

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MEETING OF THE COUNCIL

WEDNESDAY 22ND JANUARY 2025, AT 6.00 P.M.

PRESENT: Councillors S. Ammar (Chairman), B. Kumar (Vice-Chairman), A. Bailes, R. Bailes, S. J. Baxter, J. Clarke, S. R. Colella, 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, S. T. Nock, D. J. Nicholl, S. R. Peters, J. Robinson, H. D. N. Rone-Clarke, J. D. Stanley, 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 B. Talbot and Mrs. J. Bayley-Hill

74\24

TO RECEIVE APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors A. Dale, J. Elledge, B. McEldowney and S. Robinson.

75\24

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor R. Lambert declared a pecuniary interest in respect of Minute Item No. 87/24 concerning the second Motion due to be considered at the meeting in that she was employed by the Planning Department at Worcester City Council. She left the room during consideration of the item took no part in the debate nor vote thereon.

Councillor C. Hotham declared an Other Disclosable Interest in respect of Minute Item No. 84/24 Quarter 2 Financial and Performance Report 2024/25 and Medium-Term Financial Plan 2025/26 To 2027/28 – Tranche 1 in his capacity as a Trustee for The Artrix.

Councillors K. May and S. T. Nock declared an Other Disclosable Interest in respect of Minute Item No. 84/24 Bromsgrove Local Heritage List in their capacity as Ward Members for Belbroughton and Romsley which appeared in the Bromsgrove Heritage List.

Councillor A. Bailes declared an Other Disclosable Interest in respect of Minute Item No. 84/24 Bromsgrove Local Heritage List in his capacity as

Ward Member for Alvechurch South which appeared in the Bromsgrove Heritage List.

Councillor R. Bailes declared an Other Disclosable Interest in respect of Minute Item No. 83/24 Bromsgrove Local Heritage List in her capacity as Ward Member for Alvechurch Village which appeared in the Bromsgrove Heritage List.

Councillor K. Taylor declared an Other Disclosable Interest in respect of Minute Item No. 84/24 Bromsgrove Local Heritage List in his capacity as Ward Member for Dodford which appeared in the Bromsgrove Heritage List.

Councillor S. Webb declared an Other Disclosable Interest in respect of Minute Item No. 84/24 Bromsgrove Local Heritage List in her capacity as Worcestershire County Councillor for Dodford and Grafton which appeared in the Bromsgrove Heritage List.

Councillor C. Hotham declared an Other Disclosable Interest in respect of Minute Item No. 84/24 Bromsgrove Local Heritage List in his capacity as Ward Member for Hopwood which appeared in the Bromsgrove Heritage List.

76\24

TO CONFIRM THE ACCURACY OF THE MINUTES OF THE MEETINGS OF THE COUNCIL HELD ON 9TH OCTOBER AND 4TH DECEMBER 2024

The minutes from the Council meetings held on 9th October 2024 and 4th December 2024 were submitted for Members' consideration.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Council meetings held on 9th October 2024 and 4th December 2024 be approved as a true and accurate record.

77\24

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

Chairman

During consideration of this item the Chairman made some personal comments and was challenged by members before moving on to the next item.

Head of Paid Service

The Head of Paid Service requested that any Members who had not yet completed their conflict-of-interest form required by the Council's new external auditors, do so by the end of the meeting. The completed forms needed to be handed directly to either the Head of Paid Service or the Deputy Chief Executive following the meeting in order for the completed forms to be returned to the external auditors.

Members were also reminded that any remaining Ward Member funds should be allocated and spent prior to the end of the financial year 2024/2025.

78\24 **TO RECEIVE ANY ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM THE LEADER**

There were no announcements from the Leader.

79\24 **TO RECEIVE COMMENTS, QUESTIONS OR PETITIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC**

There were no comments, questions or petitions from members of the public.

80\24 **URGENT DECISIONS**

The Chairman advised that there had been no urgent decisions since the last meeting of the Council.

81\24 **TO RECEIVE AND CONSIDER A REPORT FROM THE PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND REGENERATION (REPORT TO FOLLOW)**

Councillor S. Baxter presented the report for her Portfolio, Economic Development and Regeneration. Council was advised that it was very pleasing that the service area of Economic Development and Regeneration had been brought back in house. This would help to consolidate this work in one place. Councillor Baxter took the opportunity to welcome the Assistant Director for Regeneration and Property Services and her team to the Council.

In presenting the report, Members were advised that work had begun at the Former Market Hall site in Bromsgrove Town Centre. Any key milestones would be monitored closely during the project to ensure that

it was completed by March 2026 as planned. Areas that were currently being investigated were the management model for the pavilion and uses for the office sites. It was noted that discussions were still underway in respect of the £2.45 million in residue funding from the now dissolved Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership (GBSLEP).

Levelling Up Funding needed to be spent by September 2025. However, it was reported that the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) had recognised that nationally, some projects that had been awarded Levelling Up funding were falling behind schedule and therefore some plans might have to be put in place to provide extensions to these projects, as necessary.

Members were informed that the Windsor Street site had now been fully demolished and remediation works were underway.

[At this point in the meeting there was a brief adjournment to the proceedings from 18:10 – 18:11].

Councillor Baxter explained that there would be huge opportunities at the Windsor Street site once the works were completed in March 2026 and it would be important to keep residents informed of the plans in respect of this site for the future.

It was hoped that Bromsgrove Town Centre would become a 'destination' site. Recent food events would help to develop this even further. Members were informed that the UK Shared Prosperity Funding allocated to organisations had been considered and outcomes reported to Members at a Cabinet Advisory Group meeting (CAG). The funding allocations were also available in the Portfolio Holder's report.

Other areas of note during the presentation of the Portfolio Holder for Economic Development and Regeneration's report were the Strategic Parking Review report due to be considered by Cabinet in February 2025. In addition, the Town Centres across the District would be considered in the revised Town Centres Strategy. Given the proposed changes to Local Government, it was noted that it was important for the Council to leave a lasting legacy within the District and in the best possible places moving forward.

The report was welcomed by Members and following the presentation some areas were queried in more detail. Members asked whether The Artrix was included in the strategic framework for the Town Centres

Strategy. It was confirmed that this was not the case at present, however this might be something that was considered in the future. Members asked when the revised strategy would be completed and whether the outlying village centres would be included. Members were informed that it was hoped that this would be completed by the end of 2025 and that the outlying village and town centres would be included.

Members were keen to better understand the Centres Enhancement Grant, where this had been publicised and the types of businesses who had applied for the funding. It was reported that communications had been provided to all Town Centres in respect of this funding round, which had now closed. In terms of the businesses awarded funding, Councillor Baxter undertook to provide this information to Members following the meeting.

There were several queries in respect of the car parks, including Churchfields Car Park. Some Members expressed frustration in the length of time it had taken to develop the Strategic Parking Review and that there was an opportunity to learn lessons from this and ask consultants to complete the work in a timelier manner when developing these kinds of strategies in the future.

Members queried the communications in respect of the Windsor Street site and what was proposed for the site in order to provide residents with information. It was reported that there would be communications provided by the Council and the opportunity to possibly cover the fencing around the site and produce some information that could be placed on the fencing to inform local people of the plans. It was queried what the plans were in terms of working with businesses at this site. Again, it was confirmed that this area was currently being worked on and that it was hoped that businesses, and the Council would work in partnership to develop this site.

