a repeat of last winter's increase in the number of excess winter deaths, with many facing unprecedented threats to their health amid the cost-of-living crisis. With many parts of Bromsgrove slowly sinking into poverty.

That this Council calls on the Cabinet to set up a 'Doorstep Engagement Unit' as a pioneering response to this unfolding financial crisis and includes the finances to support this in the budget setting process."

The Motion was proposed by Councillor McDonald and seconded by Councillor H. Rone-Clarke.

In proposing the Motion, Councillor McDonald commented that due to the current cost of living crisis residents were subject to soaring energy prices and increased mortgage repayments. As a result, many households were living in fuel poverty, with a large proportion of these being lone parent households and those who were the most vulnerable.

It was with this in mind that the Motion was being proposed and the suggestion of 'doorstep engagement' would enable increased human contact at a time of need for some families. Members were informed that this initiative would also provide an opportunity for residents to share any difficulties they were experiencing and to be provided with information regarding support and any benefits available.

In seconding the Motion, Councillor Rone-Clarke suggested that the increased deaths were due to increased levels of cold, flu and pneumonia and that this could be linked to poorly insulated housing and the cost of living crisis. Furthermore, that 'doorstep engagement' with local residents would be a positive step for people living within the District.

The Leader responded to this Motion and in doing so queried the data analysis that had been used. Members were informed that the data was from the Census 2021 Data analysis, and whilst the excess winter mortality index in England was significantly higher than all winters since the series began in 1991 to 1992; COVID-19 was the leading cause of excess winter mortality in 2020 to 2021 accounting for 85% of all excess winter deaths in England. As a result, it was stated that this data was not directly linked to the current economic challenges taking place nationally, and that the current cost of living challenges had begun in February 2022 when the war in Ukraine had commenced.

Members were informed that the Council continued to work proactively with partner organisations to support residents in this unfolding financial crisis through a Cost of Living Group chaired by the Chief Executive. In addition to this, it was stated that the Group was established to work together to support residents as effectively as possible in a joined up way and was always willing to consider any ideas. Further information was provided regarding the membership of the Cost of Living Group, which included the following:

- Citizens Advice Bromsgrove and Redditch
- Act on Energy
- BDHT
- Age UK Bromsgrove

- Redditch and Wyre Forest, Foodbanks
- WCC
- The Department for Work and Pensions
- NewStarts
- Library services
- Public Health, Bromsgrove Primary Care Trust (PCN)
- Churches Together
- Officers from various teams within the District Council

The Leader reported that the Cost of Living Group recognised that there was a lot of support available both nationally and locally. However, this in itself could be confusing for residents to navigate. As a result, it was confirmed that a cost of living leaflet had been created, alongside a digital campaign and the creation of Cost of Living webpages on the Council's website. The aim it was to signpost residents to key agencies and support. A more detailed leaflet was also devised by the Starting Well Team, aimed predominately at families.

Council was informed that both the 'at a glance' and more detailed leaflets had been distributed by Council Officers, Councillors and partner organisations, in order to ensure it was available in as many venues and settings as possible. Efforts had been specifically made in order to reach those who may be digitally excluded, and the leaflet therefore included phone numbers alongside web links. It was highlighted to Members that a second version of the cost of living leaflet was currently being devised for inclusion in the Council Tax notification which would be issued to all households.

Further information was provided regarding additional support agreed by the Cost of Living Group. This included the Cost of Living / Wellbeing Support Events that had taken place in the larger libraries across the County. Of particular note, was an event due to take place at Bromsgrove Library on Friday 27th January 2023 from 10am to 1pm. It was reported that this event would offer residents in-person advice, guidance, and support from partner organisations in one place. The Group were also keen to consider how they could facilitate further events across the District.

The Leader explained that through the Household Support Fund, Bromsgrove residents who were struggling with the cost of household essentials could access support with food, energy and other household costs. These specifically were noted as follows:

- Act on Energy who could help with energy costs, energy debt and broken heating systems; and
- Citizens Advice Bromsgrove and Redditch, who were working closely with Bromsgrove District Council's Financial Inclusion Team and were helping residents who were struggling and needed support with food and wider essentials, alongside their usual debt and advice services.

In addition, Council was advised that there was extra support for eligible pensioners, carers of any age and people with disabilities or long term health conditions. Furthermore, Worcestershire Advice Network (WAN) was working with WCC to identify those who were eligible for an additional £75 voucher. It was clarified that Citizens Advice Bromsgrove and Redditch and Age UK Bromsgrove, Redditch and Wyre Forest were part of WAN and were also part of the Cost of Living Group, helping to ensure a joined up approach, therefore ensuring eligible residents benefited from this extra support.

