

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MEETING OF THE CABINET

WEDNESDAY, 12TH FEBRUARY 2025, AT 6.00 P.M.

PRESENT: Councillors K.J. May (Leader), S. J. Baxter (Deputy Leader),
S. R. Colella, B. McEldowney and S. A. Webb

Observers: Councillor P. M. McDonald and Councillor S.T. Nock

Officers: Mrs. S. Hanley, Mr P. Carpenter, Mr. G. Revans,
Mr S. Parry, Ms J. Willis and Mrs J. Gresham

64/24 **TO RECEIVE APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors K. Taylor and P. J. Whittaker.

65/24 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no Declarations of Interest.

66/24 **TO CONFIRM THE ACCURACY OF THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE CABINET HELD ON 7TH JANUARY 2025**

The minutes of the meeting of Cabinet held on 7th January 2025 were submitted for Members' consideration.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 7th January 2025 be approved as a true and accurate record.

67/24 **MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD HELD ON 6TH JANUARY 2025**

The minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting held on 6th January 2025 were considered.

The Leader confirmed that there were no outstanding recommendations from this meeting requiring Cabinet's consideration.

It was noted that the Strategic Parking Review report was pre-scrutinised at the Board's meeting which took place on 11th February 2025. This had resulted in some recommendations being made to

Cabinet. These recommendations would be considered during the Strategic Parking Review agenda item, as detailed at Minute No. 69/24.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting held on 6th January 2025 be noted.

68/24

PAY POLICY 2025/2026

The Deputy Chief Executive and Section 151 Officer presented the Pay Policy 2025 – 2026 report for Cabinet’s consideration.

It was reported that the Localism Act required all English and Welsh Local Authorities to produce a Pay Policy statement. The Act required the statement to be approved by Full Council and to be adopted by 31st March each year for the subsequent financial year. The Pay Policy Statement for Bromsgrove District Council 2025 – 2026 was included at Appendix 1 to the report.

The purpose of the statement was to provide transparency with regard to the Council’s approach to setting the pay of its employees by identifying the following:

- a) the methods by which salaries of all employees were determined.
- b) the detail and level of remuneration of its most senior staff i.e. ‘chief officers,’ as defined by the relevant legislation.
- c) the Committee(s) responsible for ensuring the provisions set out in this statement were applied consistently throughout the Council and for recommending any amendments to Full Council.

The Council’s pay and grading structure comprised of Grades one to eleven. These were followed by grades for Managers, Assistant Director 1, Assistant Director 2, Director WRS, Executive Director, Deputy Chief Executive and Chief Executive; all of which arose following the introduction of the Shared Services agreement between Bromsgrove District and Redditch Borough Councils.

It was explained that within each grade there were a number of salary / pay points. Up to and including Grade eleven scale, at spinal column point forty-three and that the Council used the nationally negotiated pay spine scale. Salary points above this were locally determined. It was clarified that the Council’s Pay structure was set out in point 6 in Appendix 1 to the report.

All Council posts were allocated to a grade within this pay structure, based on the application of a Job Evaluation process. Posts at Managers and above were evaluated by an external assessor using the Hay Job Evaluation scheme.

Bromsgrove District Council, like the majority of Local Authorities was committed to the Local Government Employers national pay bargaining framework in respect of the national pay spine and annual cost of living increases negotiated with trade unions.

All other pay related allowances were subject of either nationally or locally negotiated rates.

Bromsgrove District Council was managed by a Senior Management Team who managed Shared Services across both Bromsgrove District and Redditch Borough Councils. These management roles had been job evaluated on this basis, with the salary costs for these posts split between both Councils.

It was reported that the Pay Policy also set out the following:

- The recruitment of Chief Officers
- Additions to the salaries of Chief Officers
- Termination payments
- Advertisement/publicity of posts

Members were informed that like most Local Authorities, Bromsgrove District Council did not operate a performance related pay scheme.

The Council's definition of lowest paid employees were persons employed under a contract of employment with the Council on full time (37 hours) equivalent salaries, in accordance with the minimum spinal column point currently in use within the Council's grading structure. As at 1st April 2024 this was £23,656 per annum.

