

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MEETING OF THE COUNCIL

24TH JANUARY 2024, AT 6.00 P.M.

PRESENT: Councillors S. Ammar (Chairman), A. Bailes, R. Bailes, S. J. Baxter, S. R. Colella, A. M. Dale, S. M. Evans, D. J. A. Forsythe, E. M. S. Gray, C.A. Hotham, D. Hopkins, R. J. Hunter, H. J. Jones, R. Lambert, M. Marshall, B. McEldowney, S. T. Nock, D. J. Nicholl, S. R. Peters, J. Robinson, S. A. Robinson, H. D. N. Rone-Clarke, D. G. Stewart, K. Taylor, S. A. Webb and P. J. Whittaker

Officers: Mrs. S. Hanley, Mr P. Carpenter, Mr. G. Revans, Mrs. C. Felton, Ms. N Cummings, Mrs. J. Bayley-Hill and Ms M. Bassett

73\23 **TO RECEIVE APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J. Elledge, B. Kumar, K. May, P. McDonald and J Stanley.

74\23 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor S.R. Colella declared an Other Disclosable Interest which had not been registered, in Minute item no. 87/23, Motions on Notice in relation to the first Motion about funding for canals, as his son lived on a canal boat in London.

75\23 **TO CONFIRM THE ACCURACY OF THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COUNCIL HELD ON 6TH DECEMBER 2023**

The minutes of the meeting held on 6th December 2023 were submitted for Members' consideration.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 6th December 2023 be approved as a true and accurate record.

76\23 **TO RECEIVE ANY ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM THE CHAIRMAN AND/OR HEAD OF PAID SERVICE**

Chairman

On behalf of the Council, the Chairman paid tribute and thanked Miss Jo Slade, Chair of the Friends of St John's Church, for securing funding from the National Heritage Lottery Fund of just under £250,000 to repair the spire tower of the church and run a series of heritage engagement activities. The Chairman also extended thanks to Hilda Roxburgh and Sheila Vincent, fellow Friends trustees, who assisted and supported the bid. The church had a history of 1,000 years and had been listed on Historic England's Buildings At Risk register due to issues with the spire, which was the tallest in Worcestershire. Miss Slade had spent considerable time and dedication making the application and involving many members of the community. The Council gave a round of applause to Miss Slade.

Head of Paid Service

The Head of Paid Service, Mrs S. Hanley, apologised to the Council and to members of the public who had received incorrect invoices for the garden waste service. She assured the Council that all who had been impacted had been notified individually and no direct debit customers were impacted.

77\23

TO RECEIVE ANY ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM THE LEADER

In the absence of the Leader, the Deputy Leader, Councillor S. Baxter, reported that both Councillors K. May and P. McDonald were unwell and on behalf of the Council wished them both a speedy recovery.

78\23

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

There were no comments, questions or petitions.

79\23

URGENT DECISIONS

Members were advised that no urgent decisions had been taken since the previous meeting of the Council.

80\23

TO RECEIVE AND CONSIDER A REPORT FROM THE PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR STRATEGIC HOUSING, HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Councillor S. Webb, Portfolio Holder for Strategic Housing, Health and Wellbeing, presented her report to the Council and thanked Council officers for their hard work and contributions.

Members of the Council asked questions about the report and the following were the main items raised:

- Whether councillors could be involved in events which supported social prescribing; the Portfolio Holder undertook to ask the relevant team to notify all members when such events were taking place so that they could support them if they wished
- In response to a question, Councillor Webb confirmed that the Primary Care Network (PCN) funded the social prescribing activities
- In response to a request from Councillor B. M. McEldowney the Portfolio Holder would supply him with a list of the agencies which could refer to social prescribing activity
- A member pointed out that the Bromsgrove PCN did not cover the whole District and asked which organisations were responsible for the remainder of the area. Councillor Webb responded that the Bromsgrove PCN covered 77,000 of the total population of 99,600. Currently, whilst it was understood that social prescribing activity took place throughout the District, data was not yet available beyond the Bromsgrove PCN. The Portfolio Holder and Leader of the Council, who also held the Wellbeing portfolio for Worcestershire County Council, were pursuing obtaining all relevant data
- When homes at the Burcot Lane development would be occupied. The Portfolio Holder reported that the final stages of the legal process were being carried out and the homes should be occupied in a couple of months' time. In response to a further question, Councillor Webb reported that the properties were being marketed by Oulsnam Estate Agents and that two had been sold so far. Where rent was payable, this would be set by Spadesbourne Homes
- Another member asked whether there had been any issues with the houses being built at Burcot Lane; the Portfolio Holder responded that any issues should be picked up during the build, but there was also a 12 month window for snagging issues
- Councillor R.J. Hunter asked whether details could be provided by type of the accommodation brought onstream as a result of Section 106 agreements. Councillor Webb undertook to provide this detail separately to him
- Councillor Hunter also asked whether the Council could learn from details about the current housing waiting list to refine its housing offer. The Portfolio Holder responded that the current housing waiting list was 3,707 and she would provide a breakdown by category to Councillor Hunter outside the meeting

