

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

12TH FEBRUARY 2024, AT 6.00 P.M.

PRESENT: Councillors P. M. McDonald (Chairman), S. T. Nock (Vice-Chairman), A. Bailes, R. Bailes, A. M. Dale, E. M. S. Gray, D. J. Nicholl (substitute), B. Kumar, S. A. Robinson and J. D. Stanley

Observers:

Councillor M. Hart – Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Communities, Worcestershire County Council;
Councillor S. J. Baxter – Deputy Leader, Bromsgrove District Council;

Councillor S. R. Colella – Portfolio Holder for Leisure, Culture and Climate Change, Bromsgrove District Council;

Councillor C. A. Hotham – Portfolio Holder for Finance and Enabling, Bromsgrove District Council;

Councillor M. Marshall – Bromsgrove District Council;

Hannah Perrott – Assistant Director for Communities, Worcestershire County Council;

Carol Brown – Head of Libraries, Worcestershire County Council

Officers: Mr P. Carpenter, Mr. G. Revans, Mr. S. Carroll (on Microsoft Teams), Mrs. J. Bayley-Hill, and Mr. M. Sliwinski.

69/23

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES

An apology of absence was received from Councillor R. J. Hunter, who was substituted at the meeting by Councillor D. J. Nicholl.

70/23

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND WHIPPING ARRANGEMENTS

There were no declarations of interest nor declarations of party whip.

71/23

TO CONFIRM THE ACCURACY OF THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD HELD ON 16TH JANUARY 2024

The minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting held on 16th January 2024 were considered.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting held on 16th January 2024 be agreed as a true and correct record.

LIBRARIES PROVISION - WORCESTERSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL PRESENTATION

The Overview and Scrutiny Board welcomed the Deputy Leader of Worcestershire County Council (WCC) alongside Officers from the County Council.

The WCC Deputy Leader introduced the presentation and stated that the County Council was committed to preserving all 21 libraries in the County. It was stated that the Libraries Unlocked scheme provided a way of allowing libraries to remain open despite significant financial pressures facing upper-tier authorities, particularly relating to adult social care (ASC) services and home to school transport of children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

The WCC Deputy Leader stated that the Libraries Unlocked scheme enabled library users who upgraded their membership to enter specific libraries outside of standard opening hours. The scheme had already live at Droitwich and Stourport Libraries for circa 18 months, with anecdotal evidence suggesting that there was high satisfaction with the scheme at those locations. Through the scheme, there was a reduction in total staff hours, however, library users were able to enter libraries and access range of services in the evenings, without a member of staff needing to be present.

It was highlighted by the WCC Deputy Leader that there was no proposal to reduce the range of activities offered at libraries; it was reiterated that Libraries Unlocked scheme would safeguard the future of libraries in the County in the face of financial pressures facing authorities.

Following the introduction by the Deputy Leader of WCC, County Officers provided a presentation on the Libraries Unlocked scheme, with the following matters highlighted for Members' consideration:

- The open library service delivery model was identified in the Library Strategy 2020-25 as Worcestershire's preferred transformation approach for sustaining the library network. This was approved by County Council's Cabinet in December 2019; however, the implementation had been delayed due to Covid-19.
- Formal public consultation on library transformation options was undertaken in 2018-19. 2000 responses were received in addition to feedback from public meetings held across all libraries in the county. Therefore, the Libraries Unlocked scheme was a model based on and informed by customer feedback expressed in the consultation, particularly with regard to addressing barriers to customers using libraries when unstaffed and best times of day for libraries to be unstaffed.
- Key benefits of Libraries Unlocked scheme were listed as: increasing opening hours and thereby extending service availability to a wider community audience; growing libraries as

community assets by increasing use of library space by community partners; future-proofing of Worcestershire Library network through a flexible delivery model; supporting recovery of library participation post pandemic.