Following the presentation of the report Members queried what the Hay Job Evaluation Scheme was. It was explained that this was a standardised system of evaluating the size of roles within an organisation.

Members further queried why there was a difference between the percentage paid by Bromsgrove District Council to the Assistant Director Environmental and Housing Property Services and the Assistant Director Community and Housing Services. It was noted that the percentage paid

by the Council for these roles was thirty five percent, whereas the percentage paid for the remaining Assistant Director roles was fifty per cent. It was also clarified that in addition to the Bromsgrove responsibilities, these roles were also responsible for service areas more specific to Redditch Borough Council, such as Strategic Housing. As a result of this the larger percentage was paid for by Redditch Borough Council.

RECOMMENDED that

the Pay Policy 2025 – 2026 be approved.

69/24

STRATEGIC PARKING REVIEW

The Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Regeneration presented the Strategic Parking Review report for Members' consideration. It was noted that there had been some disappointment in the length of time it had taken for the report to be presented to Members. It was also noted that the report did not fully address the business case to look at alternative providers, including an in-house service. Unfortunately, it was felt that this would no longer be an option due to the delays experienced. It was explained however, that there was still the opportunity to make some amendments if necessary to the Service Level Agreement (SLA) with Wychavon District Council in order to ensure the best provision for Bromsgrove and its residents.

As a result of the detailed discussions at the Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting held on 11th February 2025, several recommendations were made by the Board as follows:

- Recommendation 1 – The Business Case and Service Review for the Strategic Parking Review be deferred for 6 months until the issues identified have been addressed as not fit for purpose, in that it did not cover bringing the service in-house.
- Recommendation 2 – there should be an increase in the proposed Civil Enforcement Officer (CEO) patrol time, greater than 25%, included in the Service Level Agreement (SLA), as the current proposal of 25% was not considered to be adequate.
- Recommendation 3 - More CEOs should be funded to operate in the District as opposed to introducing an Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) service.
- Recommendation 4 – The Council retained cash payment options for car parks in the District.

- Recommendation 5 – A study be launched reviewing parking in Alvechurch.

The Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Regeneration addressed these recommendations during the presentation of the report and stated that as a result of the pre-scrutiny there had been several changes to the recommendations contained within the Cabinet report.

The Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Regeneration explained the amendments and further recommendations as follows:

Recommendation 6 – It was suggested that additional wording in **bold** be included in this recommendation as follows:

*“The Assistant Director of Regeneration and Property Services following consultation with the Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Regeneration, **subject to any scrutiny of the proposals**, develops a **detailed business case** and implementation plan including all technical surveys and full costs to install, where practicable and affordable, Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) systems to Recreation Road South, St Johns and Windsor Street car parks and to also investigate other car parks under the ownership of the Council.”*

It was explained that this amendment was as a response to the recommendation from the Overview and Scrutiny Board in respect of deferring the business case, the implementation of an ANPR system at some locations in the District and the wish to retain cash machines for payments within the car parks throughout the District. It was further clarified that it had been a directive from the previous Government that a cash machine must be retained within Local Authority car parks within a District. This would continue to be the case for Bromsgrove.

Recommendation 7 – It was suggested that an additional recommendation be made as follows:

“The remaining strategic parking study budget be allocated to undertaking additional parking and traffic study work in wards in the District located outside Bromsgrove town centre.”

It was explained that this additional recommendation was in response to the recommendation made by the Overview and Scrutiny Board in respect of a study be launched reviewing parking in Alvechurch. The Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Regeneration invited all Ward Members (including Alvechurch) to approach her and suggest

areas of parking concern within their wards. Once any issues had been ascertained, the remaining strategic parking budget could be allocated to look at issues within these wards accordingly.

An additional recommendation to Council was also made as follows:

- 12) The Council allocate an additional £70,000 for additional Civil Enforcement Officers to enable increased enforcement during out of hours and weekends.