- A member referred to the property prices in Bromsgrove and sought the Portfolio Holder's views about the current 40% affordable housing target for greenfield and 30% target for brownfield sites. Councillor Webb responded that the targets were national policy
- In response to a question, the Portfolio Holder undertook to arrange a visit for Councillors to the Lifeline Service
- Councillor Webb also undertook to ask the Starting Well Service to circulate details of the various events and initiatives undertaken by it to all members, so that they could get involved as appropriate
- The Homes for Ukraine project had been well received but a member expressed concern that as it seemed very likely the conflict in Ukraine would continue and current visas and BRP cards (Biometric Residence Permit) were due to expire at the end of the year, this could cause difficulties for the continued provision of housing. It was suggested that the Home Office as the responsible Government Department should be approached to address this issue
- In response to a query from Councillor S. R. Peters, Councillor Webb would send him the latest homelessness and Council housing waiting list data once it was available.

81\23

OUTSIDE BODIES APPOINTMENT

The Council had been advised by Worcestershire County Council, which co-ordinated meetings of the West Mercia Police and Crime Panel, that the Council's substitute member on the panel must be from the same political group as the lead member. This was due to rules of political balance. As the Council's lead representative was Councillor H. Jones, the substitute member needed to be a Conservative Member.

RESOLVED that Councillor B. Kumar be appointed as the Substitute Member to the West Mercia Police and Crime Panel for the remainder of the 2023-24 Municipal Year.

82\23

LOCAL GOVERNMENT BOUNDARY COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND PRELIMINARY STAGE BOUNDARY REVIEW FOR BROMSGROVE - COUNCIL SIZE SUBMISSION

Councillor Rone-Clark, Vice Chairman of the Electoral Matters Committee, introduced the item and explained the process for the review of Council size, which was being carried out by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE). At this first stage the

Council was recommending the size of the Council. The Electoral Matters Committee had discussed this in depth at its meeting and he proposed that the completed submission on Council size, as circulated with the Council agenda, should be submitted to the LGBCE.

Councillor J. Robinson seconded the recommendation.

During consideration of this item, Councillor S. Baxter thanked the officers and the Electoral Matters Committee members for their work on the review so far.

RESOLVED that

- 1) The Council puts forward a Council size of 31 in its submission to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE); and
- 2) The Council size submission report be submitted to the LGBCE as part of the Electoral Review for Bromsgrove.

83\23

OUTCOMES OF THE CORPORATE PEER CHALLENGE

Council considered a report on the findings and suggestions from a Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC) Review visit by the Local Government Association. This followed from the original CPC undertaken at the Council in March 2023. There were no new recommendations in the review report.

Councillor S. Baxter, Deputy Leader, presented the report and proposed the recommendations, which were seconded by Councillor P. Whittaker. Councillor Baxter referred to the progress made since the first CPC report and the proposed ongoing actions. During consideration of the item the following points were raised:

- In response to a question about whether the Council had mitigated risks from recommendation 4 in the original report relating to hybrid and flexible working, Councillor Baxter referred to the feedback from the CPC review which set out the progress made in addressing this recommendation.
- A member referred to excellent officer support for members but commented that this was not consistent across the Council.

- In response about being transparent with the public about the contents of the report, Councillor Baxter reported that it would be published in full on the Council's website
- Councillor Rone-Clarke recorded his thanks to the Environmental Services team who had recently addressed concerns he had raised very quickly. He asked that Councillors be kept informed of any indicators which would affect staffing.
- It was noted that whilst the report was generally positive, the 2021 Accounts had yet to be signed off
- In response to a query, Councillor Baxter assured the Council that the Cabinet Advisory Panels were being included in the action plan process
- Councillor D. Hopkins asked how the apprenticeship and leadership development programmes would be embedded beyond the period of the 2022-2026 Workforce Strategy. Councillor Baxter undertook to circulate information about this outside the meeting.

