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Council
17th July 2024

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MEETING OF THE COUNCIL

17TH JULY 2024, AT 6.00 P.M.

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

Officers: Mrs S. Hanley, Mrs C. Felton, Mr G. Revans, Ms D. Goodall, Mrs C. Green, Mrs B. Talbot, Mrs J. Bayley-Hill and Ms J. Gresham.

16\24 **TO RECEIVE APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors D.J. Nicholl and D.G. Stewart.

17\24 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

18\24 **TO CONFIRM THE ACCURACY OF THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COUNCIL HELD ON 15TH MAY 2024**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 15th May 2024 be approved as a correct record.

19\24 **TO RECEIVE ANY ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM THE CHAIRMAN AND/OR HEAD OF PAID SERVICE**

Chairman

The Chairman announced that the Council had been informed that former Chairman of the Council, Craig Lanham, sadly passed away in May 2024. As a mark of respect, the Council observed a minute's silence in his memory.

The Chairman and Council congratulated Councillor Sam Evans who had recently qualified as a solicitor.

Councillor Evans studied A Level law whilst at Sixth Form at South Bromsgrove High School and graduated from the University of Worcester with a first class LLB Law Degree in 2019. He then worked at a high street law firm and studied a LLM with the Legal Practice Course

at BPP in Birmingham, graduating in late 2021. He qualified as a solicitor on 1st March this year.

Head of Paid Service

The Head of Paid Service announced that item 13 on the agenda for the meeting, Council Productivity Plan, would not be considered by the Council as it was a matter decided by Cabinet.

20\24

TO RECEIVE ANY ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM THE LEADER

The Leader of the Council paid tribute to former Councillor Lanham, who represented Norton and Stoke Heath and was Chairman 2006-07.

The Leader reported that further to an approach by a Councillor, she had contacted Worcestershire County Council to ask that the District Council was informed in advance of any major works planned to take place in the District. The Assistant Director of Highways at the County Council had agreed to inform Councillors and the Council of any extensive works planned for the District.

The Leader was delighted to report that Lickey End Recreation Ground and Sanders Park had both been awarded the Green Flag award. The award was run by Keep Britain Tidy and was internationally acclaimed. She commended the work of Council employees and supported the observation of a Councillor about the work undertaken by local residents in Lickey End which contributed to maintenance of the park and local environment.

21\24

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

Dr Ian Pogson asked the Council what the plans were for the old Fire Station and the old Library in the centre of town.

Councillor S. Baxter, Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Economic Development and Regeneration, replied that

“The site was originally owned by the Fire Service (56%) and Worcestershire County Council (44%). It was extensively marketed over a number of years post the library relocating in 2015. A number of interested parties came forward, but none of them were able to present a business case that stacked up financially. All potential partners only looked at the demolition of the site as it was not commercially viable to refurbish. A full environmental survey has been undertaken and has identified the need for full remediation works involving the Environment Agency.

Bromsgrove District Council took the decision to apply for LUP (Levelling Up Fund) money and as a result of the successful bid we have procured the site.

This site is being demolished using LUP monies from central government. These funds were made available to move forward vacant sites in centres such as Bromsgrove which were not financially viable for redevelopment without further support. Planning consent for demolition has been secured and a demolition company that can manage land contamination procured. The approval of the contractor is set out in a report that was discussed at Cabinet this evening and was reviewed by Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the 11th July. All timescales to date accord with funding conditions, which require the site to be cleared.

Following the clearance of the site this land will form part of the Strategic Development Plan for Bromsgrove town centre.”

22\24

URGENT DECISIONS

Members were informed that there had been no urgent decisions since the previous meeting of the Council.

23\24

POLITICAL BALANCE

The Council considered a report setting out proposals for changes to the political balance of the Council following changes in the membership of political groups.