Concerns were raised as to the potential for slippage of the Levelling Up projects, particularly as the funding received was time limited. It was reported that due to the nature of the works at Windsor Street, there needed to be two stages of work undertaken. The first stage was remediation followed by the settlement stage. The second stage needed to take place a certain amount of time after the first stage to ensure that the remediation works had been deemed satisfactory. This had resulted in the completion date of March 2026. The Market Hall site was due to be completed in January 2026. However, it was anticipated that the Levelling Up funding would have all been spent by September 2025 as

outlined in the funding criteria. However, there might be the possibility of an extension as highlighted earlier in the meeting.

Some Members expressed their hope that the revised Town Centres Strategy would look to include areas such as the Housing and Planning Strategies. This would aim to encourage a more joined up approach to strategic working across the Council. It was noted that the Council Plan, developed earlier in the municipal year, contained Council priorities that would support this.

82\24

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE JOINT APPOINTMENTS COMMITTEE

Councillor K. May presented the recommendations from the Joint Appointments Committee report for Members' consideration. In doing so it was outlined that the recruitment process to appoint a new Chief Executive and Head of Paid Service and new Deputy Chief Executive and Section 151 Officer had been undertaken.

Following a tender exercise, GatenbySanderson were commissioned as the external recruitment agency to assist with a national search and the recruitment process for both positions.

The introduction of a Joint Appointments Committee was approved by Bromsgrove District Council's Full Council and subsequently the Committee agreed to appoint Members from both authorities to serve on a Joint Appointments Sub-Committee. The role of the Joint Appointments Sub-Committee was to act as the recruitment panel for both positions.

The Joint Appointments Sub-Committee undertook the final interviews for the positions of Chief Executive and Head of Paid Service and Deputy Chief Executive and Section 151 Officer on 16th and 18th December 2024 respectively. The Joint Appointments Sub-Committee received professional support from the current Chief Executive, the Human Resources and Organisational Development Manager and an external Recruitment Advisor from GatenbySanderson.

A further meeting of the Joint Appointments Committee took place on Wednesday 8th January 2025. During this meeting, Members considered recommendations made by the Joint Appointments Sub-Committee concerning their nominations for the positions of Chief Executive and Head of Paid Service and Deputy Chief Executive and Section 151 Officer respectively.

The respective appointments to both the Chief Executive and Head of Paid Service and Deputy Chief Executive and Section 151 Officer roles were conditional, and subject to the approval at both Bromsgrove District Council and Redditch Borough Council Full Council meetings and following successful completion of all necessary employment checks. These checks were a standard part of the Councils' recruitment processes and conducted to ensure compliance with Council policies and legal requirements.

The required checks included:

1. Right to Work Verification
2. Satisfactory References
3. DBS check (Disclosure and Barring Service)
4. Medical clearance

Only if all these checks were successfully completed and met Council standards would a formal, unconditional offer be made.

During the presentation of the report, Councillor K. May took the opportunity to thank the current Chief Executive and Deputy Chief Executive for their commitment to the Council over the previous months.

Some Members expressed their concerns in respect of the financial implications of recruiting to two senior positions given the current proposals regarding the change in structure for Local Government. These concerns were raised in particular as it was likely that Bromsgrove District Council would cease to exist in just over two years' time. Members reported that they had not been given the opportunity, despite requesting the information, to look at the financial cost to the Council for recruiting to these positions for the next two years. The Chief Executive explained, that after having sought legal advice on this matter, it was not appropriate to provide Members with this kind of financial information as it would require divulging personal information of candidates that had not yet received formal offers for the roles.

It was acknowledged that the timing was not ideal given the current situation. However, it was noted that the Chief Executive and Head of Paid Service along with the Section 151 Officer were statutory positions within the Council and therefore had to be in place. Furthermore, given the time of uncertainty ahead it was necessary to have a strong leadership team in place to implement the changes going forward.

Members stated that they had been disappointed that the report did not address some areas of interest including notice periods and what the 'track record' of the preferred candidates had been. Members were informed that generally in senior management positions the notice period was three months. However, this would be something that the incoming officers would negotiate once the offers had been accepted. It was also reported that the current Chief Executive and Deputy Chief Executive would remain in position until such time as the new successful candidates entered the roles.

There was uncertainty for all Council employees and, although no guarantees could be made at this current time, after seeking legal advice it seemed that current employees would be subject to the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) (TUPE) on 'vesting day' for the new unitary authority.

The recommendations were proposed by Councillor K. May and seconded by Councillor P. McDonald.

On being put to the vote it was

RESOLVED that

- 1) To note the Joint Appointments Committee had completed a rigorous selection process to recruit a new Chief Executive and Head of Paid Service and a new Deputy Chief Executive and Section 151 Officer.
- 2) Subject to Redditch Borough Council as employer agreeing to the appointment at their Council meeting due to take place on 27th January 2025, and subject to satisfactory reference and eligibility checks, John Leach be appointed as Chief Executive and Head of Paid Service.
- 3) To note that the salary agreed for the Chief Executive and Head of Paid Service was within the range approved by Redditch Borough Council's Pay Policy as the employing authority.
- 4) To approve the appointment of Robert Watson as Deputy Chief Executive and Section 151 Officer, to fulfil the purposes of Section 151 of the Local Government 1972, subject to satisfactory reference and eligibility checks.

- 5) Subject thereto, Robert Watson to be made available under the shared services arrangements with Redditch Borough Council to perform such duties as were required in his capacity as Deputy Chief Executive and Section 151 Officer for Redditch Borough Council.

- 6) To note that the salary agreed for the Deputy Chief Executive and Section 151 Officer was within the range approved by Bromsgrove District Council's Pay Policy as the employing authority, and

- 7) The current Chief Executive and Head of Paid Service and Deputy Chief Executive and Section 151 Officer to remain in post until John Leach and Robert Watson have commenced employment with the authorities.

[Councillor S. Peters asked for his vote against the recommendations above to be specifically recorded in the minutes].

83\24

INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL RECOMMENDATIONS 2025/26

Councillor K. May presented the Independent Remuneration Panel Recommendations 2025/26 report for Council's consideration. The report detailed the recommendations made by the Worcestershire Independent Remuneration Panel (IRP) regarding Members' allowances for 2025/26.

Members were informed that the IRP had met during 2024 to review both the basic allowance paid to all Councillors as well as the Special Responsibility Allowances (SRAs) paid to some Councillors who had been appointed to particular positions of responsibility. The panel comprised of independent representatives of the community and reviewed the allowances paid to all Councillors serving District Councils in Worcestershire apart from Wyre Forest District Council.

Members were asked to note that in considering the report from the IRP, the Council was not obliged to approve their recommendations. However the proposals did need to be considered.

It was noted that prior to the Council meeting, the appendix to the report was reissued in a Supplementary Papers 2 pack. This was because the multipliers provided by the IRP in their report were old versions, although the figures payable were correct.

Clarification was provided that, as agreed earlier in the municipal year, it was anticipated that the Chairman's allowance would be increased to a multiplier of one times the basic allowance. However, this was not something that the IRP would have considered.