RESOLVED that the report in respect of the outcomes of the Corporate Peer Challenge progress review from The Local Government Association peers be noted, and thereafter published on the Council's website.

84\23

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE CABINET

Recommendations from the meeting of the Cabinet held on 17th January 2024 were presented for the Council's consideration.

Planning Enforcement Policy

Councillor K. Taylor presented the updated Planning Enforcement Policy for consideration by the Council and recommended its endorsement. Councillor H. Jones seconded the recommendation.

Councillor A. Bailes suggested that advice to enforcement officers about what would be appropriate and proportionate in enforcement should be included in the policy. He commented that the Council should be open and transparent when it was taking enforcement action in order to ensure the trust of the public. He also suggested that any review of the enforcement policy should be presented to the Planning Committee. Councillor Taylor responded that as some enforcement action was

sensitive it would not be appropriate to discuss cases in public, but Councillor Bailes' concerns would be raised with the Head of Planning.

In response to a query about whether biodiversity should be included in the Policy, Councillor Taylor reported that 89% of the district was green belt and policies to safeguard this were maintained robustly.

A member suggested that some wording in the policy should be reviewed, for example reference to 'trivial', because of the impact that enforcement action could have on the public. Councillor Taylor undertook to discuss this with officers.

RESOLVED that the Council's Planning Enforcement Policy be endorsed.

Council Tax Discretionary Council Tax Reduction Policy – Council Section 13a(C) Policy

Councillor C. Hotham presented the draft Council Tax Discretionary Council Tax Reduction Policy for the award of section 13A(1)(C) reductions in Council tax. The Council's policy had not been reviewed for several years; amendments to the policy would ensure that the delegation to provide discounts in line with any future national schemes were in place and enable support to be provided speedily to any qualifying households.

Further to reference in the Policy to the flood recovery framework, a member asked about support for victims of flooding and actions undertaken by the Council to prevent future flooding. Councillor Hotham gave details of the financial help available and proactive work undertaken by the Council in flood prevention.

The recommendations were proposed by Councillor C. Hotham and seconded by Councillor S. Baxter.

RESOLVED that

- 1) The Section 13A(1)(C) policy be approved and adopted from 1st April 2024.
- 2) The Council's scheme of delegation be amended to grant delegated authority to the Head of Finance and Customer

Services, and the Financial Support Manager to reduce the Council Tax payable on a case by case basis, as provided by Section 13A 1 (c) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992.

Council Tax – Empty Homes Discount and Premiums

Councillor C. Hotham reported that since the introduction of Council Tax in 1993 some properties had been eligible for council tax discounts, the levels of which had been varied by legislation. Until 2004, dwellings which were unoccupied were eligible for a council tax discount of 50%. Since then, amendments to legislation had given billing authorities the power to reduce or remove the discount for unoccupied dwellings and in the case of long-term empty homes, to impose a council tax premium.

The Levelling Up and Regeneration Act had introduced further changes to the discount and premiums for unoccupied homes. The main changes were that the period for which a dwelling must be vacant before it was classed as a long-term empty dwelling had been reduced from 2 to 1 year. The billing authority had also been given powers to apply a premium of up to 100% for any dwellings that were furnished and had no residents.

The Council currently applied the full premium to all long-term empty homes on the basis that a dwelling would be subject to the premium if vacant for 2 years or more. The amendment to the legislation would mean that from 1st April 2024 the premium would be applied to all dwellings that had been vacant for 12 months or more.

Councillor M. Marshall enquired whether the scheme could apply to commercial premises. Councillor Hotham responded that business rates might have to continue to be paid but he would enquire about the potential.

In response to a query from Councillor D. Hopkins, Councillor Hotham undertook to find the definition of 'substantially unfurnished' and forward it to him.

The recommendations were proposed by Councillor C. Hotham and seconded by Councillor S. Baxter.

RESOLVED that

- 1) From 1st April 2024, under section 11B(1) of the local government finance act 1992, for long-term empty dwellings

the discount under section 11(2)(a) will not apply and the additional council tax premium applied will be:

- i) For a dwelling that has been unoccupied and substantially unfurnished for less than 5 years – 100% premium.
 - ii) For a dwelling that has been unoccupied and substantially unfurnished for 5 years or more, but less than 10 years – 200% premium.
 - iii) For a dwelling that has been unoccupied and substantially unfurnished for 10 years or more – 300% premium.
- 2) The Head of Financial and Customer Services on a case-by-case basis may consider a reduction to the long-term empty premium under section 13A(1)(C) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992.