- It was reiterated that staff support would remain available under the Library Unlocked model and would be timetabled throughout the week. The model provided a way whereby most library services remained accessible without library staff needing to be present.
- To mitigate the impact of reduced staff hours from Libraries Unlocked, the under 16s were surveyed (in phase 1 locations for implementation of Libraries Unlocked) to identify preferred times for visiting local library. The staff had been timetabled to reflect the preferences expressed by survey respondents. 12-months after the go-live date, it was reported that there had been a 22 per cent increase in 16-19 year old active library members and a 5.6 per cent increase in 11-15 year old active library member (for locations where Library Unlocked is live).
- Safety of Libraries Unlocked – Concerns of customers about safety of unstaffed libraries had been taken into account with all libraries operating Libraries Unlocked scheme offering: mandatory face-to-face induction for users upgrading to libraries unlocked membership; the scheme being unavailable to customers with history of unacceptable behaviour; full CCTV coverage of libraries including monitoring by County Hall Security during unstaffed hours (Monday-Friday 5-8pm and all day Saturday); dedicated emergency 24/7 phone line on sites; security and fire systems linked to suppliers for a timely response.
- The early adopters of the scheme, Droitwich and Stourport libraries, had seen an 85 per cent increase in opening hours and a 26 and 37 per cent respective reduction in core staffing hours in the two libraries. Staff remain available throughout the week. It was highlighted that the scheme had seen a positive customer response with a 56 per cent increase in library visits 12 months after the go-live date.
- It was noted that at the Droitwich and Stourport libraries, which were part of phase 1 of Libraries Unlocked, the use of library as a local venue for community activity had been encouraged. As part of this, a free meeting room hire offer had been in place to encourage greater use of library by local groups and organisations.

In terms of next steps, Worcestershire County Council (WCC) Officers noted that 12 further libraries were in scope for phase 2 implementation of Libraries Unlocked scheme: 5 of these were located in Bromsgrove District – in Bromsgrove, Rubery, Hagley, Wythall, and Alvechurch. The first libraries to proceed with implementation of Libraries Unlocked would be Bromsgrove and Rubery libraries, with the provisional go live date of March 2024. Further work would need to take place at Hagley, Wythall and Alvechurch libraries with regard to separate arrangements at those libraries before implementation dates could be provided.

It was highlighted that the implementation of Libraries Unlocked at each of these locations was subject to a detailed stakeholder engagement, cost-benefit analysis, and formal staff consultation. It was further highlighted that additional feasibility work would be required to determine whether Libraries Unlocked could be implemented in libraries which were run under Private Finance Initiative (PFI) arrangements, these applied to Alvechurch, Wythall, and Hagley libraries.

In terms of staff hours and opening hours, it was confirmed that for Bromsgrove (town) library, staff hours would be reduced by 25 per cent and overall opening hours would increase by 50 per cent when Libraries Unlocked is introduced. For Rubery library, staff hours would reduce by 30 per cent but opening times increase by 106 per cent following Libraries Unlocked implementation. All libraries under Libraries Unlocked had an opening time of 72 hours per week.

Following the presentation by County Council Officers, Members asked questions and made a number of comments. The following responses were noted:

- Safety of unstaffed libraries – Officers reiterated that there had been no recorded incidents of theft at either the Droitwich or Stourport libraries since the implementation of Libraries Unlocked in 2021. There was one incidence of disruptive behaviour at Droitwich Library in January 2023. While it was noted that CCTV footage showed the disruptive behaviour did not seem to concern other users, police community support officers (PCSOs) were alerted and appropriate action was taken, including talking to the parents of the offenders. No damage or injuries to persons had occurred from this incident. There had been no further incidents.
- Updating library stock based on needs of residents – It was noted that despite budgetary constraints facing the County Council, there was a book fund as part of a broader libraries funding. This allowed book stock to be replenished in libraries and get books updated with latest additions. The BorrowBox app allowed users to offer suggestions on the books they would like to see stocked. The use of the app, it was reported, had seen a great increase in the post pandemic period. In addition, an annual customer voice survey would be run again this year, which would ask asked users what books they would like to see in stock, among other questions. Lastly, library users could offer suggestions directly to librarians.
- Impact of Library Unlocked on experienced librarians – It was noted that in all libraries in the County, all staff was experienced in customer service and the library managers were qualified librarians and that would remain the case in libraries under the Library Unlocked scheme. In terms of staffing, the main impact for

users would be that staff would be on hand for a reduced number of hours per week.