Following the presentation Members discussed the recommendations as shown in the report. There was a detailed discussion in respect of the multiplier for the Chairman of the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee. It was suggested that this should be increased due to the complex work undertaken by the Chairman of the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee. This had been more apparent in recent years particularly as the Chairman was now also expected to attend Finance and Budget Working Group meetings, which increased the number of meetings attended over the municipal year. Furthermore, the Committee undertook more detailed work since the Council had received the Section 24 Notice in 2023. It was proposed that the multiplier be increased to 0.3, which was in line with the multiplier for the Chairman of the Licensing Committee. Some Members expressed concerns that this was contrary to the recommendations made by the IRP. There were also Members who commented that this was not good practice, as the IRP were an independent panel and their advice should be considered. However, it was noted that this had not always been the case and that in previous years Members had amended the IRP recommendations.

As a result of the discussions as outlined in the preamble above, an amendment to the recommendations was proposed by Councillor J. Robinson and seconded by Councillor R. Hunter as follows:

'That the multiplier for the allowance of the Chairman of Audit, Standards and Governance Committee be increased to 0.03, in line with the chairman of the Licensing Committee.'

On being put to the vote this amendment was lost.

[It was noted that Councillor H. Rone-Clarke did not take part in the vote on the above amendment in his role as current Chairman of the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee.]

There were further detailed discussions regarding the Chairman of the Licensing Sub-Committee. It was suggested that there be an increase to the multiplier for this role. Some Members did not agree and stated that this was not an opportunity to look at increasing the multiplier for all roles for elected Members. If that were the case, then a future increase for

Members' Allowances across the board would potentially need to be increased in order to attract younger elected Members in the future.

A potential increase was discussed and although some Members expressed the view that there were some inconveniences involved in attending Licensing Sub-Committee hearings in the day, this should not automatically result in an increase in the multiplier for this role. Members highlighted that other similar roles were provided with a multiplier such as the Chairman of the Appointments Committee, Chairman of the Electoral Matters Committee and Chairman of a Task Group.

As a result of the discussions, an amendment was proposed by Councillor R. Hunter and seconded by Councillor J. Robinson as follows:

'That the multiplier for the Chairman of Licensing Sub-Committee hearings be increased to 0.03 to bring it into line with the Chairman of the Electoral Matters Committee.'

It was noted by some Members that the IRP had already reviewed the potential to pay an SRA to Licensing sub-Committee members, as this had been requested by Bromsgrove Members earlier in the year. However, the IRP had established that this practice did not take place at any other Council within the County. Furthermore, Bromsgrove District Council, did not hold the largest number of Licensing Sub-Committee meetings in the County, with far more such meetings taking place in Redditch where Members were not reimbursed with an SRA.

On being put to the vote the amendment to the recommendation was lost.

In summing up, the Leader noted that all Members carried out many duties and committed a large amount of time to their roles. This would need to be looked at in order to attract new and younger elected Members in the future.

The recommendations as written in the report were proposed by Councillor K. May and Councillor P. Whittaker.

RESOLVED that

- 1) Council approve a Basic Allowance for 2025/26 of £5,826, representing a 5.58% increase.

- 2) Council approve a range of Special Responsibility Allowances as set out in Appendix 1.
- 3) Travel allowances for 2025/26 continue to be paid in accordance with the HMRC mileage allowance.
- 4) Subsistence allowances for 2025/26 remain unchanged.
- 5) The Dependent Carer's Allowance remains unchanged.
- 6) Travel and subsistence payments made by Parish Councils to councillors (where they are paid) are made in accordance with the provisions set out in this report.

84\24

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE CABINET MEETINGS HELD ON 10TH DECEMBER 2024 AND 7TH JANUARY 2025

The Chairman explained that there were recommendations from the Cabinet meetings held on 10th December 2024 and 7th January 2025 for the Council's consideration.

Recommendations from the Cabinet meeting held on 10th December 2024

Bromsgrove Local Heritage List

The Portfolio Holder for Planning, Licensing and Worcestershire Regulatory Services, Councillor K. Taylor presented the Bromsgrove Heritage List report for Members' consideration. It was noted that this had been a long piece of work and that the Officers had worked incredibly hard in putting the information together.

It was reported that four parishes were involved in this part of the work and thanks were extended to the parishes for their involvement. In addition to this, Councillor Taylor thanked the Overview and Scrutiny Board for the scrutiny that had been carried out in respect of this matter. Several responses had been received that outlined some reluctance to appear on the list and as a result there had been some appeals from local residents.

The recommendations were proposed by Councillor K. Taylor and seconded by Councillor S. Webb.

RESOLVED that

- 1) The Local Heritage List for the following parishes be adopted:
Alvechurch, Beoley, Belbroughton and Fairfield Dodford with
Grafton
- 2) The wording of the Officer Scheme of Delegations for the Local
Heritage List be updated ; and
- 3) The amended Local Heritage List Strategy be approved.

Low-Cost Housing Capital Receipts

The Portfolio Holder for Health and Wellbeing and Strategic Housing presented the Low-Cost Housing Capital Receipts report for Council's consideration. During the presentation, Members were informed that the report set out the pressures on the Council's statutory housing service including homelessness service and those in temporary accommodation.

It was reported that twenty-seven years previously, the Council had entered into an arrangement with a housing developer to establish a local housing scheme. This had resulted in properties being offered to those families who were eligible to buy one of the houses within the scheme at a thirty per cent discount. However, over time the housing had ceased to be suitable for low-cost housing needs.

A report was considered by Cabinet in February 2017 which sought approval for the housing within the scheme to be sold at one hundred percent value when the developer chose to sell the properties. The Council would then recoup their thirty per cent and invest in affordable housing. The capital receipts as a result of this decision were £577,912.26, At the date of the meeting none of this capital money had been spent.

Officers had carried out some research and a model had been developed in respect of the increasing costs of temporary accommodation and upward trend of homelessness. It was hoped that the plans in respect of the low-cost housing capital receipts would help increase the supply of temporary accommodation, thus resulting in a decrease in the use of Bed and Breakfast (B&B) accommodation. There were several options for use of the receipts, which included the purchase of any low-cost housing or the flipping of new build shared ownership into social housing.

Members welcomed this report, however there were some concerns raised in respect of the lack of social housing included in the report with more references to 'affordable' housing. It was noted that those who found themselves homeless would not be in a position to be financially able to buy affordable homes. It was clarified that there was an opportunity for shared ownership homes to be flipped to social housing where necessary. It was also highlighted that this was much needed in the District due to the high demand for access to Bromsgrove District Housing Trust (BDHT) homes currently for local people and the increased use of B&Bs. Members were keen to note that there was a Housing Task Group underway, that was looking at these types of issues within the District and that further work could be achieved following the completion of the investigation.

Some Members were interested in the priorities of the use of the capital receipts. It was confirmed that if the recommendations contained within the report were approved then authority would be delegated to the Assistant Director of Housing following consultation with the Portfolio Holder to move forward with these priorities.

Finally, there was a question raised in respect of information on the four static caravans due to receive funding of £30,688 which had been considered at the meeting of the Cabinet on 10th December 2024. Some Members thought that this was good value for money, and questioned whether it would be possible to expand this funding further? The Portfolio Holder undertook to find out more information regarding this scheme.