Final Council Tax Support Scheme 2024-2025

The Council was required by section 13A(2) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 (LGFA '92) to make a council tax reduction (CTR) scheme specifying the reductions in council tax that would be provided to people who were in financial need, or to classes of people who were in general in financial need. Council was required to review its scheme each year.

Councillor C. Hotham proposed the recommendation to retain the scheme and uprate the income bands. This was seconded by Councillor S. Baxter.

RESOLVED that the Council Tax Reduction Scheme is retained for 2024-25 tax year, subject to uprating of income bands by 6.7% as set out in the table at appendix a to the report.

Planning and Environmental Enforcement Business Case

The Deputy Leader, Councillor S. Baxter, presented a report which outlined a Business Case for the enforcement activity across all services of Bromsgrove and Redditch Councils, including shared services. The objectives of the business case were to target enforcement using an intelligence led approach with proportionate use of resources and improved service standards. Recognising the risk to the authorities in getting enforcement wrong, both reputationally and financially, the business case sought to deliver a strong service with efficiencies.

The Business case had examined 4 options:

- Continuing with the current arrangements
- Grouping the enforcement roles into one team within the Councils
- Grouping enforcement with WRS, and
- Full triaging with the ability to resolve issues at first point of contact.

The last scenario was identified as the most appropriate.

The Business Case identified the level of resource to be transferred to WRS to meet demand for planning enforcement – a transfer of the current budget. The current backlog of cases had been considered, and additional resource provided in the Business Case to reduce the backlog and consequent delays.

As the customer services element for Environmental Services was across various roles and not easily extracted from service budgets, additional investment was identified to support triaging. In recognition of the public concerns about dog fouling, fly tipping and littering the Business Case emphasised proactive engagement and promotion of responsible behaviours.

Councillor Baxter proposed the recommendations, and these were seconded by Councillor P. Whittaker.

During the debate the following points were made:

- The view was expressed that moving the planning enforcement function to WRS risked the integrity of the end-to-end process and there should have been investment in the in-house service. The Acting Chief Executive clarified that WRS was a shared service across the District Councils in Worcestershire and Bromsgrove District Council was the host employer
- In response to a question, Councillor Baxter confirmed that Redditch Borough Council supported the proposals. The £93,600 cost was from the current budget for the planning enforcement service. If Council agreed the other recommendations, then the financial implications would form part of tranche 2 of the budget process
- It was noted that data about envirocrime was available in performance monitoring reports
- The view was expressed that it might be difficult to recruit to the proposed 2-year fixed term contracts. Councillor Baxter replied that an advantage of a larger service was that there would be

more opportunity to progress and use transferable skills across the different disciplines.

RESOLVED that

- 1) The Business case be pursued with the intention to bring together the enforcement functions within Environmental Services and Planning and associated current budget (as identified in Table 6 of Appendix 1) within the Shared Regulatory Service provided by WRS.
- 2) An additional £93,600 annually from existing resources be agreed to fund the service to meet the level of demand in Planning Enforcement.
- 3) An additional £55,590 be agreed to fund 1.6 FTE additional (Grade 6) resource to support the work in tackling the backlog of Planning Enforcement cases for the next two years only.
- 4) An additional £7,537.50 be agreed to fund 0.25 FTE additional (Grade 4) resource for the customer service resource element of fly-tipping, littering and enviro-crime.
- 5) An additional £21,650 be agreed to fund 0.5 FTE additional (Grade 6) resource to support the work on enforcement of fly-tipping, littering and enviro-crime.

Medium Term Financial Plan 2024-25 to 2026-27 Tranche 1

Councillor C. Hotham presented the Tranche 1 budget proposals and drew attention to changes in the forecast since the beginning of the financial year. Tranche 1 reflected the position in November 2023 and the situation was now clearer following the Government's announcement of the Local Government Settlement in late 2023.

No responses had been received to public consultation on Tranche 1. Work on the Tranche 2 budget was underway. Councillor Hotham reminded the Council that the outcomes of the play audit and bus shelter proposals were agreed to be added to the budget.

Councillor Hotham proposed and Councillor S. Baxter seconded the recommendations.

In response to a question, Councillor Hotham reported that the recent Government announcement of additional funding for local government did not provide details about how this would be allocated.