Further information was provided in respect of BDHT, who, it was confirmed, were working with the Council and proactively identified and supported local residents who needed extra support.

Members were advised that the community builders had information to use, as appropriate, when engaging with residents, as well as a wide range of partner organisations and Councillors too, through the Cost of Living Partnership bulletins to help ensure anyone living or working in the District knew how to access support should they need it.

The Leader highlighted that a cost of living survey, devised by Bromsgrove District Council with the help of partner organisations via the Cost of Living Partnership Group, was being launched in January 2023 to help obtain further information from local residents in order to help draw up an action plan to ensure that every area was being investigated in order to alleviate pressures being faced by residents during this challenging time.

Members were informed that partner organisations were keen to support the setting up of a social supermarket, and NewStarts were leading on this work looking at the best model for Bromsgrove. Further information was provided in respect of the potential for a pilot to run out of one of the foodbanks, with a desire to also consider how this could support the Environment with a reduction in food waste. It was hoped that this pilot would commence in February 2023.

The Leader confirmed that vulnerable households were being targeted by the Bromsgrove Primary Care Network (PCN), through the social prescribing services and that data was also being used to target communication. Information was also provided regarding discussions with WCC, Bromsgrove PCN and Act on Energy as the Council had requested Bromsgrove District be part of a 'warm home prescription' pilot in Worcestershire. It was reported that, should this pilot go ahead, it would be supported by social prescribing services and would involve GPs identifying vulnerable people with both cold-sensitive health conditions and low incomes who needed help to stay warm and well at home.

Members were further advised that an initiative, similar to the proposed Doorstep Engagement scheme, was undertaken during Covid-19 using volunteers. However, it was noted that the number of volunteers had significantly declined over the last 12 months. Therefore, it was stated that continuing the existing approach of partnership working was an effective way in supporting residents at this time.

During the debate, some Members thanked Officers for the provision of the cost of living flyers and explained that they had been a very useful tool when engaging with their communities and that Members were already in a position to engage with their residents on their doorsteps and provide information supplied on the flyer. It was suggested that a number of excess deaths during this period could be attributed to Dementia. However some Members commented that this could be attributed to failures in social care provision nationally.

There was also a discussion regarding the Fuel Poverty Task Group's investigation, which had taken place in 2022 and had seen successful results through engagement with partner organisations and health experts in order to tackle Fuel Poverty.

In summing up, Councillor McDonald suggested that although the information provided had highlighted the positives, there were many residents suffering at this time as a result of the cost of living.

At this point in the meeting, Councillor Mallett raised a Point of Order in respect of the chairmanship of the meeting. He explained that he had felt that Councillor Laight, in his role as Chairman, had curtailed the speaking time of some of the Members. It was with this in mind that he proposed a vote of no confidence in the Chairman. Officers confirmed

that, as per the Constitution, this could be proposed at the next meeting of the Council in a formal Motion on Notice if he so wished.

In accordance with Procedure Rule 18.3 a recorded vote was taken on Councillor McDonald's Motion and the voting was as follows:

Members voting FOR the Motion:

Councillors P. McDonald, L.C.R Mallett and H. Rone-Clarke (3)

Members voting AGAINST the Motion:

Councillors A. Beaumont, R. Deeming, G.N Denaro, M, Glass, S. Hession, A. Kriss, K. May, M. Middleton, P. Thomas, M. Thompson, J. Till, S. Webb and P. Whittaker (13).

Members ABSTAINING in the vote on the Motion:

Councillors S. Colella, S. Douglas, A. English C. Hotham, R. Hunter, J. King and S. Robinson (7).

The vote on the Motion was therefore lost.

The Ryland Centre – Urgent Motion

The following Notice of Motion was submitted in accordance with Procedure Rule 10.4 by Councillor S. Robinson:

“Council calls on the cabinet to urgently explore opportunities for keeping the Ryland Centre in public ownership and commission a business case to establish whether BDC can take over its management.”

In proposing the Motion, Councillor Robinson explained that the Ryland Centre was an asset to the community that provided accessible and reasonably priced facilities. In addition, the running track, provided a facility for local schools. Councillor Robinson explained that she understood there were covenants on the site regarding its use for sport and youth only, however, she felt it was important to understand what this meant for the community and whether there was a potential to interpret the covenants differently should a third party take ownership of the site in the future.

