

**BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**MEETING OF THE CABINET**

**WEDNESDAY 13TH MARCH 2024, AT 6.00 P.M.**

PRESENT: Councillors K.J. May (Leader), S. J. Baxter (Deputy Leader), S. R. Colella, C.A. Hotham, K. Taylor, S. A. Webb and P. J. Whittaker

Observers: Councillor R. J. Hunter and Councillor P. M. McDonald

Officers: Mrs. S. Hanley, Mr P. Carpenter, Ms J. Willis, , Mrs L. Berry, Mr. M. Dunphy, Ms. M. Worsfold and Mrs J. Gresham

88/23 **TO RECEIVE APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

There were no apologies for absence.

89/23 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor S. Webb declared an Other Disclosable Interest as a Trustee of the Citizen's Advice Bureau in relation to Agenda Item Number 7, Minute Number 94/23 – Cost of Living Funding Proposal.

Councillor Webb remained in the meeting for consideration of this item and took part in the vote thereon.

There were no further Declarations of Interest.

90/23 **TO CONFIRM THE ACCURACY OF THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE CABINET HELD ON 21ST FEBRUARY 2024**

The minutes from the Cabinet meeting held on 21<sup>st</sup> February 2024 were submitted for Members' consideration.

**RESOLVED** that the minutes from the Cabinet meeting held on 21<sup>st</sup> February 2024 be approved as a true and accurate record.

91/23

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD HELD ON 12TH FEBRUARY 2024**

The Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Board was present for consideration of this item. It was noted that there were no outstanding recommendations from the meeting of the Board held on 12<sup>th</sup> February 2024.

There were however, two reports that had been pre-scrutinised at the Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting which took place on 11<sup>th</sup> March 2024. It was agreed that these recommendations would be considered by Cabinet during consideration of the specific reports at agenda items 5 and 6, Minute Numbers 92/23 and 93/23.

**RESOLVED** that the minutes from the Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting held on 12<sup>th</sup> February 2024 be noted.

92/23

**BROMSGROVE CENTRES ACTION PLAN REVIEW 2024/25**

The Bromsgrove Centres Manager presented the Bromsgrove Centres Action Plan Review 2024/25 for Members' consideration.

In doing so, the following was highlighted:

- The Bromsgrove Centres Strategy and Action Plan 2023-2026 was approved by Members in January 2023.
- The Bromsgrove Centres Action Plan set out Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness and success of the plan. These KPIs included budget monitoring, actions and response for certain projects. Outstanding actions from the previous action plan would be carried forward and continued in the 2024/25 municipal year.

Following the presentation of the report Members agreed that this was a positive and encouraging strategy for Bromsgrove Centres and were keen to implement it as soon as possible. Members felt that the events that had been organised were encouraging and had a positive impact on communities across the District and increased footfall within Town Centres across the District.

The Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Board presented the recommendation agreed by Members at the meeting of the Board on 11<sup>th</sup> March 2024. The recommendation was as follows:

*'That the action plan be named 'Bromsgrove District Centres Action Plan' to emphasise that it is targeting centres in all wards of the District.'*

Cabinet considered the recommendation, and it was agreed that this change could be reflected.

Therefore, it was

**RESOLVED** that the Bromsgrove District Centres Action Plan 2024/25 be approved.

93/23

### **LOCAL HERITAGE LIST STRATEGY**

The Principal Conservation Officer presented the Local Heritage List Strategy report for the consideration of Cabinet. During the presentation it was highlighted that this report provided an update on progress of the Local Heritage List Strategy adopted in 2016. It was noted that there had been progress on the list, however there had been issues faced particularly in the public engagement element of the strategy.

Members' attention was drawn to the summary of the Local Heritage List Strategy contained within the report which included information regarding the value of heritage assets to local communities and that the Bromsgrove District Plan (2017) acknowledged the importance of adopting a Local List to formerly identify the locally important heritage assets within the District.

Officers reported that the criteria for inclusion on the Local Heritage List had been identified, and included the following:

1. Age
2. Authenticity and Rarity
3. Architectural interest
4. Historic interest
5. Townscape / Villagescape / Landscape interest.

It was stated that in order to be included on the List, candidates needed to satisfy the first criteria stated above and at least one other.

Cabinet was informed that Historic England provided the guidance in respect of Local Heritage Listings. Contained within this guidance was the importance of community engagement within the process.