It was noted that because of the time lag between the item being considered by Cabinet and the Council meeting, reference in the Cabinet report to the level of the Council Tax cap was out of date and it was 3%.

RESOLVED that

- 1) The inputs into the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan as at the start of October 2023, and the associated risks and opportunities, be endorsed.
- 2) It be noted that these inputs have been used, along with the 2023/24-25/26 Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) agreed by Council in February 2023, to project an initial "gap" to be closed.
- 3) An initial Tranche of savings proposals, as set out in Section 3.12 - 3.25 and the associated Savings Proposal Document in Appendix A, as published on the 14th November and any feedback will be considered by Cabinet in January 2023 be approved
- 4) Fees and charges are increased by 7% as part of this process.
- 5) Commercial fees and charges, as set out in Appendix F are approved, and
- 6) Tranche 2 of this process will add further information such as the Local Government Settlement to give a final financial position for the Council.

85\23

TO NOTE THE MINUTES OF THE MEETINGS OF THE CABINET HELD ON 17TH JANUARY 2024

The minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 17th January 2024 were noted.

86\23

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

The Chairman advised that 6 Questions on Notice had been received for this meeting.

Question submitted by Councillor R. Hunter

Councillor R. Hunter asked the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Regulatory Services, “The new NPPF published in December 2023 clarifies that: ‘there is no requirement for Green Belt boundaries to be reviewed or changed when plans are being prepared or updated’ (Paragraph 145, p42). What will you do to enact this new Government directive here in Bromsgrove so that our Green Belt is better protected in the next local plan?”

Councillor K. Taylor responded that “The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) needs to be read as a whole and considered very carefully before decisions are made on the future planning policies for Bromsgrove. The sentence in the NPPF which follows the one quoted in the question reads as follows *‘Authorities may choose to review and alter Green Belt boundaries where exceptional circumstances are fully evidenced and justified.’* Therefore Paragraph 145 when looked at in full does not contain a directive on the green belt, it provides a choice for local authorities. That choice is for the local plan to consider alongside the rest of the NPPF which amongst many things still stresses the need to meet housing and employment needs. Officers are working on the options available to the Council in light of the new NPPF and will be discussed at the Strategic Planning Steering Group (SPSG) in due course.”

Councillor Hunter asked a supplementary question, whether Councillor Taylor accepted that this meant it was now effectively in the Council’s gift, where previously under the NPPF the Council did not have an option about whether or not to release green belt to meet the District’s housing targets.

Councillor Taylor responded that currently the Council had approximately three and a half years’ housing supply and some developers might look at what ‘special circumstances’ might be used to seek to develop in the green belt. He urged all members to participate in the SPSG to consider this issue.

Question Submitted by Councillor M. Marshall

Councillor M. Marshall asked the Deputy Leader:

“Empty shops on Bromsgrove High Street give an unsightly and depressing impression of our town, deterring visitors and potential investors. The former Edinburgh Woollen Mill is by far the worst example. What is the council doing to ensure the site is made safe and when will the barriers be removed?”

Councillor S. Baxter replied that “We are aware of Edinburgh Woollen Mill and agree that in its current state it sets a poor standard for the high street. The site is currently under investigation with the planning enforcement department. The Council is limited in the action it can take beyond ensuring safety for the public.

Bromsgrove joins multiple other high streets that are suffering from changes in shopping habits and economic challenges. Bromsgrove District Council have recently introduced a Centres Enhancement Grant. The aim is to tackle vacant units, make improvements to frontages, improve accessibility, boost footfall and enhance the sustainability of businesses. The grant offers £10,000 or £5,000 for businesses within the centres to either, occupy a vacant unit or improve the frontage of an existing unit. The Town Centre Manager works closely with local businesses to support them”. Councillor Baxter also commented that all Councillors should communicate the availability of the grants to appropriate businesses across the District.

Councillor Marshall asked a supplementary question about how long the Edinburgh Woollen Mill site would remain in its current condition, as he had been asking questions about it for 9 months.

Councillor Baxter responded that it was a difficult situation, she reiterated that the Council’s control was limited and it could ensure safety, but she could not give details about an ongoing enforcement case.

Question submitted by Councillor D. Nicholls

Councillor D. Nicolls asked the Portfolio Holder for Health and Wellbeing and Strategic Housing:

“I have two residents in my ward who have been waiting almost 5 months for a walk in shower funded by DFG to be installed. This is causing considerable hardship. How long should residents normally have to wait for aids and adaptations such as this and what can be done to speed up the process?”