Council was informed that the Motion was in respect of the preparation of a business case to better understand whether there was the potential

for the Council to take ownership of the site in the future. Councillor Robinson explained that she felt that there was a lot at stake for the local community, including local netball clubs who used the facilities and that the centre needed to be protected.

The Motion was proposed by Councillor Robinson and seconded by Councillor Hunter.

The Leader responded to the Motion and explained that Sandwell Leisure Trust (SLT) had given notice to WCC, the owners of the site, that they would cease their contract to deliver services at the Ryland Centre on 31st March 2023. At that time, a new provider would need to start delivery of services/ownership of the site as from 1st April 2023, as WCC did not want an ongoing liability.

Council was informed that following conversations with WCC, in November 2022 significant works were required on the running track. This included re-laying in the medium term, drainage works which were linked to changing rooms not being able to be used and the building itself. The County Council had to show best value in selling these assets and so could not transfer them to Bromsgrove District Council at no cost. The current estimate for the works was between £500k to £1m, and it was reported that these works would need to be undertaken very quickly. In addition, given the requirement for the Energy Efficiency of Council buildings to be in the top 3 ratings by 2026, there was also the potential of works having to be undertaken in this area as well. Therefore, should the Council purchase the site, the cost effectiveness of delivery of the service with these costs, even with them spread over multiple years, would be questionable.

As stated earlier in the meeting, it was confirmed that there were covenants on the site which limited its use to sport and youth. As Sport England had part funded the track, if the site were to be used for another reason, an equivalent sports centre would need to be built as a replacement.

The County Council had indicated that there was a potential buyer who understood the site and would deliver these works, meaning that WCC would not have the ongoing liability for the works or the site. This would mean upgraded facilities for users. It was reported that the key point for the Council and residents of Bromsgrove was negotiation of Community Use Agreements in liaison with WCC for ongoing access to the facilities to ensure continued access.

During the debate, consideration was given to the appropriateness of public discussion of this Motion due to potentially commercially sensitive information being raised. However, in summing up, Councillor Robinson, confirmed that there was no need to discuss specific information as it was merely about commissioning a business case to better understand whether taking ownership of the Ryland Centre was a viable proposition for the Council going forward.

In accordance with Procedure Rule 18.3 a recorded vote was taken on this Motion and the voting was as follows:

Members voting FOR the Motion:

Councillors S. Colella, S. Douglas, A. English C. Hotham, R. Hunter, J. King, P. McDonald, L.C.R Mallett H. Rone-Clarke and S. Robinson (10)

Members voting AGAINST the Motion:

Councillors A. Beaumont, R. Deeming, G.N Denaro, M, Glass, S. Hession, A. Kriss, K. May, M. Middleton, P. Thomas, M. Thompson, J. Till, S. Webb and P. Whittaker (13).

Members ABSTAINING in the vote on the Motion:

(0).

The vote on the Motion was therefore lost.

Following consideration of this Motion and as the time limit for consideration of Motions had been exceeded, in accordance with Council Procedure rule 10.16 a vote was taken by the Council, and it was agreed not to consider the remaining two Motions at this meeting. Instead, Members were advised that these Motions would be considered at the following meeting of Council.

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TO CONSIDER ANY URGENT BUSINESS, DETAILS OF WHICH HAVE BEEN NOTIFIED TO THE HEAD OF LEGAL, DEMOCRATIC AND PROPERTY SERVICES PRIOR TO THE COMMENCEMENT OF THE MEETING AND WHICH THE CHAIRMAN, BY REASON OF SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES, CONSIDERS TO BE OF SO URGENT A NATURE THAT IT CANNOT WAIT UNTIL THE NEXT MEETING

In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 7, the Chairman advised Members that he had accepted, as an item of urgent business,

consideration of nominations to fill a vacant seat on the Artrix Holding Trust as an outside body appointment. This vacancy had arisen following Councillor M. Middleton's resignation from the Trust. This appointment had been accepted as urgent business as there was scheduled to be a meeting of the Trust prior to the next meeting of Council and there was a need to ensure that this meeting would be quorate.

Council was invited to consider nominations and to agree the appointment of a Member to fill this vacant seat.

During consideration of this item a nomination was received for Councillor J. King.

On being put to the vote, this nomination was carried and therefore it was

RESOLVED that Councillor J. King be appointed to fill a vacant seat on the Artrix Holding Trust as an outside body appointment.

The meeting closed at 8.40 p.m.

Chairman