It was explained that prior to the work on the Lists for Beoley and Dodford, public consultation events were held to gain public feedback on the draft conservation areas for both Beoley and Dodford Conservation Areas. At these events the opportunity was taken to publicise the Local Heritage Lists. It was noted by Officers that the public response had been limited and only a handful of nominations had been received from the public. Officers clarified that this represented around ten responses.

In the original Local Heritage List Strategy, nominations for inclusion on the list were to be considered by an assessment panel who considered the suitability of all the assets nominated against the selection criteria. However, since the original strategy was adopted there had been changes experienced in staffing levels of Conservation Officers working within the Council. Cabinet was informed that the conservation resources had now doubled and had allowed for internal benchmarking of the proposed list to take place. Therefore, the assessment panel's role had become less relevant compared to the public engagement element which was considered extremely important. A further change since the original strategy was adopted, was the increased use of the Council's website and social media resources. Officers explained that this extra resource would be utilised to increase public engagement as part of the proposed update to the process. In addition, there would also be opportunities to engage with the local Ward Councillors, Parish Councillors and building owners as part of the new process.

In terms of how the draft lists would be presented, Officers stated that there would be a half page summary of the heritage asset, which included a brief description, the assessment of criteria and a location map of the site.

Draft lists for Beoley, Alvechurch, Belbroughton and Dodford had now been prepared. These lists had resulted in 140 properties being added to the draft Local Heritage List. The sites comprised of a diverse range of properties including houses, schools, village halls, places of worship and canal infrastructure. Members were informed that work was underway on the preparation of the draft lists for Bromsgrove Town, Lickey and Blackwell and Wythall.

Going forward, it was proposed that further lists would be prepared for the remaining areas within the District in consultation with the Head of Planning, Regeneration and Leisure. The final sections of the list would be presented to Cabinet for formal adoption as the Local Heritage List for Bromsgrove. It was envisaged that Officers would prepare a number of reports in tranches over the next twelve to eighteen months with each

one covering a number of parishes / areas so that Local Heritage List coverage could be achieved as soon as possible, rather than wait for the whole District to be assessed before the list was finalised.

Following the presentation of the report there was a detailed discussion regarding the updated process. This included the following areas:

- Appeal processes – there would be no appeal process as part of the newly proposed process. Comments would be sought from property owners as part of the consultation process. However, if an owner did not want their property to be included on the list, this would not be deemed a satisfactory reason for it not to appear on the list. This was the same in the statutory property listing process.
- Permitted Development Rights – these rights would still be recognised as these were made by Central Government. Inclusion on the Local Heritage List would be included as a material consideration as part of the planning process just as statutory listing was currently a material consideration.
- Areas of work already completed – it was raised that all of the work already undertaken had been in parished areas of the District. It was felt that work also needed to be undertaken in unparished areas. Officers confirmed that this would be done and that there had been no particular reason as to why work had been carried out in parished areas so far other than the link to the conservation area appraisals that had been completed in these areas. There would certainly be a mix of assessments carried out in both parished and unparished areas over the course of the work. It was noted that there were some areas located within the District that had more interest in the process for example Alvechurch was very engaged, in part because that area had its own neighbourhood plan.

There was a discussion regarding specific areas contained within the strategy, including in respect of non-designated Heritage Assets. It was noted that the ‘balanced judgement’ would be provided when an application was considered by the Planning Committee or in cases when the Committee did not consider an application, this judgement would be provided by the Planning Officers. These judgements would include consideration of the public benefit if a non-designated Heritage Asset were to be affected as part of a planning application. This was already in place as part of the statutory listing process.

Some Members queried the non-inclusion of heritage assets on the list and that non-inclusion did not necessarily mean that there was no heritage value of that property. Officers explained that the fact that the property was still a 'heritage asset' would still be a material consideration in the planning process. However, it provided flexibility in assessing future heritage assets as and when architectural interests inevitably changed over time resulting in properties that were not on the list being added to the list in the future.

Members asked what national intelligence was available in respect of planning applications that were refused by the Local Authority on the grounds of heritage value but were subsequently granted on appeal. Officers were unsure of the exact data in this area but undertook to look into this further.

It was requested that changes to the wording regarding the Chartist Settlement at Dodford be reworded within the strategy for clarity. Officers undertook to make these necessary changes.

The Chairman of the Overview and scrutiny Board presented the recommendations from the Board which were as follows:

- 1) That District Ward Councillors be directly involved in the consultation process for the Local Heritage List (LHL) in their respective ward areas.
  