Councillor S Webb responded that “The aids and adaption service is delivered through a County Wide contract with an organisation called Millbrook and timeframes are to some extent dependent on the number of cases at any one time.

There are 3 categories of work:

- Urgent
- Category 1
- Category 2/3

Referrals are worked in date order that they are received into the agency from the NHS Occupational Therapy Service. This is unless a referral is categorised by an Occupational Therapist as Urgent, in which these cases are picked up and completed within 55 days. These cases are usually for palliative customers or emergencies such as carer breakdown. The Occupational Therapist has the responsibility of prioritising the customer which is based on clinical need and cannot be changed by Millbrook.

There can be reasons why some customers may be seen before another (out of date order), the reasons may be:

- A delay in a landlord giving permission for work on the property
- Customer in hospital
- Customer temporarily unwell

On average the process of an Occupational Therapist identifying the need for a walk-in shower, to the final payment date is approximately 7-8 months (based upon 2023 completed cases). However, as mentioned above there are factors that can affect each individual case.

In respect of reducing this time, recruiting to vacant posts in a timely manner can assist (there is one vacant post out of 8 technical caseworkers within Millbrook). There has been a recruitment drive within the Occupational Therapists' service which has had a direct impact upon the number of referrals received. Since June 2023 we have seen referrals increase from an average of 10 per month to 30 per month this will have an impact upon timescales and available budget when reaching the approval stage.

Councillor Nicholls asked a supplementary question and thanked officers for their input. He referred to the distressing circumstances faced by the customers and asked whether the additional Government funding recently announced for local government could be used to improve the situation.

Councillor Webb replied that funding was not the issue, the performance of the contract was being reviewed together with the specifications and the contract which Millbrook was currently carrying out was due to be re-let next year.

Question submitted by Councillor S. Evans

Councillor S. Evans asked the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Licensing and WRS:

“Chronic traffic congestion in Bromsgrove town centre has been exacerbated recently by the closure of Whitford Road. The huge additional strain this put on local roads has caused significant delays, making people late for work and children late for school. Residents fear this could be a sign of things to come when the number of homes increases. What planning obligations have been placed on the developer to mitigate traffic congestion and is there a timescale within which these must be completed?”

Councillor K. Taylor responded that “The Whitford Road scheme allowed at appeal in February 2021 under outline planning application 16/1132 included a package of mitigation measures to address the effects on the highway network. The Fox Lane priority junction would be altered with the formation of a roundabout, alterations would be made to the mini-roundabout at the Charford Road junction, and a signalisation scheme is proposed for the staggered crossroads at the Kidderminster Road junction. Conditions have been imposed on the appeal decision which would ensure the provision of these junction works, together with a timeframe for implementation. These being:

(25) No part of the development shall be occupied until the junction of Fox Lane/Rock Hill has been altered in accordance with the scheme for a roundabout shown on the plan Fox Lane/Rock Hill schematic ref 7033-SK-005 revision F.

(27) No more than 99 dwellings shall be occupied until the junction of the A448/Whitford Road/Perryfields Road has been altered in accordance with the plan Whitford Road/ Perryfields Road proposed junction arrangement ref 461451-D-014, and until a pedestrian crossing on the A448 has been provided in accordance with the plan Potential A448 signalised crossing ref 7033-SK-015 revision A.

(28) No more than 249 dwellings shall be occupied until the junction of Charford Road/Rock Hill/Worcester Road has been altered in accordance with the scheme for a roundabout shown on the plan Mitigation for Rock Hill/ Charford Road mini-roundabout ref 7033-SK-013 revision E.

Through planning obligations, financial contributions would be made to schemes at other junctions. The sum of £744,681.58 would be paid to Worcestershire County Council (as the Local Highway Authority) towards alterations at the Hanover Street junction and at Market Street/St John Street, and a separate obligation would involve a contribution of £1,312,706.94 towards the County Council's A38 Bromsgrove Route Enhancement Programme. In addition, the proposal includes new pedestrian crossing facilities on Whitford Road and Kidderminster Road, and financial contributions towards a bus service between the development, the town centre and the railway station, and towards cycle and pedestrian links."

Question submitted by Councillor J. Robinson

Councillor J. Robinson asked the following question to the Deputy Leader:

"With the news that Bromsgrove will no longer be benefiting from the services of NWEDR, what action will you be taking to ensure efforts to regenerate North Worcestershire remain joined up and that Bromsgrove is still able to bid competitively for grant funding?"

