

**Council****Thursday, 18 February 2021, Online - 10.00 am****Minutes****Present:**

Mr G R Brookes (Chairman), Mr A A J Adams, Mr R C Adams, Ms P Agar, Mr A T Amos, Mr T Baker-Price, Mr R W Banks, Mr R M Bennett, Mrs J A Brunner, Mr B Clayton, Mr K D Daisley, Mr P Denham, Mr N Desmond, Mrs E A Eyre, Mr A Fry, Mr S E Geraghty, Mr P Grove, Mr I D Hardiman, Mr A I Hardman, Mr P B Harrison, Mr M J Hart, Mrs A T Hingley, Mrs L C Hodgson, Dr A J Hopkins, Dr C Hotham, Mr M E Jenkins, Mr A D Kent, Mr R C Lunn, Mr P M McDonald, Mr S J Mackay, Mr L C R Mallett, Ms K J May, Mr P Middlebrough, Mr A P Miller, Mr R J Morris, Mr J A D O'Donnell, Mrs F M Oborski, Ms T L Onslow, Dr K A Pollock, Mrs J A Potter, Prof J W Raine, Mrs M A Rayner, Mr A C Roberts, Mr C Rogers, Mr J H Smith, Mr A Stafford, Ms C M Stalker, Mr C B Taylor, Mrs E B Tucker, Mr P A Tuthill, Mr R M Udall, Mrs R Vale, Ms S A Webb and Mr T A L Wells

**Available papers**

The members had before them

- A. The Agenda papers (previously circulated);
- B. 5 questions submitted to the Assistant Director for Legal and Governance (previously circulated); and
- C. The Minutes of the meeting held on 14 January 2021 (previously circulated).

**2255 Apologies and Declaration of Interests (Agenda item 1)**

Apologies were received from Ms R L Dent and Mr R P Tomlinson.

**2256 Public Participation (Agenda item 2)**

Mr E Kimberley asked a question on behalf of Mr P Bladon about officer covid vaccination.

Ms R Wormington asked a question about the appointment of a climate change officer.

Mr C Cooke asked questions about remedies for traffic congestion.

Mr A Spencer asked a question about climate change.

Dr M Marshall asked a question about Roadside Verge Nature Reserves.

Dr J Birks asked a question about cycling and the Council's transport policy.

The Chairman thanked all the public participants for their contribution and said they would receive a written response from the relevant Cabinet Member.

**2257 Minutes  
(Agenda item 3)**

**RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 14 January 2021 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.**

**2258 Chairman's  
Announcements  
(Agenda item 4)**

Noted.

A Minute's silence was held in memory of former county councillor Mr Peter Pinfield who had sadly passed away.

**2259 Reports of  
Cabinet-  
Matters which  
require a  
decision -  
2021/22 Draft  
Budget and  
Medium-Term  
Financial Plan  
Update 2022-24  
(Agenda item 5)**

The Council had before it a detailed report on the 2021/22 Draft Budget and Medium-Term Financial Plan Update 2022-24, which Cabinet had considered on 30 January 2020 and which the Leader of the Council and the Cabinet were recommending for adoption by the Council.

All Councillors had received or had access to the full report and Appendices considered by the Cabinet on 4 February 2020.

The Leader of the Council introduced the report and moved the recommendation as set out in paragraph 1 of the report; this was seconded by Mr A I Hardman. The Leader thanked all those involved in producing the budget over a short period of time. This budget built on the sound financial base maintained throughout the last financial year whereby even in the face of a serious and sustained health emergency and despite the issues associated with the pandemic, a small underspend at the end of year outturn had been predicted. The Council had also set aside additional expenditure of £80m which had been matched by Government Grant to do whatever was needed to proactively respond to issues associated with the Covid pandemic. The net budget of £350.2m had been set against the back-drop of rising income, albeit not as fast as expected due to the impact of the pandemic on the Council Tax base, and continued adult and social care pressures.

The Leader added that the budget sought to do three key things. Firstly, it aimed to protect the most vulnerable members of society providing further resources for demand-led Adult Social Care (a rise of £11m) and Children's Social Care (a rise of £7.7m). This was on top of previous budget increases and now accounted for 70% of the overall budget.