RESOLVED that

- 1) for the remainder of the 2024/25 Municipal Year, the Committees set out in the table in Appendix 1 of the report be appointed and that the representation of the different political groups on the Council on those Committees be as set out in that table until the next Annual Meeting of the Council, or until the next review of political representation under Section 15 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989, whichever is the earlier.
- 2) Members be appointed to the Committees and as substitute members in accordance with nominations to be made by Group Leaders.

24\24

ESTABLISHMENT OF A JOINT APPOINTMENTS COMMITTEE INCLUDING TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Council considered a report setting out governance proposals for the appointment of Statutory Officers, including the establishment of a Joint Appointments Committee with Redditch Borough Council. It was suggested that the joint committee was the most effective approach to the administration of the recruitment process.

In proposing the report, Councillor K. May referred to the recommendations relating to the pay for the Chief Executive role. It was noted that there was an error at paragraph 4.1 in the report, where the current starting salary for the Chief Executive role should be £142,251 (not £142,663). The Council had received advice from West Midlands Employers that the top increment of the salary for the role should be increased by 1.31% in order to remain competitive. Councillor S. Baxter seconded the recommendations.

RESOLVED that

- 1) A Joint Appointments Committee (JAC) be established, to replace the current Appointments Committee, for Bromsgrove District Council (BDC) with Redditch Borough Council (RBC) of 10 Councillors (5 from each authority, which must include both Leaders) with terms of reference as detailed in Appendix 1 of the report.
- 2) The Joint Appointments Committee is directed to appoint a subcommittee of 6 members (3 from each authority), which will form the final interview panel for the appointment of the Head of Paid Service and S151 Officer and make recommendations to the JAC.
- 3) To appoint 5 members from Bromsgrove District Council to the JAC in accordance with para 2.2 of the report.
- 4) To authorise the Monitoring Officer to update the Constitution, including any consequential amendments required as a result of the above.
- 5) To approve a 1.31% increase to the top increment of the Head of Paid Service grade.
- 6) To approve a revised Pay Policy to include changes to Head of Paid Service grade and the introduction of a new grade between top of NJC Grade and Hay Grades.

25\24

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD - ANNUAL REPORT 2023 - 2024

Councillor P.M. McDonald, Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Board, presented the Board's Annual Report for 2023-24.

During consideration of the report Members referred to the positive impact of the work of the Board and thanked the members and officers who supported it. Arising from a question, it was noted that the review of the implementation of the new Governance arrangements of the Council was planned for November 2024.

RESOLVED that the Overview and Scrutiny Board Annual Report 2023-24 be noted.

26\24

AUDIT, STANDARDS AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT 2023 - 2024

As the former Chairman of the Committee was not at the meeting, this item was deferred.

27\24

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE CABINET

A recommendation from the meeting of the Cabinet held on 17th July 2024 was presented for the Council's consideration.

The Council Plan

Councillor K. May proposed the approval of the Council Plan and this was seconded by Councillor S. Baxter. The Plan would set the strategic direction of the Council for the next four years and inform the business planning process for services in order to meet the priorities set out. Councillor May outlined the process of compiling the Plan and referred to consideration of it by Overview and Scrutiny Board at its meeting on 11th July. Arrangements for monitoring implementation and progress of the Plan were also explained.

RESOLVED that the Council Plan 2024-2027 be approved.

28\24

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE (TO FOLLOW)

The Chairman advised that one question on notice had been received for this meeting.

Question submitted by Councillor S. Robinson

“Is the Council looking for a better long term solution to managing 30 mins free parking than having to print off and display a ticket each time?”

Councillor S. Baxter, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Regeneration responded:

“The new system has only just been introduced and with our current parking machines and technology it is currently the only sensible way of achieving the 30 minutes free parking. This will be kept under review and as and when technology allows, we will review the situation. It is worth noting that with the current pay and display system users get a ticket to be displayed which confirms when the 30 minutes runs out.”