The recommendations were proposed by Councillor S. Webb and seconded by Councillor K. Taylor.

RESOLVED that

- 1) the low-cost housing receipts be used to purchase existing properties, flip shared ownership into social or affordable rented accommodation or invest in new build developments with BDHT to increase the supply of affordable housing and temporary accommodation to meet the growing demand; and
- 2) delegated authority be granted to the Assistant Director Community and Housing Services following consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Strategic Housing to approve individual proposals for new developments or the purchase of existing satisfactory dwellings and flipping Shared Ownership to

affordable or social rented properties and the spend relating to these, as and when they were brought forward.

Carbon Reduction Strategy and Implementation Plan

Apologies had been received from the Portfolio Holder for Leisure and Climate Change for this meeting. Therefore, the Portfolio Holder for Economic Development and Regeneration presented the report in respect of the Carbon Reduction Strategy and Implementation Plan.

Members were informed that this was a very detailed strategy that outlined the five key successes and actions for the Council in respect of carbon reduction for the future.

Thanks were extended to the Assistant Director for Community and Housing Services and the team for their hard work in putting the strategy together.

Members welcomed the report and the Council's commitment to carbon neutrality by 2040. However, it was raised that the Intergovernmental Panel on climate Change (IPCC) had since recommend that there was a need for carbon neutrality to be reached by 2030, if not sooner.

It was raised that a former Portfolio Holder had requested some modelling to be arranged in order to look at the potential for the Council's operations to be carbon neutral by 2030, 2035 and 2040. This was to ascertain whether there might be the potential for the Council to be carbon neutral earlier than planned. Members were unaware if this modelling had been conducted but it was agreed that the Portfolio holder for Leisure and Climate Change should be asked to consult with Officers to see if the work had been carried out.

The recommendations were proposed by Councillor S. Baxter and seconded by Councillor K. May.

RESOLVED that

the Council endorse the findings of the Annual Review of the Carbon Reduction Strategy.

Bromsgrove Draft Air Quality Action Plan 2025 – 2030

The Portfolio Holder for Planning, Licensing and Worcestershire Regulatory Services presented the Bromsgrove Draft Air Quality report.

It was reported that the online consultation had already commenced. This consultation had commenced prior to consideration by Council in order to meet deadlines set by Department for Environment, Farming and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) to complete consultation by 1st April 2025. Members were satisfied that this had been necessary to do in order to avoid any penalties from late submissions from the consultation period. Members were encouraged to complete the online survey.

Following the presentation Members queried whether it would be possible to provide monitoring for individual residents who lived in an Air Quality Management Area(AQMA) in order to understand if the air quality had a detrimental effect on the residents' health. The Portfolio Holder undertook to obtain this information from Officers.

Members further requested any data held by the Council in respect of whether there were more occasions for residents to visit their General Practitioner (GP) with respiratory and lung diseases such as asthma or Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD). This would be an interesting area to investigate as the impact of certain areas across the District might be adversely impacted by poor air quality. It was noted that this was information that was more likely to be held by Public Health. However, it was agreed that this information would be circulated, if possible, to all Members for their information.

The report was welcomed by Members particularly those who felt that certain areas needed to be monitored closely due to the increased number of vehicles on the roads. It was noted that a Member request had been made to a Worcestershire Regulatory Services (WRS) Officer to see if there was the possibility to set up an additional AQMA in Bordesley.

Members were also keen to better understand what the criteria was for establishing an Air Quality Monitoring station. Currently, there were three across the District and it would be useful to understand how these areas had been chosen. The Portfolio Holder undertook to circulate this information to Members.

During presentation of the report Councillor Taylor extended his best wishes to one of the Officers involved in the preparation of the report who was currently unwell.

The recommendations were proposed by Councillor K. Taylor and seconded by Councillor S. Webb.

RESOLVED that

- 1) the Draft Air Quality Action Plan 2025-2030 be approved;
- 2) a Consultation on the Plan be undertaken for 2 months from Mid-December to February 2025: and
- 3) authority be delegated to the Assistant Director Community and Housing, following consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Licencing Worcestershire Regulatory Services, to approve the final Plan following the consultation, and for submission to DEFRA by April 2025.

Quarter 2 Revenue and Performance Monitoring 2024/2025

The Portfolio Holder for Finance presented the Quarter Two Revenue and Performance Monitoring report for Members' consideration.

Council was informed that the report set out the draft revenue position at the end of Quarter Two. It was forecast that there would be a full year overspend of £344,000 which was an increase of £103,000 from Quarter One. The outturn spend was reported as £1.944 million against a capital budget totalling £7.069 million.

Information was provided to Members in respect of £40,000 from earmarked reserves to support community hubs, which was due to be reallocated to Poverty Truth Commissions. It was stated that the project was likely to cost £120,000 in total, so the Council would be providing one third. The remaining funding would be provided from other partners (one third) and the voluntary sector (one third).

In addition to this, it was recommended that there be a new allocation of £50,000 from the General Fund for Planning Appeals in the future.

The report also included information on the Council's Treasury Management Strategy, a statutory report that needed to be provided at least twice yearly. This report set out to provide information on the debt and borrowing of the Council along with working capital and prudential indicators.

Following the presentation of the report, Members queried several areas. The report stated that £32,000 had been spent on professional fees for commercialism. Members queried what these costs entailed.

The Portfolio Holder undertook to find this information and circulate to Members.

Members expressed concerns regarding the use of agency staff and the increased costs. These concerns were noted as being appropriate to report, particularly at a time when there had been discussions regarding decreasing the use of agency staff across the Council. It was reported that agency staff had been used in the Finance team in order to ensure the closure of the accounts for the previous years and to deal with the amounts contained within the suspense account. Another area of significant use for agency staff had been within the Waste Team. It was hoped that use across these teams would decrease particularly as the Statement of Accounts had now been prepared for the outstanding years. It was suggested that this could be an area for Members of the Finance and Budget Working Group (FBWG) to look at more closely and monitor in the future. Alongside this, it was suggested that the impact of savings made by vacant posts should be looked at, and whether this had a detrimental impact on the Council's services and its workforce. It was suggested that if any Members had specific queries regarding a specific area of impact, such as Environmental Services, that they should contact the service directly through the Assistant Director leading that service area.

It was raised that there had been discussions at a meeting of the FBWG regarding the allocation of £40,000 to the Poverty Trust Commission and that additional information had been requested by Members on this matter. Although information had been provided, it was not deemed adequate enough to scrutinise sufficiently and it was agreed that this would be further discussed at the next FBWG meeting with more evidence being provided to Members on the effectiveness of the initiative. For the time being the allocation would be included in the Medium-Term Financial Plan until this scrutiny had taken place.

Members discussed the allocation of the Members' Ward Budgets. Members queried the information contained within the report regarding the allocation of the ward budgets, which it was suggested did not appear to be accurate. However, it was explained that the information provided was a 'snapshot' and therefore was not completely accurate or up to date. Members were informed that there had been twenty-one Councillors who had fully or partially spent their allocated budget, with ten Councillors still to spend their allocation. The total spend of those who had spent some or all of their allocation was currently £18,000, with a remaining £15,000 to be allocated. Of those Councillors who had not spent any of their allocation, it was reported that there was £16,000 to

£18,000 outstanding. It was highlighted that any outstanding Ward Member Budgets needed to be spent by 31st March 2025.