The Deputy Leader replied that "A report will come to Cabinet on 14th February 2024 that deals with the Termination of the shared service arrangement for North Worcestershire Economic Development and Regeneration.

This report will contain a confidential appendix that sets out how the council priority of Economic Development and Regeneration will be delivered in future.

Economic development and regeneration is a key priority for Bromsgrove and we will have a team ready to ensure the delivery of the Levelling Up Fund and to be able to bid competitively for any future opportunities that arise."

Councillor Robinson asked a supplementary question about whether by operating the function on its own and potentially losing efficiencies

gained through the current shared service model, the Council would incur additional costs or have to make savings. Councillor Baxter replied that further details would be available when the report was considered by Cabinet and members were welcome to attend the meeting.

Question Submitted by Councillor D. Stewart

Councillor D. Stewart asked the Portfolio Holder for Health and Wellbeing and Strategic Housing, “I note with concern that the Household Support Fund Phase 4 has been closed to new applicants. Please could an overview be provided by officers of how the fund has been administered and the outcomes?”

Councillor S. Webb responded that “The Household Support Fund Round 4 has been paused due to all the funding being allocated.

The closure of the application was communicated to relevant service areas and partners and was shared on the Council’s website.

The fact that the funding was allocated so quickly reflects the needs for support for some of our residents. The Household Support Fund grants were not the only means of support and our cost-of-living website and leaflet produced in partnership with other agencies sets out a range of support available. This includes

- support from Act on Energy to help cover energy bills, energy debt and/or assistance towards repairing broken boilers and heating systems.
- Through the Worcestershire Advice Network, help is also available for eligible pensioners NOT in receipt of Pension Credit, people with disabilities or a long-term health condition of any age, and carers of any age.
- Details on the government’s Cost of Living Payments 2023-24 that are automatically paid to eligible residents and advice on how to report non receipt of this payment
- The Bromsgrove Energy Advice Service that provide a free impartial Energy Advice Service delivered by Act on Energy that helps residents to cut energy bills, minimise home energy use and reduce carbon emissions

Details of other local support available can be found on the Council’s Cost Of Living pages on its website and covers areas such as:

- Help with food, furniture and household supplies

- Help with jobs, education and development
- Help for families
- Help if you have a disability
- Help for older people
- Help with housing, money and debt
- Help with mental health and wellbeing
- Help for young people under 25

I will arrange for these links to be circulated after the meeting for Members' consideration."

87\23

MOTIONS ON NOTICE

The Chairman reported that four Motions on Notice had been submitted for the meeting, but the Motion relating to the Household Support Fund had been withdrawn and dealt with as a Question, so would no longer be debated.

Funding for Canals

Councillor P. Whittaker declared an interest in this item a canal ran through land he owned.

The Council considered the following Motion on Notice proposed by Councillor D. Nicholl.

"Bromsgrove District Council notes with concern planned cuts in government support from 2027 to our local canals.

1. The Canal and River Trust is warning that a reduction in grant funding of over £300 million in real terms from 2027 will threaten the future of the nation's historic canals, leading to their decline and to the eventual closure of some parts of the network.

2. This will almost halve the value of public funding for canals in real terms compared with recent years. This comes despite a Government Review, shared with the Canal & River Trust, confirming that its funding is 'clear value for money', with canals shown to deliver substantial benefits to the economy, to people and communities, and to nature and biodiversity.

BDC calls on the Leader to write to the Secretary of State for the Environment urging them to put in place a fairer funding settlement to help protect Bromsgrove's beautiful and historic canals."

Councillor Nicholl referred to the purpose of the motion and that it had attracted cross party support elsewhere. It related to the care and maintenance of infrastructure which was not only important to the District but of national significance.

Councillor D. Hunter seconded the motion. In doing so he referred to the Trust itself saying that if the proposed cuts were implemented from 2027 it would not be able to maintain the canal network as it did currently. The canals brought benefits to all residents and this had been recognised through finance being provided at a national level.

Having sought clarification about the responsibilities of the Canals and Rivers Trust, a potential amendment by a member to include reference to rivers in the motion was withdrawn.