Secondly, investment in facilities that the public had identified as of most need including tackling congestion, roads and pavement improvements and public transport. This year's Viewpoint Survey had also identified flood defence and access to the countryside as key issues for the Council to address. It was therefore proposed to continue with the £10m cutting congestion programme to benefit Kidderminster, Bromsgrove, Evesham and the A38 junction at Upton, continue the £200k investment in bus services and invest a further £6m to improve roads and £4m on pavements which would provide a high quality road network for all users. A further £2.5m would be provided for flood mitigation and highways drainage and £500k for the Bewdley flood defence scheme. £2.5m would be invested in LED street lighting. 150k trees would be planted over the next five years. The capital budget for public rights of way and access to the countryside would be more than doubled with £100k set aside for maintenance and revenue.

Thirdly, the budget sought to support recovery, working with the LEP, Midlands Connect and district councils. It sought to replenish the Open for Business reserves, support the roll out of Superfast Broadband, build on the success of Malvern Hills Science Park and Worcester Six development as part of the next generation economic game-changer programme and with a £20m investment in train stations and the regeneration of land around them. It provided £300k for the most vulnerable members of society so that hardship funds would be available through district councils for those struggling to pay their Council Tax. It also supported partner organisations working on the high street and town projects. There were also a number of road infrastructure projects supported.

He added that the budget balanced the need for additional resources against the public's ability to pay therefore only a 2.5% increase in Council Tax was proposed. The proposed increase was one of the lowest of upper tier authorities in the region and amongst the lowest 25% of all county councils in the country. It was important to provide value for money for Council Taxpayers at a time when local residents most needed

the Council's support. The Government had allowed the Council to balance its collection fund over three years and provided support to cover 75% of irrecoverable losses as well as another £11.4m of Covid support and extra adult support grant.

Comments made in support of the proposed budget included:

- The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Adult Social Care commented that despite various levels of support received from the Government, the Council remained in emergency mode. It was therefore not appropriate to take all the Adult Social Care precept at this stage because the precept existed to address issues associated with demographic change rather than for emergency provision. In addition, the Council should press ahead with its Adult Social Care reform plans. The Council planned an ambitious efficiency drive of £7m, together with an increased business rate take and a judicious use of reserves which meant that the Council had set one of the lower Council Tax rates in the midlands. As a result an extra £11.5m had been made available for Adult Social Care for independent living as well as a £2m transformation fund programme for working with the community and voluntary sector
- The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Highways highlighted this Council's commitment to improving the road network with increased expenditure on footways and highways, highways infrastructure including street lighting, gulleys and highways drainage for this and the following year. Resident's surveys had highlighted congestion as the main issue of concern and this Council was on the way to being in the top quartile for the condition of its roads and pavements by next year. In recognition of the importance of walking, the public rights of way budget had been doubled to £1m. The number of inspectors had been increased from eight to ten to deal with issues associated with the work undertaken by utility companies
- The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Environment commented that improving the environment was a universal thread running through the budget. In particular, he highlighted the extra investment in LED street lighting, the purchase of green electricity, the flood mitigation funding, particularly the schemes in Bewdley and

Tenbury, the natural networks and tree planting creating biodiversity corridors throughout Worcestershire, and changes to high streets and congestion reduction. All these factors would have an impact on reducing the county's carbon footprint

- The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Children and Families indicated that the Children Social Care budget would increase by £7.7m with a further £1.1 in reserve to guard against the rising cost of children coming into care. Worcestershire Children's Services was an improved and improving service and there had been a massive transformation away from bringing children into care towards a strengthening families approach. This approach represented a long-term investment and the budget supported that. The Council was well-prepared to keep children safe
- The increase in expenditure on public rights of way would be of great benefit to all residents in the county and the LED lighting programme would improve the county's carbon footprint
- Officers should be congratulated for the work undertaken to produce this budget despite operating in a remote environment. The investment in technology to support remote working and associated environmental benefits was welcomed. The Council should review its current working arrangements to use this blueprint as a way for the Council to operate going forward
- The Council had heeded the advice of the overview and scrutiny panels and increased the level of investment in highways, footways, streetlighting and flood mitigation. In particular, investment in the public rights of way network structures was welcomed. Communities were urged to use available funding to establish Countryside Access Volunteer Groups
- The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Communities welcomed the support for the "Here to Help" initiative and thanked the volunteers who had come forward to support the most vulnerable in society. She also welcomed additional funding for pavements, smaller highways projects and the Malvern Science Park
- The Chairman of the Adult Care and Well-being Overview and Scrutiny Panel welcomed the extra £11.5m funding available for Adult Services to meet demand-led pressures, helping people to live in their own homes with the help of assisted

technology. The Council continued to lobby Government for a long-term solution to the Adult Social Care funding shortfall