- 2) That the final Local Heritage List (LHL) for Bromsgrove, covering the whole district, be completed and published within the next 18 months.

In presenting the recommendations the Chairman of the Board reiterated the need for Officers to consider unparished areas within the District as part of the work. It was also noted that there was a rich history in Rubery of local heritage properties such as Nailers' and Button Cottages and that local Ward Members could provide useful information in respect of the assets within their wards.

In respect of the second recommendation, Officers suggested that it seemed reasonable that the works would be completed within the eighteen months suggested. However, if there were any delays they would be reported accordingly. It was also confirmed that at the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board it had been requested that Officers provided the Board with a quarterly update in respect of progress and

that a project plan would be provided at the Board meeting due to take place in April 2024.

**RESOLVED** that

- 1) Cabinet approve the revised Local Heritage List Strategy Document.
- 2) Cabinet delegate the authority to the Head of Planning, Regeneration and Leisure Services to publish for consultation draft sections of the Local Heritage List.
- 3) District Ward Councillors be directly involved in the consultation process for the Local Heritage List (LHL) in their respective ward areas.
- 4) the final Local Heritage List (LHL) for Bromsgrove, covering the whole District, be completed and published within the next 18 months.

94/23

**COST OF LIVING FUNDING PROPOSAL**

The Head of Community and Housing Services presented the Cost of Living Funding proposal for Cabinet's consideration. In doing so, Members' attention was drawn to the following:

- In 2020-21 the Council allocated £50,000 to support the Community Hubs initiative. Further allocations were made in 2021-22 and 2022-23 equalling a total budget of £150,000. It was confirmed that this budget was currently sat in earmarked reserves.
- In February 2020 the budget was approved by Cabinet as a revenue bid to support the development of the Worcestershire County Council (WCC) Community Hubs in libraries initiative across the District.
- Following a new direction of travel by WCC, this budget was never provided to the County Council. Therefore, the £150,000 funding remained within reserves.
- Due to the Cost of Living crisis, it was agreed that the needs of local residents needed to be better understood. Therefore, a multi-agency Cost of Living Group was established with partners such as WCC, Bromsgrove District Housing Trust (BDHT) and other partners. Following discussions at this group, two surveys were carried out, in order to better understand the specific needs

of local communities. The findings from the survey highlighted that the crisis was affecting a broad range of residents not just those on benefits or a lower income. It also established that financial management advice might ease the pressure on residents but that this could not be the only solution. It was suggested that there needed to be more information and support provided to mortgage holders who were struggling with their mortgages, those who had faced food insecurity in the last six months and those residents who had gone without essentials, such as shower or cleaning items including clothes.

In considering the outcomes of the survey, the Cost-of-Living Group determined that there was a need for additional debt advice workers to work across agencies and within local communities for a fourteen month trial period. The focus of the additional workers would be as follows:

- Specialist housing adviser who delivered housing advice directly.
- Voluntary sector money adviser to help residents improve their well-being when faced with financial difficulties.
- Enhancement of the support of the Financial Inclusion Team.

This trial period would also provide the opportunity to inform a lottery bid by the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) to continue this work in the future. It was clarified that if the lottery bid was successful any monies not spent on the trial project would be put back in to reserves and reallocated.

Following the presentation of the report Members discussed the allocation of funds to each new role and queried why the amount outlined in the report equated to only £126,000 rather than the full amount of £150,000. It was confirmed that the amounts contained within the report were per annum and as the trial period took place over fourteen months the outstanding amount of £24,000 would cover the final two months of the roles. There was a suggestion that the outstanding amount could potentially be utilised to support local food banks within the District.

Some Members felt that there was a risk that fourteen months might not be a long enough period of time to embed new roles and also complete a bid for lottery funding. However, Officers however confirmed although this would be a challenge,



discussions had already started with the VCS and therefore this piece of work had effectively already commenced providing the necessary time.

In terms of the Citizens Advice Bureau funding, it was reported that this would certainly help those residents who were struggling with the Child Benefit system which had recently changed and had caused confusion amongst residents.

Some Members felt that some of the allocation should be provided to outreach work to support young people in schools with financial management. However, it was confirmed that this initiative was already taking place in secondary schools across the District and had been for some time.