- Further information about the impact of the scheme on library staff – It was explained that Libraries Unlocked was designed to deliver savings and as staffing was the main expenditure the reduced staff hours had been identified as a way to deliver savings. It was noted that vacancies had been held open to minimise any compulsory redundancies that might occur. In addition, the County Council had recently run a corporate-wide voluntary redundancy scheme with some library staff taking the voluntary redundancy offer.
- It was noted that additional energy costs of libraries from increased opening hours would be factored in when calculating the net efficiencies made as a result of the Libraries Unlocked scheme.
- A Member commented that special praise should be given to the current librarian employed at Alvechurch Library who was doing an exceptional job in very difficult circumstances. It was added that the librarian was greatly valued by the community in Alvechurch. Concerns were expressed that library staff worked in conditions where building staff and other contractors might be continually on site as part of the plans for new arrangements which was very distressing to the staff concerned. County Council Officers responded that staff awareness sessions had been implemented as part of the Libraries Unlocked implementation. In addition, because there had been a number of vacancies, there had been no staff redundancies up to this point and it was hoped this would continue to be the case in the remainder of phase one and phase two of Library Unlocked implementation. It was highlighted that there had been a positive response to Libraries Unlocked scheme from staff in other libraries. Staff were also formally consulted on any final proposals to implement Library Unlocked; Alvechurch, Wythall, and Hagley libraries were not yet at the stage where final plans had been formulated.
- Survey feedback on Libraries Unlocked – The County Council's Head of Libraries reported that a survey had been undertaken during the early part of the phase one Libraries Unlocked implementation in October 2022. As part of that all of the Library Unlocked customers in the County at that time had been surveyed. It was noted that one learning point from that survey was that non-Libraries Unlocked customers in the libraries having the scheme should also be surveyed in order to understand the reasons why those library users were not subscribing to / using the Libraries Unlocked. This would be taken into account in phase two of the Libraries Unlocked scheme. The Head of Libraries undertook to provide the survey results (figures) to District Councillors.

- Libraries put forward for phase two of Libraries Unlocked that operated under PFI arrangements – It was noted that as part of identifying the 12 libraries for phase two of Library Unlocked, a return on investment (ROI) exercise was (or would be) undertaken individually for each of the libraries proposed. It was explained that each library that was planned to have Libraries Unlocked implemented had a capital investment assigned and Officers had to assess whether there would be an appropriate level of ROI based on factors such as potential staffing costs and implementation costs of the technology. It was explained that in locations such as Alvechurch, there might be a negative ROI to Libraries Unlocked, because of the PFI arrangements, in which case the scheme would not go ahead at that location.
- It was explained that scale up phrase used in the presentation denoted keeping libraries open even if further efficiencies were needed should they be required. This was not the case at that moment.
- Free meeting room hire (for partners) during Libraries Unlocked hours – It was queried by a Member why this offer was provided if efficiencies needed to be made. An example was provided of Rubery where the building was felt by a Member to be in a bad condition requiring regeneration. County Council Officers explained that there was a wide range of partners that County worked with across libraries including voluntary organisations who run activities for children and youth. The free meeting space within libraries unlocked hours was offered to encourage people and organisations to utilise library space in the evenings and weekends. It was stated that this initiative can be reviewed over time in terms of its effectiveness. In Library Unlocked hours (weekdays 5-8pm and Saturday), library members could also book the space for free.
- Building surveyors – It was explained that this was to assess any needs and costs arising from the implementation of Libraries Unlocked at the selected libraries such as from implementing the new technology and design and safety features required to run Libraries Unlocked scheme.
- Library use and access – It was explained that anyone who was a library member in the County could join to become a 'Libraries Unlocked' member. It was explained that all members of the public (regardless of place of residence) could join to become a Worcestershire library member and through this could then sign up to join 'Libraries Unlocked'.
- It was reiterated that no library activities were proposed to be scrapped as part the Libraries Unlocked scheme. Individual libraries within the County retained discretion over timetabling library activities such as 'bounce and rhyme' sessions, the

timetabling of which might be affected by the implementation of libraries unlocked.