- The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Education and Skills commented that over the course of the implementation of the National Funding Formula parameters by the Government, the Council had received an extra £54m for children in Worcestershire. In total, when the increases by district councils, the Fire Authority and parish councils were factored in, the Council Tax for a Band D property would increase by £65 per annum
- The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Transformation and Commissioning commented that the budget supported Worcestershire residents, businesses and communities. The investment in Superfast Broadband was particularly welcomed to further improve connectivity in local communities
- The CIPFA report in 2017 had predicted a deficit for this Council of £60.1m by 2021 and yet the Council would break even by the end of the financial year which undermined the report's credibility.

Comments made against the proposed budget included:

- It was important to differentiate between capital and revenue expenditure. Although the additional funding for capital projects was welcomed, this expenditure came out of the revenue budget which was in difficulty. There was a £74m deficit in the budget with no plans to recover the funds. Despite this, there were no plans to increase Council Tax to the governmental recommended level. The Council had not taken into account the concerns about the funding gap associated with Council Tax, Adult Social Care and medium to long term planning set out in the findings of the CIPFA report in 2017
- There had been massive budgetary reductions to the council's domiciliary care services over the last decade. The Chief Officer of Crossroads Worcestershire had stated that the true cost of providing the domiciliary care service outweighed the amount the Council was paying and decisions on the service had been based on finance rather than quality of service. There were huge financial pressures and financial deficits were forecast. Service providers had stated that the Council was

not funding them sufficiently to provide a decent level of service provision. Despite this, the Council was not proposing to take the full amount of the available precept

- It was unclear how the proposed reduced spending on mental health service provision was meant to address the findings of the Health and Well-being Board's needs assessment report produced in November 2020 concerning the impact of the pandemic, particularly on suicide rates, boredom, anxiety, stress, low mood and social isolation.

An amendment was moved by Mrs E B Tucker and seconded by Mrs F M Oborski proposing:

**Amendment: Investing in social care rehabilitation and our social care workers**

Liberal Democrat Group Revenue Budget Amendment Proposals 2021/22	Amendment 1	
	£ million	£ million
<b>Income – additional 0.5% ASC Precept:</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Group proposes that it will raise additional income by further increasing the Adult Social Care Precept to 1.5%, instead of the 1% proposed by Cabinet. The additional income will increase the base budget of Adult Services budget and this will be used in part (£0.250 million) to allow a redistribution of Cabinet's proposed split of the Social Care Grant between Adults and Childrens (see Appendix 1) to spending across Adults and Children's services as set out below.</li> </ul>		-1.4
<b>Expenditure - investment in the following areas:</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Community Reablement provision</b> – whilst the Group understands provision has been made available for continued reablement, we are concerned that more could be needed as the full impact of COVID is realised and instead of the potential need to draw from reserves the Group want to put a recurring increase for this base budget. We also are of the view this will reduce further demand and cost in future years.</li> </ul>	0.9	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Support for Social Workers</b> – our Group recognises the amazing work undertaken by our Adults and Children's Social Workers over the last year in response to the pandemic. We are aware that they have not always been able to get the break they deserve. As such we want to be able to increase the funding for support and ancillary workers to enable those social workers to re-energise and take time out and also if funding allows further</li> </ul>	0.5	

develop opportunities in order that they can continue their fantastic work well into the future. We propose an initial split of 50:50 of the allocation between Adults and Childrens for setting the budget, but delegate to the Director of People and the Chief Executive WCF & Director of Childrens Services (Interim) the final allocation based on their assessment of need.