Councillor Robinson commented that residents had referred to the complexity of adding extra time to their parking beyond the 30 minutes. However, she appreciated that this would be kept under review. Councillor Baxter reiterated that currently the Council was constrained by the technology available.

29\24

MOTIONS ON NOTICE

The Chairman advised that three Notices of Motion had been submitted for this meeting.

Young People and Democracy

The Council considered the following Notice of Motion submitted by Councillor R. Hunter:

“Council notes with concern the growing levels of despondency with democracy amongst young people.

Council commits to take reasonable steps within our community to promote the benefits of local democracy to young people, and where practicable engage them in democratic processes, as appropriate to the Council’s remit as a district local authority.

Council resolves to investigate options by the end of the calendar year, in partnership with local schools and youth groups, to involve local young people in the democratic process. This will include exploring the possibility of inviting young people to give a ‘thought for the day’ presentation at the beginning of Council meetings.”

In proposing the motion, Councillor Hunter referred to the connections between young people and the Council and Councillors which already took place and explained that the motion sought to build on this. He considered that the Council should seek to renew its relationships with young people to encourage the continuation of democracy.

The Motion was seconded by Councillor S. Robinson. She referred to the work already being carried out and suggested that more could be done to stimulate interest in democracy in children and young people, in a politically neutral way.

During consideration of the Motion the following were the main points raised:

- The Policy Team already had links to various youth groups in the District and it was suggested they could meet with Group Leaders to consider how the desire to increase participation by young people could be developed.
- Involving young people and children in Council meetings might have safeguarding and resource implications which would need to be explored.
- A member reported on a youth council which had been set up during the covid pandemic and had been supported by various parts of the Council.
- The view was expressed that engaging young people should include understanding their environment and what they were

capable of delivering, in partnership with the Council and Councillors.

- It was important to involve young people in democracy, but attending formal Council meetings was unlikely to be attractive to them.
- A member reported on work being carried out by parish Councils including visiting schools to engage with young people and setting up youth councils. It was acknowledged that not all areas of the District were parished.
- A member outlined a proposal to involve young people in the review of play areas in the District and suggested that a formalised process for engaging with young people might help the Council with future consultation work.
- The view was expressed that engaging with young people should aim to enable them to tell the Council what was important to them. This could be achieved in a number of ways and the Council should be innovative in its approach.

RESOLVED that

- 1) Council notes with concern the growing levels of despondency with democracy amongst young people.
- 2) Council commits to take reasonable steps within our community to promote the benefits of local democracy to young people, and where practicable engage them in democratic processes, as appropriate to the Council's remit as a district local authority, and
- 3) Council resolves to investigate options by the end of the calendar year, in partnership with local schools and youth groups, to involve local young people in the democratic process. This will include exploring the possibility of inviting young people to give a 'thought for the day' presentation at the beginning of Council meetings

Additional Police for Bromsgrove District

The Council considered the following Notice of Motion submitted by Councillor P. McDonald:

"After regular meetings with the police, it is has become apparent that the police are under resourced in the district of Bromsgrove. The lack of capacity is leading to an increase in anti-social behaviour and crime in general. This demonstrates the urgent need for more police patrolling the area. Research by the police shows the obvious, that if you increase numbers then you reduce crime in general.

Therefore, Council calls upon the Leader to write to the Police and Crime Commissioner requesting more police for the District of Bromsgrove."

In proposing the Motion, Councillor McDonald reported that residents had expressed concern to him that the Police did not respond effectively to calls. He suggested that the Police did not have sufficient capacity to investigate all the incidents reported to them in the way they might wish to. Increasing the number of Police officers on the streets would increase their visibility, ability to investigate incidents and thus increase visibility and residents' peace of mind.

Councillor Rone-Clark seconded the Motion and suggested that there was an opportunity to influence the development of the Police service following a change in national government.