- Information for Staff about Libraries Unlocked – The hours of operation of Libraries Unlocked had been communicated to library staff at affected libraries (via staff consultation) and this message would be reinforced through further communication. It was raised by a Member that a number of librarians were not aware of the decision to proceed with Libraries Unlocked until a key decision had been published on the County Council website. Providing a response, Officers noted that staff had been provided with up to date information on this but efforts would be made to provide comprehensive communication to library staff going forward. It was noted that the decision to implement Libraries Unlocked scheme had already been taken. Staff consultations going forward would be more specific circumstances in the individual libraries concerned that had to have the arrangements implemented.
- Information session on Libraries Unlocked arrangements for customers at Bromsgrove Library would be held on 20th February, and similar sessions would be held prior to 'go live' dates of Libraries Unlocked at other libraries. Officers undertook to ensure that Libraries Unlocked engagement sessions were effectively publicised.
- Key lessons learned from implementation of Libraries Unlocked in Stourport and Droitwich – County Council officers reported that a review of the implementation of this scheme in Stourport and Droitwich was undertaken by Worcestershire County Council's Overview and Scrutiny Panel. Some of the lessons highlighted were ensuring that year 11 children (15 to 16 year olds) were able to access Libraries Unlocked because they were in their final GCSE year; improving communication with the customers, including those who were not local to the library area, to ensure that there was more awareness of the scheme before it was implemented at a specific library was a further key lesson from implementation at the Droitwich and Stourport libraries.
- Use of library for community activities – It was reiterated by Members that libraries were a vital space for community, used not only for library activities but also for a wide range of community activities such as warm spaces.
- Consultation engagement with young users – It was highlighted that there was a focus on engagement with young people (15-16 year olds) on Libraries Unlocked because under 16s were not allowed to access libraries during unstaffed hours currently but this age group had to prepare for GCSE exams. The consultation was to ascertain what arrangements could be made to facilitate access for young people preparing for GCSE exams. In reference

to a Member comment about lack of survey focus on working age people, it was noted that while the core library staff hours would be reduced as a result of Libraries Unlocked, the scheme allowed libraries to remain open in the evenings which was more suitable for working age people. With reference to Rubery Library, it was noted that staff hours would reduce from 35 to 25 per week, however, the opening hours would increase from the current 35 to 72 hours.

- Libraries Unlocked scheme implementation – It was noted that Droitwich and Stourport were the most suitable libraries for piloting the Libraries Unlocked scheme due to their size, building and accessibility perspectives. It was noted that it was deemed that implementation at those locations was successful which meant that the scheme would be rolled out more widely.

RESOLVED that the presentation be noted.

73/23

GOVERNANCE SYSTEMS REVIEW - IMPLEMENTATION PROGRESS UPDATE

The Principal Democratic Services Officer introduced the report and in doing so noted that the Constitution Review Working Group (CRWG) had their last meeting on 30th January 2024. At that meeting, the Group considered the suggestion that, wherever possible, opposition Councillors should be appointed to the positions of Chairmen of the Council, Audit, Standards and Governance Committee and Overview and Scrutiny Board.

It was noted that in 2023-24 Councillors from political groups not represented on the Cabinet were Chairmen of the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee and Overview and Scrutiny Board (which complied with national best practice) as well as serving as the Chairman of the Council. However, there was not currently a constitutional requirement for the Chairman of the Council to be a member from a political group that was not represented on the Cabinet.

It was reported that Members felt this needed to be formalized and the proposed amendments to the Committee Terms of Reference and the Council Procedure Rules, at Parts 5 and 8 of the constitution, were designed to enable the Council to continue in the future to appoint Councillors who are members of political groups not represented on the Council's Cabinet wherever possible. It was stated that in the event that following future local elections insufficient numbers of opposition Members available to appoint to the positions of Chairmen of the Council, the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee and the Overview and Scrutiny Board respectively, provisions were made in the proposed wording of the Committee Terms of Reference and Council Procedure Rules to enable other Councillors to be appointed to those positions, thereby ensuring that Council business could continue without disruption.