This was a response to the recommendation made by the Overview and Scrutiny Board that more Civil Enforcement Officers (CEOs) be funded to operate in the District as opposed to the introduction of an Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) service and the request to increase patrol time in out of town areas. It was hoped that this extra resource would hopefully pick up any existing and new areas where out of hours and weekend parking was an issue.

Following the proposal of the amendments and new recommendations, the Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Regeneration, thanked the Overview and Scrutiny Board for undertaking such detailed scrutiny on this report, which had provided lessons learnt for this and other strategic reviews in the future.

The Assistant Director of Environmental and Housing Property Services presented the Strategic Parking Review report in further detail. There had been some greater complexities for this piece of work than had been anticipated, which had resulted in delays. He expressed his disappointment and apologised to Members for these delays.

It was confirmed that a report had been presented to Cabinet in February 2024 where it had been agreed that a Strategic Parking Review would take place, including on and off-street enforcement and a business case that considered various options including a longer-term SLA with Wychavon, tendering of the service or an in-house service.

The Strategic Parking Review would include several areas as follows:

- A Strategic Review of existing car parking requirements (including the Shopmobility Service)
- Car Park Management
- On-Street enforcement

Car Parks within the District were assessed using a number of factors including capacity, condition, usage, proportions of blue badge bays and Electric Vehicle (EV) charging bays. Once these assessments had been carried out the results were provided by the consultants.

In terms of car park management, following discussions at both a Cabinet Advisory Group meeting in May 2024 and an earlier meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board in February 2024, Members had expressed that the ten per cent patrol time for CEO that currently existed within the SLA was not sufficient and that a more equitable balance of patrols be provided to the out of town centres be undertaken following the completion of the review. This, it was confirmed could be changed within the SLA for the future and although a figure of twenty-five per cent had been included within the report it was confirmed that this would be the minimum amount of time spent patrolling out of time and could be increased as necessary.

The introduction of an ANPR system was highlighted for Members' consideration. It was noted that at the Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting that had taken place the previous evening, most Members had understood that an introduction of this kind of system would work much like it did in the private sector. That payment would be made via an app with no barriers to prevent people leaving prior to payment. It was clarified that this was not the case and that barriers would be in place so that a vehicle could drive into the car park, the registration number would be recognised and the appropriate payment depending on the length of stay would need to be paid prior to the vehicle exiting the car park. The Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Board stated that this was a much more satisfactory outcome and that if this was the case then the introduction of an ANPR system was not cause for so much concern.

Members were informed that measures would be introduced in the future to raise awareness and alleviate parking issues. There were 'soft' measures, such as increased education and social media campaigns to increase awareness of inconsiderate parking for example. In addition to 'hard' measures, such as parking restrictions and signing and lining options.

Following the presentation by the Assistant Director of Environmental and Housing Property Services, the Leader invited the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Board to speak. In doing so it was stated that there had been a number of concerns raised by the Board in respect of the review. He noted that the report seemed to suggest that the scope of the review had been decided at the CAG meeting held in May 2024. It

was stated that it was not the purpose of CAG meetings to 'decide' outcomes but to provide support in an advisory capacity to Cabinet. It was confirmed that this was definitely not the case and that CAG meetings had never been intended to negate the work that the Overview and Scrutiny Board undertook.

During the discussions at the Board meeting, it was felt that the Strategic Parking Review had not fully met the requirements, as it did not provide information as requested in the report considered in February 2024. However, it was highlighted that a deferral of the report, as recommended by the Overview and Scrutiny Board would result in further delays and that, as outlined in the amendment to recommendation 6 (as detailed above) the Overview and Scrutiny Board could look to pre-scrutinise any business case that came forward in respect of this matter if they were so minded to do so. It was also noted that due to the provision of the capital funding allocated to this project this was a one-off opportunity to leave a legacy for the residents of Bromsgrove following devolution.