Some Members queried the £50,000 savings made on libraries referenced in the report as this was not a statutory responsibility of the District Council. It was reported that this was not strictly a 'saving' and had been earmarked in case there needed to be any support provided to libraires if there were any changes in the future. It was confirmed that money had already been allocated for Citizen's Advice Bureau (CAB) and outreach work as agreed previously by Council.

The UK Shared Prosperity Funding allocation (UKSPF) of £74,000 was questioned by some Members. It was felt that this was a small amount given that the full amount of funding was £2.4 million. It was noted that as discussed at a recent Cabinet Advisory Group meeting, the funding had been allocated and a report was due to be considered by Cabinet in the near future.

In terms of the new allocation of £50,000 for planning appeals, Members were keen to understand why this had not been necessary in previous years. It was explained that historically planning appeals had been paid for directly from the Planning budget. However, this was not considered to be appropriate going forward, as it impacted on the operational budget for Planning and therefore the new allocation was being recommended.

There was a detailed discussion regarding the performance data included in the report. Members suggested that because the data was not current this made it difficult to ascertain where improvements had been or needed to be made. The crime statistics were specifically queried and whether they provided an accurate picture of crimes being reported in a balanced manner. It was noted that these figures were from the West Mercia Police website and not data held by the Council. Members were reminded that Councillors had the opportunity to understand these and other Community Safety data sets at the annual presentation in respect of the Community Safety Partnership provided at Overview and Scrutiny Board meetings.

RESOLVED that

- 1) Council approve the £40,000 from the Community Hub earmarked reserves to be allocated to contribute to a Poverty Truth Commission in Bromsgrove (subject to further scrutiny);

- 2) The Balance Sheet Monitoring Position for Quarter 2 be noted – which was the Treasury Monitoring Report and required to be reported to Council; and
- 3) the £50,000 be transferred to earmarked Reserves from the General Fund for Planning Appeal costs

Recommendations from the Cabinet meeting held on 7th January 2025

Refuse Fleet Replacement and Wheeled Bin Pressures

The Cabinet Member for Environmental and Community Safety presented the report and took the opportunity to thank the Environmental Services Manager and the team for producing a comprehensive report. He also thanked the Overview and Scrutiny Board for pre-scrutinising the report at its meeting held on 6th January 2025.

It was noted that there was a degree of urgency in respect of this report due to the timelines involved and in order to ensure that refuse collection continued to be an effective Council service.

Council was informed that the procurement of the current style wheeled bins had been approved by Members in 2004. They had been purchased using funding from DEFRA. The style of bins that were purchased were only compatible with a 'diamond' lift system. This style of lift was only invested in by three Local Authorities across the UK with most Councils choosing to invest in the 'comb' lift bin which was cheaper to manufacture. Currently, Bromsgrove District and Redditch Borough Councils were the only Local Authorities using this style of bin.

Over time, the bins had proved problematic due to the type of lift used on the refuse collection vehicles being incompatible with the lift on the bin. This issue had been resolved by fitting a supplementary mechanical arm to the vehicles which lifted 'diamond' and 'comb' lift bins. However, it had become increasingly difficult and expensive to maintain and repair the mechanical arms on the vehicles. It was therefore proposed that new wheeled bins with a 'comb' lift be procured.

Members were informed that during the discussions at the Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting on 6th January 2025, it was recommended that two hundred and forty litre 'comb' bins be purchased rather than one hundred and sixty litre 'comb' bins as proposed in the Cabinet report, which had been endorsed.

Following the presentation, Members discussed the contents of the report in detail. Several areas were raised as follows:

- What happened if the Council's refuse vehicles were in need of repairs? Was there a way to source replacements? – It was noted that these types of lifts were no longer able to be sourced in the waste sector. Therefore, if there were no vehicles available at Bromsgrove, Redditch Borough Council, as the only other Local Authority still using these kinds of lifts, provided spare refuse vehicles. However, this inevitably impacted on their refuse service along with Bromsgrove's refuse service.
- The importance of a strategic approach in respect of proposed changes to wheeled bins, given the introduction of a statutory weekly food waste service as a result of the implementation of the Environment Act 2021. Members queried why the Council needed to procure larger bins if the food waste collection service would be in place, as this would potentially decrease the amount of waste by approximately thirty-five per cent being placed in the grey bins in the future. It was explained that bigger replacement bins would provide greater value for money and accommodate any changes to refuse collection regularity in the future. It was also explained that although food waste bins would be available in the future, households might not use it effectively, resulting in food waste being incorrectly placed in the grey bins. Members explained that there had been a detailed debate at the Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting and that the issue of equality must be considered alongside the replacement of the bins. It was stated that some residents needed the larger bin style in order for them to effectively dispose of waste, such as disposable nappies. It was noted that some residents might only require the smaller wheeled bins. It was confirmed that there would still be the opportunity to accommodate these kinds of requests. Some Members commented that the previous implementation of the roll out of wheeled bins had not been as efficient as had been hoped, therefore Members suggested that a more effective approach be taken this time.
- Risk Implications – it was highlighted that there were no risk implications included in the report. However, it was noted that there were some implications specifically concerned with continued delivery of an effective service and reputational risk.

The recommendations were proposed by Councillor P. Whittaker and seconded by Councillor K. Taylor.

RESOLVED that

The Council allocate £2.2 million Capital funding in the Medium -Term Financial Plan for the 2025/26 financial year for the purchase and distribution of the standard 'Comb' 240 litre wheeled bins.

[At this stage in the meeting the Chairman announced that there would be a comfort break from 20:24 – 20:37].

Introduction of Food Waste Collection

The Portfolio Holder for Environmental and Community Safety presented the Food Waste Collection report.

During consideration of the report, Members discussed the following in detail:

- Adequate space at Bromsgrove Depot – Members raised concerns regarding the space available at the depot in dealing with the current refuse disposal. This pressure would inevitably increase when the food waste collection service was implemented, potentially resulting in a future request to source a new depot site or further outsourcing the service. Members requested that a business case be prepared to look at the possibility of delivering the service in-house in future.

It was reported that following discussions at the Overview and Scrutiny Board and Cabinet meetings, it had been agreed that, in order to support the Council in managing the risks of being unsuccessful in outsourcing the operations, a twin track approach would be taken. This meant that Officers would look at the possibilities of using an in-house option. Some Members expressed the view that they were confused as to why this approach had now been agreed. During the discussions at the Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting, it seemed that it would not be feasible to bring the service in-house. It was reported that this approach had been agreed in order to mitigate any risks should there be no appetite from the private waste sector to take on the Council's waste disposal service. Furthermore, it was clarified that an in-house option was not being proposed currently as it was important to be able to offer a reasonable contract to a private waste operator if there were an appetite. The work that would be undertaken included cost analysis of land acquisition and

requirements to comply with the statutory duty of food waste collection and increased need of refuse vehicles. This work would also include looking at the future population and housing growth. Members requested that the approach to implementation be considered and that although work was underway to look at the possibility of delivering an in-house service it was best to take a measured approach to ascertain all of the available options.