Following the presentation, Members raised questions with regard to the progress in implementation of Cabinet Advisory Group. It was responded that these were in the process of being set up and Members would be informed of any meeting dates once the Cabinet Advisory Group was established. Dates for meetings of Cabinet Advisory Group were also being added to the 2024-25 meetings calendar.

RECOMMENDED

- 1) That the proposed amendments to the Committee Terms of Reference, at Part 5 of the Constitution, in respect of provisions as to the Chairmen of the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee and the Overview and Scrutiny Board, be approved as detailed in Appendix 1 to the report;
- 2) That the proposed amendments to the Council Procedure Rules, at Part 8 of the Council's Constitution, in relation to the appointments of the Chairman of the Council and the Chairmen of the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee and the Overview and Scrutiny Board, be approved, as detailed in Appendix 2 to the report.

RESOLVED

- 3) That the update in respect of progress with the implementation of actions arising from the Governance Systems Task Group be noted.

74/23

PLAYING PITCH STRATEGY - PRE-SCRUTINY

The Development Services Manager presented the report on the Playing Pitch Strategy and in doing so drew attention to the fact that this was the outstanding strategy arising from the Leisure and Culture Strategy that was endorsed by Cabinet in October 2022 (the Leisure and Culture Strategy included recommendations that had been drawn from three further strategies that underpinned the main strategy. These were the Arts and Culture Strategy, the Parks and Open Spaces Strategy and the Built Facilities Strategy).

The Playing Pitch Strategy before Members covered the following aspects:

- How many playing pitch facilities there were in Bromsgrove?
- What was the quality of these facilities?
- Were these facilities accessible?
- What was the current demand?
- What was the future demand up to 2040?

Officers explained that the Council worked with a consultancy to ensure the exercise was undertaken in an independent and unbiased manner.

In addition, a team of national governing bodies had overseen this work and Sports England acted as a supervisor and was responsible for signing off the Strategy.

It was further explained that the purposes of the Playing Pitch Strategy document were:

- To provide confidence to the Leisure Team when taking actions on playing pitches.
- To support the local planning authority in making confident decisions about protecting / enhancing provision of playing pitches in Bromsgrove.

It was highlighted that Sports England had to be consulted as a statutory consultee whenever an application that proposes removal or modification of playing pitches comes before the planning committee. The playing pitch strategy provided a framework document that allowed to determine applications in terms of implications on the playing pitch provision in the District.

The Development Services Manager presented the recommendations of the report. It was explained that the first recommendation asked that the Playing Pitch Strategy be endorsed, the second recommendation asked that the authority be delegated to the Head of Planning, Regeneration and Leisure, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Leisure, to implement the first tranche of recommendations of the Playing Pitch Strategy as listed in recommendation two of the report.

Following the presentation, Members discussed the contents of the report. The following points were raised:

- Reporting inaccuracies in the Playing Pitch Strategy – It was reported that as part of stage E of the Strategy, the national governing bodies' representatives would continue to meet with Council officers in a Steering Group to monitor the progress of the Strategy. Elected Members would be able to raise any concerns or comments with Council officers who would then raise them at the Steering Group meetings.
- Section 106 Contributions from Developers – It was explained that the Council already collected money through the Section 106 agreement. The Playing Pitch Strategy document would allow the Council to be more precise in terms of how to spend any contributions on playing pitches and where there was demand. However, it was clarified that agreement with regard to Section 106 contributions are determined at the planning approval stage, and not decided via a Strategy, which provided an overall framework for where there was playing pitch need in the District.
- External Funding Sources – It was noted that the Council was awaiting news as to whether it would be eligible to have access to a place-based national funding pot from Sports England (£250m) within the next 2 years.