Several other areas were raised by the Chairman of the Board as follows:

- There needed to be more yellow lines and enforcement officers in Rubery.
- An in-house solution needed to be considered for continuity particularly when considering devolution, as it was important for Bromsgrove District Council to leave a legacy for its residents.
- The security issues in respect of the cash machines within car parks.
- Alvechurch currently had motorcycle and bicycle parking and due to the incorrect evaluation contained within the report there needed to be a parking study to better understand the needs for this ward.
- Consideration needed to be made to the extra parking requirements that would be required, resulting in an increased number of housing following changes to the National Planning Policy Framework.
- Blue badge holders information had not been taken into account when evaluating the ticket machine data and that the use of the TEMPRO tool was not an appropriate method to use in order to measure the data.
- The use of ANPR outside schools should not be considered as there was already provision in place to collect this information using a van.

- Evidence of the appropriateness of implementing a nighttime car parking tariff to encourage the nighttime economy.
- The implementation of the potential option for charges to be implemented in Alvechurch and Aston Fields car parks as this may increase on-street and inconsiderate parking resulting in road safety concerns.

Following the detailed discussion, it was raised that an out of hours and weekend patrol might not work across all wards as each ward had differing needs. It was clarified that recommendations 12 (as detailed above) sought to address this issue and it was hoped that the new CEOs would be reactive and respond to specific needs as and when they were reported; it was important to engage with ward members in order to identify issues. It was reported that there was a need to encourage working with partners such as Worcestershire County Council (WCC), in respect of this project, as it was noted that Bromsgrove District Council could not implement all of the changes on its own due to powers and capacity. It was noted that recommendation 5 in the report included the establishment of a Parking Working Group. This was welcomed by the Cabinet in order to provide a partnership approach to this project. Some clarification was requested in respect of the use of partnership working alongside any ANPR system that was introduced. Would it be possible for the Council to provide information to the Police from this system? It was confirmed that this would not be possible due to data protection legislation and that although the Council did work with the Police with provision of CCTV as necessary, this was done under strict legal regulations.

It was also requested that a real time figure for twenty-five per cent of patrol time be provided to Members. Officers undertook to provide this to Members.

Further discussion followed regarding Aston Fields and the potential to better utilise the car park adjacent to the railway and that this would be an area of work to be looked at in order to potentially boost the nighttime economy of this ward.

In terms of Shopmobility, it was suggested that the Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing and Strategic Housing should consult with the resident who regularly used the service and any decision being made to change the service would be made following this consultation (Option b within the recommendations).

In proposing the recommendations clarification was provided in respect of the end date of the SLA, which was 31st March 2029.

Therefore, it was

RESOLVED that

- 1) The Business Case and Service review in respect of the delivery of Civil Parking Enforcement Service (CPE), as detailed in the appendices to this report, be noted.
- 2) The Assistant Director for Regeneration and Property Services considers the future use of Churchfields Multi Storey, School Drive and Stourbridge Road car parks within the development of the new Town Centre Strategy.
- 3) Following the review of delivery options for Car Parking Enforcement, and the impending changes arising from Local Government Devolution, and subject to the agreement of resolution 4, the Assistant Director of Environment and Housing Property Services in conjunction with the Assistant Director of Legal, Democratic and Procurement Services to agree to extend the Service Level Agreement (SLA) with Wychavon District Council for a period of 3 years and 7 months resulting in an end date of 31st March 2029.
- 4) The Assistant Director of Environment and Housing Property Services in conjunction with the Assistant Director of Legal, Democratic and Procurement Services amend the SLA with Wychavon District Council for Parking Enforcement to include a minimum of 25% of patrol time to be undertaken outside the town centre.
- 5) The Assistant Director of Regeneration and Property Services works with partner organisations including Wychavon District Council and Worcestershire County Council to establish a Parking Working Group in order to work through and consider the range of options contained within the Appendices to enhance the opportunities for better enforcement across the District.
- 6) The Assistant Director of Regeneration and Property Services following consultation with the Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Regeneration, subject to any scrutiny of the

proposals, develops a detailed business case and implementation plan including all technical surveys and full costs to install, where practicable and affordable, Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) systems to Recreation Road South, St Johns and Windsor Street car parks and to also investigate other car parks under the ownership of the Council.