- The uptake of the food waste collection service by residents – Members were concerned that the service would not be adequately used by residents following its implementation. Therefore, it was queried as to how the cost of the implementation had been decided. One million pounds had been allocated to the revenue funding to implement this collection, and given that all residents might not use it, Members questioned whether this amount was too much? Members suggested that residents be canvassed to ascertain the likely uptake of the service rather than a blanket approach being adopted that assumed that all residents would utilise the food waste collection service effectively. It was reported that there had been a number of meetings involving Worcestershire County Council and other Local Authorities within the County and that the system needed to be implemented by April 2026. The Council had instructed consultants to look at the estimates of implementation costs and that a number of options had been identified and that the million pounds option had been the most cost effective. It was stated that there was not the capacity in terms of staffing, vehicles and manpower at the Council. Due to DEFRA timelines, it was necessary to start the implementation of the service in order to be compliant by the time of the deadline. This had resulted in the recommendation being that the private sector be approached to provide the service. If the private sector were not interested in providing a North Worcestershire food waste service, then there would potentially be grounds to approach DEFRA to explain why there had been delays experienced and to postpone the introduction of the service. Members were informed that in terms of the cost of implementation, the modelling that had been used, took into account that not all residents would utilise the food waste service. However, there needed to be the opportunity for all residents to use the service due to its statutory nature. Therefore, it would not be appropriate to canvas residents in respect of this matter.
- Some Members were interested in the option of providing compost bins to residents in order to offset some of the costs of

the food waste service. It was clarified that a compost bin service was already provided by Worcestershire County Council.

Councillor P. Whittaker proposed the recommendations they were seconded by Councillor K. May.

RESOLVED that

The Council allocate £1,000,000 Revenue Funding in the Medium-Term Financial Plan as an operational budget from 2026/27 to fund the Food Waste Collection Service in the District, as accounted for within Tranche one of the budget.

Final Council Tax Support Scheme 2025/2026

The Portfolio Holder for Finance presented the Final Council Tax Support Scheme report for Members' consideration. A typographical error was highlighted in respect of the omission of the Portfolio Holder's name from the report. This had been noted by Officers. It was noted that there had been no change to the previous years' scheme. However, in line with the approved increases benefit and pension rates for 2026 of 1.7 per cent, the income bands for Council Tax would also be increased at this level. Members were informed that there were eighteen hundred pension aged residents who received Council Tax support and approximately two thousand three hundred residents of non-pension age who received support. It was clarified that this financial support was provided by the Government.

The recommendations were proposed by Councillor S. Colella and seconded by Councillor K. May.

RESOLVED that

the Council Tax Reduction Scheme be retained for the 2025-26 tax year, subject to the uprating of income bands by 1.7 per cent in-line with increases to national benefits.

Medium Term Financial Plan - Tranche 1 Budget including Fees and Charges (following consultation)

The Portfolio Holder for Finance presented the Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) – Tranche 1 report including Fees and Charges (following consultation). During the presentation, the following was reported to Council:

- The tranche one budget was presented to Cabinet on 10th December 2024. The report had subsequently been subject to public consultation. The budget had been set out in two tranches. This was prudent in order to help close any deficits during the first tranche following the Chancellor's Statement, with the second tranche being presented to Council once details of the Local Government Settlement had been released in January 2025.

The Chancellor's Statement had impacted on the Council's budgets as follows:

- A 3.2% increase in core spending power – including £1.3 billion additional grant funding with at least £600 million of this being directed to social care.
 - £233 million new funding for homelessness prevention
 - £1 billion to extend the Household Support Fund Discretionary Housing payment into 2025-26.
 - £1.1 billion of new funding through implementation of the Extended Producer Responsibility Scheme for recycling.
 - Business Rates support for the retail, hospitality and leisure sectors.
 - £500 million increase to the Affordable Homes Programme in 2025/26.
 - The UK Shared Prosperity Fund had been extended for 2025-26. This was for one year and for £900 million, a forty per cent decrease from the current year.
 - Local Government funding systems would be changed following the 2025-26 financial year, with a three-year settlement at that point.
-
- A four per cent increase in fees and charges was set out within the report. However, it was clarified that the parking fees and charges would remain unchanged.
 - Corporate pressures were also outlined within the report. These amounted to a surplus of £329,000 for the financial year 2025-26, changing to a deficit of £858,000 for 2026-27 and £644,000 for 2027-28. The key driver for these increased pressures was the implementation of the food waste service. A £1.37 million departmental revenue pressure was reported in 2025-26, decreasing to £938,000 by 2027-28. These costs would result in an ongoing pressure of approximately £1 million rising to £1.5 million over the three-year MTFP. Were the Council to get the full 3.3% core spending power increase, as set out in the

Chancellor's Statement, then this £490,000 additional funding would decrease the pressures outlined above to £500,000 in 2025-26 up to £1 million in 2027-28.

- The consultation on tranche one of the budget had opened on 10th December 2024, with an email invite to take part in the survey being sent to members of the Bromsgrove Community Panel. The survey was also promoted on the Council's social media channels. The survey closed on 2nd January 2025 with a response rate from the Community Panel of 48% and a total of 278 valid responses received. The survey asked what the three most important areas of investment should be for the Council. The responses were as follows:
 - Local Economic Development and employment at 47.1%
 - Community safety with 44.6 per cent of respondents
 - Maintenance of landscape and environment with 43.8 per cent of respondents.

Several questions included in the survey required responders to indicate whether they agreed or disagreed with questions. Most of the responses had well over 50 per cent of responders that strongly agreed or agreed. However, there were two questions that fell below this level. These were as follows:

1. Do you agree that the Council should invest more in our front-line services to cover increases in fuel? – this question had an approval rate of 49.6 per cent
2. Do you support fees and charges (this excludes parking) rising by 4 per cent to keep them in line with inflation and rising staffing costs? - this question had an approval rate of 40.2 per cent.

A further question which asked: -

1. Do you agree that the Council should invest in economic development in order to support local businesses, start-ups, the town and local centres and to prioritise local skills? – had an approval rate of 86.2 per cent, which was the highest approval rate overall.

There were two questions that dealt with Bromsgrove District Council's proportion of Council Tax. 61.5 per cent of responders

agreed or strongly agreed with a 1.99 per cent increase. This rate dropped to 45.8 per cent for a 2.99 per cent increase.

Two free text questions appeared in the survey regarding investment in the District, to increase prosperity and enhance the appeal for residents and businesses alike. The top three responses to this question were Bromsgrove Town Centre, supporting businesses and the importance of infrastructure, including roads and public transport.

The recommendations were proposed by Councillor S. Colella and seconded by Councillor K. May.

RESOLVED that

- 1) Members endorse the inputs into the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan as at the middle of October 2024, and the associated risks and opportunities; and
- 2) An initial Tranche of savings proposals and pressures, as set out in Sections 3.03 to 3.14, including the fees and charges increases (non-commercial), after consideration of feedback from the consultation exercise which closed on 2nd January 2025, be approved.

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TO NOTE THE MINUTES OF THE MEETINGS OF THE CABINET HELD ON 10TH DECEMBER 2024 AND 7TH JANUARY 2025

The minutes of the meetings of the Cabinet held on 10th December 2024 and 7th January 2025 were noted.