- Specific playing pitches and parks – It was noted that funding via Section 106 developer contributions had been provided to Waseley Hills High School, which was making improvements to the playing pitches located there for the use of the school and the community. With regard to the St Chads Park in Rubery, the officers undertook to investigate and provide answers to Members at a later date.
- Consultants' work and costs – It was noted that consultants' work in terms of playing pitches strategy and associated work was £50,000 (of which circa ¼ was devoted to production of the Strategy itself).

RECOMMENDED that

- 1) The Playing Pitch Strategy at Appendix A be endorsed.
- 2) That delegated responsibility be granted to the Head of Planning, Regeneration and Leisure following consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Leisure, Culture and Climate Change to implement the following recommendations (Listed at Playing Pitch Strategy Executive Summary Appendix B):

1.1, 2.1, 3.1, 3.3, 3.4, 5.1, 6.1, 6.3, 7.1, 7.2, 8.1, 8.3, 8.5

75/23

NOTICE OF MOTION - REQUEST TO INVESTIGATE - ACTIONS AGAINST THE IMPACT OF IMPENDING HEATWAVES

The proposer of the motion at full Council meeting, Councillor M. Marshall, addressed the Board. In doing so, he stated that Overview and Scrutiny had been asked by full Council to undertake a review of how to take immediate action to educate and equip residents for impending heatwaves, which had been made more likely by climate change.

Councillor M. Marshall reported that this was envisaged to be a short sharp review composed of a small group of Members to investigate what steps could be taken in the matter such as awareness campaigns, distributing guidelines and establishing cooling centres.

Members discussed the proposal and it was noted that there were national resources available which could help in undertaking the review, including Government guidance paper on hot weather and health from May 2023, and a report from National Audit Office on governmental resilience in extreme weather from December 2023.

The Interim Executive Director suggested that the Short Sharp Review Group could invite an emergency planning consultant to hear what was already being done locally in terms of planning for extreme weather conditions and what strategies could be usefully implemented.

During the discussion, it was agreed that all Members be contacted to ascertain who was interested in joining the Short Sharp Review Group prior to the membership being agreed by the Group.

RESOLVED that a Short Sharp Review Group be established to investigate actions that could be undertaken to protect residents from the impact of impending heatwaves.

76/23

FINANCE AND BUDGET WORKING GROUP - UPDATE

The Chairman reported that the next meeting of the Group would take place on the 13th February 2024 at which the Tranche 2 of the Medium Term Financial Plan 2024-25 and 2026-27 would be pre-scrutinised.

It was commented that as this was a key report which set out the budget, it should be pre-scrutinised by the parent Overview and Scrutiny Board, rather than a Working Group. It was asked that as part of the next year's budget process, the item be on the agenda of the Overview and Scrutiny Board.

RESOLVED that the Finance and Budget Working Group Update be noted.

77/23

TASK GROUP UPDATES

The Chair of the Food Bank and Community Supermarket Provision Task Group, Councillor E. Gray, reported that the Group had almost finalised visits to all known food banks in the District. The Group would be able to meet and prepare recommendations once the visits had been undertaken and the Group had the chance to hold its second formal meeting.

RESOLVED that the Task Group Update be noted.

78/23

WORCESTERSHIRE HEALTH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - UPDATE

The Council's Representative on the Worcestershire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC), Councillor B. Kumar, reported that that HOSC was next due to meet on 19th February 2024. It was reported that a communication had recently been received by HOSC representatives regarding the statistics on the number of calls to West Midlands Ambulance Service (WMAS) made during the Christmas and New Year period. It was highlighted by Councillor B. Kumar that the capacity of the ambulance response system was under strain in 2023-24 where there were 2076 calls made to 111 and 999 on New Year's Eve and New Year's Day alone. This represented a 16 per cent increase in calls compared to the previous year. It was reported that WMAS was looking at ways to minimise waiting times for people calling 111 and 999 numbers.

RESOLVED that the Worcestershire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee Update be noted.

79/23

CABINET WORK PROGRAMME

It was requested that the Cabinet item relating to the Local Heritage List Strategy be pre-scrutinised at the next Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting on 11th March.