Arising from the debate on this item, Councillor McDonald withdrew the Motion on the basis that he would write to the new Home Secretary to seek confirmation of funding for additional Police Officers in West Mercia. The Leader offered, once confirmation had been received, to write to the Police and Crime Commissioner for West Mercia to press for additional officers in Bromsgrove.

Developing a Tree Planting Target

Council considered the following Notice of Motion submitted by Councillor J Robinson:

“Council notes the climate emergency and the commitments it has made to play its part in tackling climate change.

Council also notes the powerful role tree-planting can play in mitigating global warming. Trees not only absorb and lock up carbon, according to the Woodland Trust they also help prevent flooding, reduce urban temperatures, reduce pollution and keep soil nutrient rich.

Council resolves to explore the possibility, through a report to Cabinet within six months, of implementing a Bromsgrove tree-planting target to include both council owned land and co-ordinating efforts across the community.”

In proposing the Motion, Councillor Robinson referred to discussions about tree planting in previous Council meetings and suggested that this Motion would enable costed proposals to be considered.

Councillor S. M. Evans seconded the motion.

Councillor H. Rone-Clark proposed, Councillor J. Elledge seconded an amendment, to add at the end of the Motion “, and to request that the Council’s Tree Officer advise members regarding the Council’s policy in respect of mature trees.”

Councillor J. Robinson accepted the amendment and the amended motion became the substantive motion.

During debate of the motion the following were the main points made:

- There was a limited amount of land in Council ownership, for example in parks, where additional trees could be planted. However, the view was expressed that reference in the Motion to “both council-owned land and co-ordinating efforts across the District” broadened out the scope of investigating a potential tree planting target.
- Increased tree planting and biodiversity net gain within new housing developments would be managed in the preparation of the next local plan, and the Strategic Planning and Conservation Manager had noted the aspiration in this regard.
- The Cabinet Member for Leisure and Climate Change undertook to write to Worcestershire County Council to explore potential opportunities for tree planting on County owned land, most likely on adopted highway verges, although if achieved this would increase the costs of maintenance and inspection and consequential financial impacts.
- A member reported experience of difficulty in finding appropriate sites for tree planting in the District.
- The view was expressed that the opportunity should be taken in the new Local Plan to maximise the requirement to plant trees.
- Whilst members supported planting trees, the view was expressed that the requirement in the Motion for officers to produce a tree planting target was difficult to achieve and potentially disproportionate.
- Residents could be encouraged to plant trees in their own gardens which could support biodiversity.
- Worcestershire County Council had a programme for planting trees across the District and local members had been involved in discussions about sites for these; the view was expressed that the Motion would be a duplication of effort and would stretch officer resources.
- The Council would consider its Biodiversity Action Plan later in the year and all Councillors could contribute to this. The Environment Act would also require Councils to achieve certain targets.
- The Motion would assist in confirming details of Council land ownership.
- The view was expressed that the terms of the Motion lacked sufficient detail as to what was proposed to understand the potential impacts. However, it was argued that the Motion required a report to be produced for Cabinet in order to understand the possibilities and implications.
- It was suggested that the Overview and Scrutiny Board might wish to consider the issue in detail and report to Cabinet.

In accordance with Procedure Rule 18.3, Councillor J. Robinson requested a recorded name vote.

Members voting FOR the motion:

Councillors A. Bailes, R. Bailes, J. Elledge, S.M. Evans, E.M.S. Gray, D. Hopkins, R. Hunter, M. Marshall, P.M. McDonald, J. Robinson, S. Robinson and H. Rone-Clarke (12)

Members voting AGAINST the motion:

Councillors S. Baxter, S. Colella, D. Forsythe, H. Jones, B. Kumar. R.E. Lambert, K. May, S. T. Nock, S. Peters, J. Stanley, K. Taylor, S. Webb and P. Whittaker (13)

Abstentions

Councillors S. Ammar, A. Dale, C. Hotham and B. McEldowney (4)

The motion was lost.

30\24

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 7.54 p.m.

Chairman