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QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

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

Question submitted by Councillor H. Rone-Clarke

"We have previously passed a motion at Full-Council encouraging multi-agency meetings to resolve land disputes, how can we also ensure that residents get resolutions to local issues when County Council functions fail? - A key example being the shocking state that the trees at Shepherds Walk have been left in and the problems this is causing residents on Avon Close and Fair oak Drive."

The Portfolio Holder for Environmental Services and Community Safety responded that the Council adopted a very positive multi-agency approach to the management of land disputes and that it was understood that Councillor H. Rone-Clarke was now working with Officers to resolve this issue.

Question submitted by Councillor P. McDonald

“The Overview and Scrutiny Board are concerned about the extensive use of consultants in recent months to support the work of the Cabinet and the services of external professionals in the day-to-day delivery of Council business. We would ask the Leader to ensure that the Chairman of Overview and Scrutiny is advised in circumstances where the use of a consultant is being proposed to formulate strategic items so that consideration can be given to the value for money in these circumstances.

Whilst we understand that there is a need to procure the services of external professionals in the day-to-day delivery of Council business and services, a quarterly report of these services are presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Board.”

The Leader responded that in line with best practice, there was a procurement pipeline published on the Council’s website which detailed spend in excess of £25,000 and that other spend details were included in the quarterly monitoring reports. It was agreed that the Section 151 Officer would make these available to Members and colleagues on the Overview and Scrutiny Board moving forward. In addition, the Leader explained that she would be happy to liaise with Councillor P. McDonald directly when the Cabinet considered the use of consultants in support of the formulation of Council Policy so that he could be made aware.

Question submitted by Councillor D. Nicholl

“Given the recent problems where the 145a bus service was to be cut and the 145 bus was due to have significant route changes in Stoke Prior. This only became apparent via residents Facebook posts. Can the Leader please contact Worcestershire County Council to get assurance that Bromsgrove District Council is informed of the consultation process

on route changes through their wards in the future by notifying Assistant Director Community and Housing Services?”

The Leader responded that Officers had raised this with responsible Officers at Worcestershire County Council, and they had advised that as part of the Worcestershire Enhanced Bus Partnership, which was the mechanism for delivering the Bus Service Improvement Plan, they were in the process of considering how best to inform and consult on work with stakeholders including District Councils on the improvements and changes to bus services across Worcestershire. This suggestion would be taken into consideration as part of this process.

Question Submitted by Councillor C. Hotham

Councillor C. Hotham referred to his Question on Notice which had been published in the agenda pack for this meeting.

“This Council has been facing almost unprecedented pressures: The redevelopment projects, the play audit, the car parking audit, the letting agency start up, a new strategic district plan, a new chief exec and 151 officer, a projected financial deficit of millions of pounds. We Bromsgrove District Council are now faced with our extermination. Whether we agree or disagree with the government's policy, the one thing we must realise is that it will happen, and it must be managed by us elected representatives for the benefit of the people of Bromsgrove. It is vital that all of us are involved as none of us want to feel that any part of Bromsgrove District is disadvantaged by the change.

Currently, the Cabinet consists of the Leader and six members, they already have their work cut out managing and overseeing our existing challenges. My question for the Leader is:

Is it now time to appoint a further Cabinet Member with primary responsibility for the change to a unitary authority who would hold regular working groups for all members to attend?”

The Leader responded that the Council would review what needed to be undertaken once the Government published further guidance on the Local Government reorganisation process. This was expected to be delivered by the end of January 2025. Therefore, this would be looked at, at the appropriate time.

Question Submitted by Councillor J. Robinson

“The Labour Government promised the end of austerity and to fund local Government fairly. It is with dismay that this council notes the financial settlement provided to Bromsgrove District Council for the financial year 25/26 resulting in real terms cut in the money available to our Council. We therefore call on the Leader to write (on behalf of the Council) to the Secretary of State to urge the Government to urgently provide further funding.”

The Leader responded that like all Members, she was disappointed that the present 2025/26 Local Government Settlement saw no increase in the Council's core spending power. In reality, this was a reduction because, as part of this 0 per cent increase, the Government were expecting the Council to increase its Council Tax by 2.99 per cent and were reducing central grants by £352,000. This was a significant departure from the promised 3.2 per cent sector increases that were promised in the Chancellor's Statement in Autumn 2024 and seemed to be the case for a significant number of District Councils.

This settlement had targeted specific areas of funding for increases rather than giving Councils the discretion of where they could spend their funds. Of that targeted expenditure, the Council benefitted with:

- £88,000 more Homeless Prevention Grant
- £1,004k of new funding to help implement the new Extended Producer Responsibility around the Environment Act 2021
- A £918,000 allocation in 2025/6 only for the UK Shared Prosperity Plan.

Medium term budgeting was difficult as again the Government had provided only a one-year settlement, as was the fact that there was to be significant change in how Local Government was funded.

The best approach for the Council was to ensure that it responded actively to all the consultations about future funding that were about to be issued and also to ensure the authority's voices were heard within the Council's networks link; the District Councils Network and the various Local Government Association Working Groups.

It was agreed that the Leader was happy for a letter to be sent on behalf of Bromsgrove District Council urging more funding for the authority.

The Chairman confirmed that there were three Motions on Notice submitted for consideration at this Council meeting. However, Members were informed that prior to the meeting, the first Motion had been withdrawn and would not be debated.

As detailed in Minute No 75/24 – Declarations of Interest, Councillor R. Lambert left the Council Chamber prior to the consideration of this Motion on Notice.

English Devolution White Paper

The following Motion on Notice was submitted by Councillor D. Nicholl for Council's consideration:

“Given the recent English Devolution White Paper:

Bromsgrove District Council calls on officers to prepare a business case for the cabinet on the merits of a North Worcestershire unitary authority versus that of a Worcestershire wide unitary authority or any other model to set out the best way forward to represent the residents of Bromsgrove and the villages.”

The Motion was proposed by Councillor D. Nicholl and seconded by Councillor S. Evans.

In proposing the Motion, Councillor Nicholl referred to the recent White Paper that had been released regarding the Government's devolution proposals. In doing so, it was outlined that the Government proposed to make Leaders at local level more accountable and for power to return to those who had 'more skin in the game.' It was noted that each decision on how power would be devolved would be made on a case-by-case basis. It was suggested that the decision to devolve power must have an outcome that was best for the residents of Bromsgrove, and it was important that all potential structures be explored. A North Worcestershire unitary authority might not be the best model to deliver services to the residents. Although there had been communications released regarding a Worcestershire County wide unitary authority, this had not been debated or voted on and therefore it was not known if this was the most suitable structure for the future. Councillor Nicholl expressed the view that it was vital that this Motion be passed in order to start the process and provide urgent answers to central Government.

Following the proposal of the Motion, an amendment was proposed by Councillor P. McDonald and seconded by Councillor H. Rone-Clarke. The amendment was as follows:

“Given the recent English Devolution White Paper:

Bromsgrove District Council call on Officers to prepare a business case, for discussion at a future extraordinary meeting of the Council, on the merits of a North Worcestershire unitary authority versus that of a Worcestershire wide unitary authority or any other model to set out the best way forward to represent the residents of Bromsgrove and the villages.”