RESOLVED that the Cabinet Work Programme be noted and that the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme be updated as per the pre-amble above.

80/23

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD WORK PROGRAMME

It was noted that the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme would be updated with the item requested for pre-scrutiny under the previous item.

RESOLVED that the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme be updated as noted under the previous item.

81/23

TO CONSIDER, AND IF CONSIDERED APPROPRIATE, TO PASS THE FOLLOWING RESOLUTION TO EXCLUDE THE PUBLIC FROM THE MEETING DURING THE CONSIDERATION OF ITEM(S) OF BUSINESS CONTAINING EXEMPT INFORMATION:-

RESOLVED: that under Section 100 I of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended, the public be excluded from the meeting during the consideration of the following item(s) of business on the grounds that it/they involve(s) the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Part I of scheme 12A to the Act, as amended, the relevant paragraph of that part, in each case, being as set out below and that it is in the public interest to do so:-

Item No Paragraph

14 3

15 3 and 4

(Following this item, the meeting adjourned from 8.00pm to 8.10pm).

82/23

LEVELLING UP FUNDING UPDATE

The Deputy Chief Executive presented the update report in respect of Levelling Up Funding (LUF).

In doing so, it was noted that the Council had been awarded £14.1m of LUF in 2022. In addition to this, the Council had added £1.6m of its own funding.

Members were reminded that NWEDR provided overall programme management for the Bromsgrove LUF programmes. Given the changes to this arrangement in the future, plans were to be put in place on how these programmes were to progress moving forward.

A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was to be signed with Worcestershire County Council (WCC) to undertake the Public Realm works.

Officers reminded Members that the Planning application for the Market Hall site was to be considered at the Planning meeting due to take place on 19th February 2024.

The present plan for the Market Hall site would result in a construction completion date of September 2025, which was six months after the present deadline for spending of any Government LUF Grant. The Council had been in communication with DLUHC and sought a six month extension to this project. This was provisionally approved by DLUHC on 5th February 2024.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

(During consideration of this item, Members discussed matters that necessitated the disclosure of exempt information. It was therefore agreed to move to exclude the press and public prior to any debate on the grounds that information would be revealed Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

83/23

**TERMINATION OF SHARED SERVICE ARRANGEMENT: NORTH
WORCESTERSHIRE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND
REGENERATION - PRE-SCRUTINY**

The Interim Executive Director presented a report which detailed proposals for the termination of the shared service for North Worcestershire Economic Development and Regeneration (NWeDR).

Members were informed that in the summer of 2023, the Leader of Wyre Forest District Council had approached the Leader of the Council and the Leader of Redditch Borough Council, which also formed part of the shared service, to advise them of Wyre Forest District Council's intention to ask to end the shared service agreement. This shared service had been in place for over 10 years and had provided economic development and regeneration services in the north of the county during this time.

Subsequent to this approach, Officers had been attending meetings with representatives of Wyre Forest District Council to discuss this matter further and, subject to an exit agreement between all parties, the shared service would cease to operate on 30th June 2024. End of terms were

still being negotiated and would need to address issues such as indemnity clauses.

RECOMMENDED:

- 1) To agree that the Collaboration Agreement relating to the Provision of Economic Development and Regeneration Services should be terminated mutually under clause 15.1 (Determination of this Agreement), with effect from 30 June 2024 and that a new Exit Agreement be entered into;
- 2) Delegate to the Executive Director (interim) following consultation with the Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Regeneration, and Executive Director Resources to negotiate, finalise and approve the Exit Agreement and to take any other steps that arose from the termination process; and
- 3) That an additional budget of £72,836 be approved for the new structure.

(During the consideration of this item, Members discussed matters that necessitated the disclosure of exempt information. It was therefore agreed to move to exclude the press and public prior to any debate on the grounds that information would be revealed which related to the financial and business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information) and which related to any consultations or negotiations, or contemplated consultations or negotiations, in connection with any labour relations matter arising between the authority or a Minister of the Crown and employees of, or office holders under, the authority).

The meeting closed at 9.16 p.m.

Chairman