- 7) The remaining strategic parking study budget be allocated to undertaking additional parking and traffic study work in wards in the District located outside Bromsgrove town centre.
- 8) That option b relating to the Shopmobility service be approved:
 - (b) To review the provision of the service following the outcome of the Town Centre Strategy Review and the outcome of where the enforcement team are relocated.

RECOMMENDED that

- 9) The Director of Resources includes in the Medium-Term Financial Plan for 2025/26 a capital budget of £100k for ANPR systems to Recreation Road South, St Johns and Windsor Street car parks.
- 10) A revenue budget of £15k per annum be included in the Medium-Term Financial Plan from April 2026 for the maintenance contracts for the ANPR installations.
- 11) A revenue budget of £335,160 for Car Parking Enforcement be included in the Medium-Term Financial Plan from April 2025, which is to include an annual inflationary uplift, determined by the Consumer Price Index (CPI).
- 12) The Council allocate an additional £70,000 for additional Civil Enforcement Officers to enable increased enforcement during out of hours and weekends.

70/24

MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN - TRANCHE 2 BUDGET INCLUDING FEES AND CHARGES (FOLLOWING CONSULTATION)

The Deputy Chief Executive and Section 151 Officer presented the Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) - Tranche 2 Budget including Fees

and Charges (following consultation) report for the consideration of Cabinet.

As a result of the recommendations agreed during Minute item 69/24 there would need to be some adjustments made to the MTFP and this will be reported to the Cabinet and Council at the meetings due to take place on 19th February 2025 as the agendas for these meetings had already been published. It was reported that these amendments would reflect the following:

- 1) An additional £85,000 be added to parking budgets, which is broken down as:
 - Additional funding of £70,000 for increased numbers of Civil Enforcement Officers (CEOs)
 - £15,000 for maintenance of an Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) system
- 2) £100,000 be added to the Capital Budget in 2025/26 for ANPR systems to Recreation Road South, St Johns and Windsor Street car parks.

Members were informed that the Council had set its budget in two Tranches this year, as it had during the 2024/5 Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) process. The initial Tranche was published in December 2024 and approved initial pressures and increases at Council in January 2025. This second Tranche should be considered as the final now that the Local Government Settlement figures were known.

It was highlighted that as with many Local Authorities the additional National Insurance contributions would impact on the budget. Members were informed that Bromsgrove District Council currently had a shortfall of £200,000 per annum. Furthermore, it was noted that not all Grant allocations were currently known.

Departmental changes, due to contract pressures had also been taken into account. These departmental changes resulted in an overall £1.387million revenue pressure in the 2025/6 financial year and then £938,000 by 2027/8.

At Tranche 1, there was a £1million deficit which needed to be closed, rising to an ongoing £1.5million in 2027/8. It was clarified that £1million of this ongoing amount from 2026/7 onwards was linked to the impact of the delivery of the Food Waste Service at the Council.

The Provisional Local Government Settlement was made on 18th December 2024. In that Settlement the Council's Core Sending Power was unchanged at £13.42million. This zero increase in spending power resulted in a significant change in funding with Councils now expected to have a 2.99 per cent increase in Council Tax to get to that a 'break even' position, with a reduction of 'Other Grants' by a corresponding amount.

It was reported that the Government had given specific targeted Grant Funding for a number of initiatives. This funding was single year, as Local Government funding was due to change significantly for the 2026/7 settlement.

The impacts on the Council for this targeted funding was detailed as follows:

- £700million additional grant funding – Bromsgrove District Council had not received any additional grant funding.
- Council Tax in Tranche 2 would be increased from 1.99 per cent to 2.99 per cent.
- £233million additional Homelessness Prevention Grant – It was confirmed that Bromsgrove District Council had received £349,000, which was £89,000 more than in the MTFP Tranche 1 reports discussed and approved in December.
- £1.1billion new funding through implementation of the Extended Producer Responsibility scheme for recycling – it was reported that Bromsgrove District Council had received £1,004,000 funding through this scheme which was included in the Tranche 2 budget proposals.
- Business Rates to support to the retail, hospitality and Leisure sector was expected to be neutral and Government funded.
- UK Shared Prosperity Fund had been extended for 2025-26 at a reduced level of £900million – Bromsgrove District Council had received £918,000 split (Revenue £748,000 and Capital £170,000).