In proposing the amendment to the substantive Motion, Councillor McDonald explained that devolution would be a good outcome for residents, as it would empower local communities and target their needs and aspirations. However, it was right to wait until further information had been provided by the Government before making any decisions. This way all the facts would be available, and an informed decision could be made.

Councillor Rone-Clarke, in seconding the amendment to the Motion, stated that following discussions at the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee meetings where the White Paper had been highlighted as a risk, he felt that the process should not be rushed.

Some Members queried the content of the amendment as to why there would need to be an Extraordinary Council meeting in order to consider this in the future. It was explained that any submission made to the Government would need to be a Council decision and therefore if the timing of the submission did not fit within the current Committee schedule, then an Extraordinary Council meeting would be required in March 2025. Members further queried why this meeting would need to be held in March. Officers confirmed that the Government had indicated that an interim proposal would be required at this time, with two further submission dates in May 2025 and Autumn 2025. However, the exact dates were still to be confirmed by Government.

The amendment was accepted by Councillor D. Nicholl and therefore became part of the substantive Motion.

Councillor C. Hotham proposed a further amendment to the Motion

“Given the recent English Devolution White Paper:

Bromsgrove District Council call on Officers to provide a progress report at the Council meeting due to be held on 19th February 2025 and to prepare a business case, for discussion at a future extraordinary meeting of the Council, and an all Member briefing, on the merits of a North Worcestershire unitary authority versus that of a Worcestershire wide unitary authority or any other model to set out the best way forward to represent the residents of Bromsgrove and the villages.”

Following the presentation of the second amendment the Monitoring Officer reported that there might not be any further detailed information known by the date of the following meeting of the Council on 19th February 2025, and therefore it might be more appropriate to arrange a Group Leaders’ meeting or all-Member briefing prior to consideration at an Extraordinary Council meeting. The Chief Executive further stated that this would be possible prior to the next Council meeting in February once the Council was in receipt of further details of a potential framework from the Government. Some Members queried whether a briefing was necessary and if there would be Officer capacity to provide this information within such tight timeframes. It was confirmed that this would be achievable.

Therefore, the second amendment proposed by Councillor C. Hotham was accepted by Councillor D. Nicholl as the proposer of the original Motion. The substantive Motion therefore was debated as follows:

“Given the recent English Devolution White Paper:

Bromsgrove District Council call on Officers to prepare a business case, for discussion at a future extraordinary meeting of the Council, and an all Member briefing, on the merits of a North Worcestershire unitary authority versus that of a Worcestershire wide unitary authority or any other model to set out the best way forward to represent the residents of Bromsgrove and the villages.”

Councillor P. Whittaker queried whether there would be a need to hold an Extraordinary Council meeting and suggested that it would be more effective to bring a progress report when they were ‘furnished with any further information from the Government so Members could be appraised of any progress in respect of future governance of the District.’ It was suggested that this would allow Officers only to hold a meeting if required. However, it was confirmed that whatever the progress report contained, there would still need to be an Extraordinary

Council meeting held in order to discuss any proposals with all Members of the Council.

The Chief Executive confirmed that although a business case had been used in the wording used within the Motion, there was not a requirement from the Government to provide a full business case at this time. The interim submission in March would be proposals that could be debated at an Extraordinary Council meeting.

On being put to the vote it was

RESOLVED that

“Given the recent English Devolution White Paper:

Bromsgrove District Council call on Officers to prepare a business case, for discussion at a future extraordinary meeting of the Council, and an all Member briefing, on the merits of a North Worcestershire unitary authority versus that of a Worcestershire wide unitary authority or any other model to set out the best way forward to represent the residents of Bromsgrove and the villages.”

Councillor R. Lambert returned to the Council Chamber prior to the consideration of this Motion on Notice.

Cancellation of Worcestershire County Council Elections

Councillor J. Robinson presented the following Motion on Notice for Council's consideration.

“Bromsgrove District Council believes that the County Council elections should go ahead as planned in May and any suggestion of them being cancelled is premature.”

The Motion was proposed by Councillor J. Robinson and seconded by Councillor S. Evans.

In proposing the Motion, Councillor Robinson explained that correspondence had been received two weeks prior to this meeting from the Leader of Worcestershire County Council (WCC) stating that he had requested that the County Council elections due to be held in May 2025 should be cancelled. It was reported that there had been no discussion with any Member at WCC when this communication was received. Councillor Robinson felt that this decision was not taken democratically

and that a unified position had not been agreed by the Councils across Worcestershire. It was stated that the County Council had no mandate to cancel elections and indeed it was for the residents to decide who the County Councillors would be following the elections and therefore who would have the mandate going forward.

Members debated this Motion in detail. During the discussion, some Members raised that this was not strictly a Motion by definition and should not have been debated at this meeting. This was because Council did not have the power to make decisions on behalf of the County Council. The directive had come from the current Government who had proposed devolution as part of its election manifesto.

There was some dissatisfaction in respect of the manner of the debate expressed by some Members. It was noted that Motions were submitted in the correct manner and either accepted or rejected by the Monitoring Officer as appropriate. Negotiations did take place prior to the publication of both Motions and Questions and this relied on understanding and generosity from all Members. There was a request made by some Members that Motions and Questions be looked at more closely prior to publication in order to prevent confusion and frustration as to what was to be debated at Council meetings and what powers the Council had to effect decisions within the Motions. It was understood that this was a difficult Motion for Members to debate given the situation in national politics. However, it was important to discuss such matters and that other Councillors within the County had made their feelings known regarding this matter. Although this had been the case, it was reported that these communications had been from specific politicians within the County and not from a Council as a whole which was what the Motion proposed. If Members wished to make their opinions known they could take the opportunity to write to the Secretary of State as individuals.

It was explained that details from the Government had been received and it was noted that any County Council on the accelerated list for devolution might have their elections deferred. Members were informed that the cost of a County Council election was approximately £500,000 and therefore to hold an unnecessary election would be at the cost of the taxpayer and there were likely to be future elections as part of the devolution process to elect shadow unitary authority Members.

It was reported that residents had expressed their disappointment at the possible cancellation of the County elections. However, it was raised that devolution would take place whether there were elections or not and

that both WCC and Bromsgrove District Council would cease to exist in their current structure in the future.

Councillor J. Robinson requested a named vote in respect of this Motion.

Members Voting FOR the Motion: Councillors Ammar, Clarke, Evans, Hotham, Hunter, Nicholl and J. Robinson (7).

Members voting AGAINST the Motion: Councillors Baxter, Jones, Kumar, Lambert, May, Nock, Stanley, Taylor, Webb and Whittaker (10).

Members voting to ABSTAIN in the vote: Councillors A. Bailes, R. Bailes, Forsythe, Gray, Hopkins, Marshall, McDonald and Rone-Clarke (8).

Not present for the vote (excluding those who gave apologies in advance): Councillors Colella (had left the meeting room but was present for most of the debate) and Peters (had left the meeting by this point).

Therefore, the vote on this Motion was defeated.

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

There was no Urgent Business on this occasion.

The meeting closed at 10.20 p.m.

Chairman