The following were the main points made during consideration of the Motion:

- The Trust had been set up as a charity but had not been able to raise funds successfully and relied on grants to support its work
- Canals played a role in nature conservation and leisure and helped support the local economy
- The Trust was also responsible for maintenance of various structures, including reservoirs, of which there were a number in the District, and it was important that it received appropriate funding
- The Motion did not provide sufficient evidence to support the Leader in writing a letter to the Secretary of State
- The Canal and River Trust had assets of £1bn. Of its income in 2022-23 of £225m, 23% was funded by Government grant, and this was due to reduce over time
- The Trust should 'sweat its assets' and become more commercially focused
- Members appreciated the health and wellbeing opportunities for residents offered by the canals in the District
- It was difficult to understand the concept of what a 'fairer funding settlement' meant and it was unlikely to be productive for the Leader to write to the Secretary of State
- It was suggested that the status of the Trust was a private sector body, even though it was a registered charity and the requirement

to find alternative income sources had been known about for some time

- The funding change set out in the Motion was three years away and the Government might change; it was suggested that the timing of the Motion was inappropriate
- Councillors could contact MP's directly to give their views about the proposals.

Having been put to the vote the Motion was declared lost.

Warm Welcome Spaces

The following Notice of Motion had been submitted by Councillor P. McDonald and was proposed in his absence by Councillor E.M.S. Gray:

“This Council notes that:

Charities have warned that many households are struggling to pay for their energy, with more than one million of Britain's most vulnerable adults living in “Dickensian” cold and damp homes this winter.

Struggling households are facing an assault from all sides. Energy bills are going up just as winter bites hard, Christmas debts have to be paid off and the ongoing wider cost-of-living crisis continues into another.

In the face of the cost of living crisis, Bromsgrove District Council will work with faith and community groups to set up Warm Welcome Spaces across the District.”

The Motion was seconded by Councillor M. Marshall.

During consideration of the motion the Deputy Leader referred to actions that the Council were taking in supporting those in the community in difficult times. This included supporting the Bromsgrove Partnership which took a lead role in coordinating appropriate support such as the provision of warm hubs and spaces.

RESOLVED that

This Council notes that:

Charities have warned that many households are struggling to pay for their energy, with more than one million of Britain's most vulnerable adults living in “Dickensian” cold and damp homes this winter.

Struggling households are facing an assault from all sides. Energy bills are going up just as winter bites hard, Christmas debts have to be paid off and the ongoing wider cost-of-living crisis continues into another.

In the face of the cost of living crisis, Bromsgrove District Council will work with faith and community groups to set up Warm Welcome Spaces across the District.

Preparing For Extreme Heat Events

Council considered the following Motion proposed by Councillor M. Marshall:

“That the Cabinet be asked to undertake a review of how to take immediate action to educate and equip residents for impending heatwaves made more likely by climate change. This will include awareness campaigns, distributing guidelines and establishing cooling centres to ensure the community’s safety and well-being during future extreme temperature events.”

In proposing the motion, Councillor Marshall referred to increasingly intense weather events, especially a succession of heat events in the summer of 2022. One of the consequences of high heat was an increase in excess deaths. He considered that although the Council had taken actions to reduce its carbon emissions it should also prepare for dealing with the impacts of climate change that already existed. He suggested that lessons learned from the 2022 event included the need for better co-ordination between agencies, educating the public about actions they could take and services available.

Councillor E.M.S Gray seconded the motion. In doing so she suggested that the review would check and ensure that those who needed to be aware of the measures in place knew about them, as well as identify potential gaps.

During consideration of the motion the following points were made:

- The Council was a category one responder and had a legal duty to warn and inform the public and businesses before, during and after an emergency
- The Council was in the Local Resilience Forum, but in most cases, it was not the lead agency.

- The organisation Applied Resilience which was supporting the Council with emergency planning and business continuity had discussed establishing a 'Societal Resilience' group to look at opportunities to expand community and business resilience. This included awareness campaigns, community action groups and resilience measures, including extreme temperatures
- A lot of activity was taking place, so it was not necessary for Cabinet to review the activity, but it was suggested better communication of what was being done was required
- Parish councils should be involved in any actions to promote the principles of the motion.

Councillor P Whittaker proposed an amendment that reference to the Cabinet being asked to undertake a review should be replaced by the Overview and Scrutiny Board. Councillor J. Robinson seconded the amendment. The proposer of the motion agreed to include the amendment and it became the substantive motion.

RESOLVED that

the Overview and Scrutiny Board be asked to undertake a review of how to take immediate action to educate and equip residents for impending heatwaves made more likely by climate change. This will include awareness campaigns, distributing guidelines and establishing cooling centres to ensure the community's safety and well-being during future extreme temperature events.

The meeting closed at 9.21 p.m.

Chairman