There were further Significant Grant levels to consider, which included:

- Housing Benefit Administration Subsidy - £146,878
- Discretionary Housing Payments - £62,332
- Housing Benefit Subsidy - £11,192,229
- Disabled Facilities Grant - £1,285,847 (up from £1,130,316)
- DEFRA allocation for Food Waste Bins/Vehicles - £902,511 (although this had been awarded it was noted that this would still result in a shortfall for implementation of the Food Waste

Service due to the high costs of new vehicles and implementation of the service.)

The Council had assessed a number of other options to move to what it believed was a considered sustainable position over the 3-year planning period. This process had resulted in the following additional income:

- Council Tax – The Government expects as part of the Local Government Settlement for all Councils to increase Council Tax levels by the maximum 2.99%. The Council assumed a 1.99% increase in Tranche 1 and so this increases that level by £96,000 to come in line with Government expectations
- Actuarial Changes from 2026 - Following a conversation with the new Actuary and the Worcestershire Treasurers at the end of November 2024, expectations were now that in the 2026 Triennial Revaluation there would be minimal increases. This saved £150,000.
- EPR Funding Allocations – the Council had received £1,004,000 in EPR Funding allocated over the three-year funding period with £250,000 allocated for specific marketing initiatives to move the initiative forward across all sectors.
- Capitalisation of Salaries – The Council should be allocating staff costs to capital projects. It had not done this in the past. At the moment an assumption of a 5% recharge had been made which needed to be sustainable over time.
- One Off Funding from the Finance Reserve. There were finance specific items in the departmental pressures that were one off in nature. These could be funded from the Earmarked Finance Reserve.
- Departmental Efficiencies – to balance the overall budget, there was the requirement for departmental efficiencies to be made.
- Savings on the VM Ware Contract – it was expected that this contract would have a 10 fold increase with a change of supplier but in December the Council was able to limit this to a far smaller increase.

During the presentation of the report, several areas of extra costs were brought to Members' attention, as follows:

- WRS Uplift for Inflation – these were the agreed increases approved at the WRS Board in November 2024.
- Local Government Settlement Costs – these now reflected the changes to funding in the 2025/26 Local Government Financial Settlement. The most significant was the £352,000 reduction in Government Grants.

- The Sunrise Project - This project focussed on supporting the most vulnerable and complex customers often known to organisations for repeat and reactive demands and identified as having a high level of contact with multiple partner agencies. The expenditure would improve the financial sustainability and health and wellbeing of residents, and in particular those more vulnerable residents. The project was tenure blind and included the provision of access to courses to improve employment opportunities and quality of life.
- The Final Local Government Settlement on 3rd February allocated the Council £0.1m for the National Insurance changes. This was £200,000 less than the Council's requirements. This difference shown now needed to be reflected as a pressure.

Cabinet were also informed of the potential risks that needed to be considered, as follows:

- The 2025/6 Local Government Financial Settlement was only for one year and overall have a £352,000 reduction in central grants.
- The new financial settlement formula in 2026/7, which would be for three years, but the make-up of this settlement formula would only be consulted on from Spring of 2025.
- The status of Councils with "Disclaimer Opinions" on their accounts. It was understood there was over five hundred of these opinions across English Councils.
- The delivery of projects on time and within allocated budgets – it was noted that the largest risk at this time was the delivery of the Levelling Up Projects. The Council had received approval from the Ministry of Housing, Local Government and Communities on 30th January 2025 that delivery of these projects could be extended until 31st March 2026. However, it was important to note that although this extension had been provided to Local Authorities nationally it would be prudent to complete the projects in as quick a time as possible in order to not increase costs due to delays.

The greatest risk was currently considered to be the Devolution of powers in Local Government and the setting up of Unitary Councils. In light of this, the Council was reviewing schemes that could be delivered and completed within the next three years to ensure that a legacy of a sustainable attractive Bromsgrove be transferred on vesting day.