**RECOMMENDED** that

£150,000 contained within earmarked reserves be allocated as a one-off investment to support the estimated costs of the following Cost of Living initiatives:

- (a) Citizen's Advice specialist housing adviser - £52k
- (b) Voluntary sector money adviser - £32k
- (c) Enhancing the support of the Council's Financial Inclusion Team - £42k

95/23

### **FINANCE AND PERFORMANCE QUARTER 3 MONITORING REPORT 2023/24**

The Deputy Chief Executive presented the Finance and Performance Quarter 3 Monitoring Report 2023/24 to Cabinet. During the presentation the following was highlighted Members' attention:

- Included in the report was Capital Programme monitoring until the end of December 2023, updated Worcestershire Regulatory Services (WRS) statutory increases in fees and charges for 2024/25, the list of contracts above £200,000 and the list of contracts between £50,000 and £200,000 and the Quarter Three Strategic and Operational Performance Measures.
- Currently, the Council was forecasting a revenue overspend for 2023/24 in the region of £572,000, before the application of £351,000 from the Utilities Reserve as approved at Quarter One. This application of the reserve would result in a forecast overspend of £221,000 for 2023/24. It was noted that the forecast

overspend was predominantly due to the implications of the 2023/24 pay award which had been paid to Officers in December 2023 and had been backdated to 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023. Other impacts included:

- Increased costs in temporary and interim staff requirements.
  - The impact of homelessness and temporary accommodation costs.
  - Higher than expected ICT costs in the Business Transformation service area.
  - Costs of refurbishment of the Council's fleet.
- As detailed above, the overspend would be offset by a forecast underspend against the Utilities Budget provision due to Utilities inflation running at 70 per cent rather than at 100 per cent as assumed in the 2023/24 Budget. In addition, the overspend would be offset by the following:
    - additional grants receipts and income for Community and Housing.
    - lower than expected ICT purchases and additional grant income in Business Transformation and Organisational Development.
  - In terms of capital spend it was noted that at Quarter Three it was £3.207m (£1.654m at Quarter Two) against the overall 2023/24 capital budget totalling £10.851m.

In presenting the performance measures information, specific areas to note were as follows:

- Housing Growth – It was reported that 199 new homes had been built, 55 of which were affordable homes. The Local Housing Affordability rate was reportedly higher than the national rate at 11.17 percent versus the national rate of 9.05 per cent.
- SLM Leisure (Everyone Active) – there had been an increase in membership numbers from the previous years.
- Staff Turnover Rates – there had been a continued improvement in turnover rates of only 8.8 per cent, which meant that the authority was significantly under the national average rate of staff turnover (15.6 per cent). This would

hopefully continue to improve as a result of the implementation of the Workforce Strategy.

Officers reported that this report had been pre-scrutinised at the Finance and Budget Working Group (FBWG) on Friday 8<sup>th</sup> March 2024. During this meeting there had been a detailed discussion regarding fly-tipping. It had been agreed that the presentation previously given by the Environmental Services Manager in respect of this topic be provided for newer Members. It had also been requested that a piece of work regarding comparison of numbers of fly-tipping incidents in neighbouring, similar sized Councils be carried out. This was of particular interest to Members as it was felt that given the current situation of closure of refuse sites in neighbouring Authorities this could potentially cause an increase in incidents occurring within Bromsgrove District. Cabinet Members expressed that there needed to be more communications around the successful enforcement of fly-tipping incidents, including when Fixed Penalty Notices were issued.

Other areas of discussion at the meeting of the FBWG was the use of Street Pastors and how residents were referred to them, and the inclusion of crime statistics in the performance measures. A further request was made that the graphs included in the report were increased in size.

Cabinet discussed the relevance of some of the performance measures included within the report. It was felt that these needed to be updated as part of the update of priorities which was soon to take place. It was important that these new priorities reflected the needs of the Council and any measures linked to these not only measured data, but also impacts as a result of the measures.

**RECOMMENDED** that

- 1) The Updated WRS 2023/4 Charges be approved.

**RESOLVED** that

- 2) The current overspend position in relation to Revenue and Capital Budgets for the period April to September and the full year revenue overspend position of £221k after applying £351k from the Utilities Reserve as approved at Quarter 1 be noted.
- 3) The updated procurements position be noted and those items over £200,000 be included on the forward plan.

- 4) The Quarter Two Performance data for the Period April to December 2023 be noted.

96/23

**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**

There was no Urgent Business on this occasion.

The meeting closed at 7.21 p.m.

Chairman