Initiatives under review for inclusion and approval following updated business cases included:

- Full funding of the 10-year play strategy agreed by Council in 2024 (only 5 years are in the present capital programme) including non-Council assets set out in that report.
- Rubery – high street design feasibility study and then implementation to create central plaza/meeting space and reconfigure parking – circa £120,000.
- Investment in a new Depot to reflect differing needs for services and vehicles in the future.

For Tranche 2, the opinion of the Interim Director of Finance was that the risks contained in the 2025/26 budget estimates had been minimised as far as was possible.

The biggest change for this budget would be the capitalisation of salaries which had not been done previously. However, it was noted that there had not needed to be any service cuts made as a result of any changes to budgets previously which had been positive for the Council, its staff and its residents.

Budget and MFTP proposals forecast the level of General Fund balances at £12.781m as at 31st March 2028 (before the adjustments for Parking) which was over five times the recommended 5% of net level. However, it was recommended that the level of reserves should not fall below £5million as due to the changes in the structure of Local Authority structures and funding in the future. It was thought that there would be an expectation that any redundancies as a result of the restructure would need to be paid from Reserves.

Following the presentation of the report Members thanked the Deputy Chief Executive and Section 151 Officer for all his hard work on this and previous budgets. In addition, Members stated that all his work during his time at the Council had been much appreciated.

The Leader invited the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Board to speak. He reported that at the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board held on 11th February 2025, Members raised monies due to be received from the now defunct Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise partnership (GBSLEP). It had been reported that the ringfenced £2.45million funding allocated to former member Councils might not be released as expected. A letter had been received from Birmingham City Council stating that the money would not be released at the end of this financial year. However, Members were informed that external advice would be sought in this matter going forward in order to

ensure that all monies would be received as previously agreed. It was hoped that this would be in the financial year 2026-2027.

The Chairman of the Board then highlighted some areas that had been discussed at previous meetings of the Finance and Budget Working Group in respect of the loss of Business Rates relief for Bromsgrove School. It was reported that any dividends would be received at the end of the next financial year, and it would amount to approximately £250,000.

The Poverty Trust Commission had also been discussed at the last meeting of the FBWG as a result of the discussion at the Council meeting held on 22nd January 2025. At this meeting Members expressed their concerns in funding this project with little information to scrutinise. Therefore, it had been requested at this Council meeting that further information would be provided to Members of the FBWG at its meeting held on 10th February 2025. After further scrutiny it was decided that there was still not sufficient information available and therefore another FBWG meeting had been arranged to look at this matter in more detail. This meeting was due to be held on 18th February 2025, in time for any further consideration at the Full Council meeting on 19th February 2025.

The Overview and Scrutiny Board had also raised the possibility of additional funding for the Artrix. However, it was noted that no further funding could be allocated as The Artrix was now being managed by a charity and that any further funding would be subject to subsidy control legislation in respect of charities.

The Cabinet Member for Finance queried if any Alternative Budgets were yet to be received and the deadline or receipt in advance of the Full Council meeting on 19th February 2025. The Deputy Chief Executive and Section 151 Officer undertook to provide Members with this information.

RECOMMENDED that

- 1) The Tranche 2 growth proposals be approved.
- 2) The additional funding to the Council as per the final Local Government Settlement, including the estimated levels for 2026/7 and 2027/8.
- 3) The Tranche 2 savings proposals, including an increase of Council Tax of 2.99% be approved.
- 4) the Commercial and Worcestershire Regulatory Services fee increases for 2025/26 be approved.

- 5) The updated five-year Capital Programme 2025/6 to 2029/30 along with its ongoing revenue costs be approved.
- 6) The levels of Earmarked Reserve being carried forward into future years and the setting up of the Property and ERP Reserves be approved.
- 7) The level of General Fund balances following additions from the 2025/6 MTFP be approved.
- 8) Members take account of any feedback from the Tranche 2 consultation process undertaken.

71/24

TO CONSIDER ANY URGENT BUSINESS, DETAILS OF WHICH HAVE BEEN NOTIFIED TO THE ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF LEGAL, DEMOCRATIC AND PROCUREMENT 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 7.59 p.m.

Chairman