<b>Net Total Impact 2021/22</b>	<b>1.4</b>	<b>-1.4</b>
<b>Balance / gap</b>		<b>0</b>

The mover and seconder of the amendment then spoke in favour of its adoption; Comments made in support of the amendment included:

- This proposed amendment would save more money than it would cost to implement. An extra Adult Social Care levy of £0.5m was proposed which would add £6.55 per annum to a Band D property Council Tax bill. It would hugely improve the quality of life of covid victims and would recognise the work undertaken by social workers, both in Children's and Adult Social Care. Social workers had given up their leave commitment to dedicate their time to their clients and this funding would enable the provision of support staff to enable them to take their breaks and re-energise, enhance professional development and look after their health and well-being. A further £900k was proposed for the Adult Reablement service providing an extra 330 support packages per annum to enhance covid victims' quality of life and thereby saving the Council money by reducing the cost of their future care packages
- If half of residents who could be supported by this proposed additional funding for the Adult Reablement service remained in their homes then based on an average weekly cost of £650, it would save the Council £5.5m per annum
- The number of Adult and Children's Social Care staff carrying forward over 10 days of annual leave into the next financial year was considerable. In addition, 25% of Adult Social Care staff and 20% of Children's Social Care staff had taken sick leave during the year
- The number of people awaiting operations was predicted to rise to 10m as a result of the impact of covid which would put further pressure on the Adult Social Care service
- This additional funding could be used to employ



full-time social workers rather than agency staff so the team was big enough to allow staff to take their full leave entitlement

- The amendment should be supported although a direct increase in Council Tax rather than to the precept would have allowed the Council more flexibility in terms of the use of these funds.

Members also spoke against the amendment:

- The Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care commented that it was proposed to use the Adult Social Care precept in the next financial year. The treatment of Covid was a matter for the CCGs and the NHS to deal with. The precept was not being taken this year because it was intended to target funding in the most efficient way to benefit service users to address demographic change rather than emergency issues. The amendment anticipated a back-filling of work by agency staff but there was no knowledge of the availability or quality of such staff. In addition, there would be concerns about a lack of continuity in staffing
- The Leader of the Council indicated that this amendment would reduce the flexibility of the Council to use its precept in future years, particularly given the level of uncertainty about funding at present. He acknowledged the work of all staff during the pandemic and the point made about the ability for staff to meet service demands but also taking their leave entitlement in such an exceptional year but that was not a matter for this budget debate. There was a balance to be struck between the financial pressures on the Council and the cost to Council Taxpayers and their ability to pay in very difficult financial circumstances. There were other means to address one-off resource pressures as a result of the pandemic.

At the conclusion of the debate and on a named vote this amendment was lost.

Those in favour of the motion were: Dr C Hotham, Mr M E Jenkins, Mrs F M Oborski, Prof J W Raine, Mrs M A Rayner, Mrs E B Tucker, Mr T A L Wells. (7)

Those against the motion were: Mr A A J Adams, Mr R C Adams, Mr A T Amos, Mr T Baker-Price, Mr R W Banks, Mrs J A Brunner, Mr B Clayton, Mr K Daisley, Mr N Desmond, Mrs E A Eyre, Mr S E Geraghty, Mr I D Hardiman, Mr A I Hardman, Mr P B Harrison, Mr M J

Hart, Mrs A T Hingley, Mrs L C Hodgson, Dr A J Hopkins, Mr A D Kent, Mr S M Mackay, Ms K J May, Mr P Middlebrough, Mr A P Miller, Mr R J Morris, Mr J A D O'Donnell, Ms T L Onslow, Dr K A Pollock, Mrs J A Potter, Mr A C Roberts, Mr C Rogers, Mr J H Smith, Mr A Stafford, Mr C B Taylor, Mr P A Tuthill, Ms R Vale, Ms S A Webb. (36)

Those abstaining were: Ms P Agar, Mr P Denham, Mr A Fry, Mr R C Lunn, Mr P M McDonald, Mr L C R Mallett, Ms C M Stalker, Mr R M Udall (8)

A constitutional amendment was then moved by Mr R C Lunn and seconded by Mr L C R Mallett proposing:

*“This Council calls on the government to fund the equivalent of a 1.5% increase in Council Tax and a 2% increase in Adult Social Care costs for Worcestershire from central funds.”*

The mover and seconder of the amendment then spoke in favour of its adoption; Comments made in support of the amendment included:

- In these exceptional circumstances, it was not right that local Council Taxpayers should be asked to pay more. The costs of the pandemic should be met from central taxation which more fairly reflected an individual's ability to pay. Any increase in the rate of Council Tax was in effect a covid tax. The growing burden of Adult Social Care was a national issue and the cost was being placed on local Council Taxpayers as a result of the Government's failure to resolve it
- The Government had removed subsidies to local councils and considering the amount of money wasted by the Government during the pandemic, it could afford to provide additional local funding for services impacted by the pandemic
- The Council was proposing to increase Council Tax at a time that many of the most vulnerable people in the country were struggling financially as a result of the pandemic
- A national solution to fairer funding was even more urgent in the current circumstances. It was clear that the Administration's attempts to lobby the Government for fairer funding had failed. If every local council sought this additional funding, it might bring about a national solution to the funding crisis.

Members also spoke against the amendment:

- The amendment was unnecessary as the Council had and would continue to lobby the Government for fairer funding. To ask the Government to fund this Council's Council Tax increase was fanciful and if all councils took the same approach, the total governmental spend would be immense
- It was difficult to justify to local residents that there was a difference between local and national taxation as both took money from their pockets. Local taxation determined by locally elected councillors was preferable to national taxation
- The Leader of the Council commented that the Council had received the final financial settlement from the Government and there was no further opportunity to change it so the Council's base budget was now set. This amendment would not freeze Council Tax for this financial year. This amendment was about lobbying the Government and in that respect it was unambitious in its demands. This amendment did not allow for any additional funding within the budget. It failed to recognise the additional funding that the Council had received from the Government. There was a danger in the future that the role of local government would become an agent of central government. This amendment was not about Adult Social Care funding or the pandemic but about local taxation versus national taxation.

The Chairman advised that as the amendment was not an amendment to the budget, it did not require a named vote. However, he had received the requisite number of requests for a named vote to be held on this amendment in advance of the meeting.

At the conclusion of the debate and on a named vote this amendment was lost.

Those in favour of the motion were: Ms P Agar, Mr P Denham, Mr A Fry, Mr R C Lunn, Mr P M McDonald, Mr L C R Mallett, Mrs F M Oborski, Ms C M Stalker, Mrs E B Tucker, Mr R M Udall (10)

Those against the motion were: Mr A A J Adams, Mr R C Adams, Mr A T Amos, Mr T Baker-Price, Mr R W Banks, Mr R M Bennett, Mrs J A Brunner, Mr B Clayton, Mr K Daisley, Mr N Desmond, Mrs E A Eyre, Mr S E Geraghty, Mr I D Hardiman, Mr A I Hardman, Mr P B Harrison, Mr M J Hart, Mrs A T Hingley, Mrs L C Hodgson, Dr A J

Hopkins, Mr A D Kent, Mr S M Mackay, Ms K J May, Mr P Middlebrough, Mr A P Miller, Mr R J Morris, Mr J A D O'Donnell, Ms T L Onslow, Dr K A Pollock, Mrs J A Potter, Mr A C Roberts, Mr C Rogers, Mr A Stafford, Mr C B Taylor, Mr P A Tuthill, Ms R Vale, Ms S A Webb. (36)

Those abstaining were: Dr C Hotham, Mr M E Jenkins, Prof J W Raine, Mrs M A Rayner, Mr T A L Wells (5)

In debating the budget as originally moved and seconded the following points were raised:

Comments made in support of the proposed budget included:

- The Leader of the Council commented that this was a balanced and sustainable budget which met the Council's priority aims with one of the lowest Council Tax increases in the region. He acknowledged that there were gaps in future funding but pointed at the controlling group's record at resolving these issues whilst improving services. It was important for this Council to lobby Government not only in respect of fairer funding but also for demand-led services such as Adult Social Care. That was a debate for the future, not this year's budget. Despite this being one of the toughest years for the Council, an underspend was proposed in the budget.

Comments made against the proposed budget included:

- There was a £75m funding gap (£32m in 2022/23 and £43m in 2023/24) in the budget from 2022-24 and it was queried how the deficit would be covered, what services would be cut, the size of the Council Tax increase next year and the year after. There was a lack of investment in school buildings, youth service, and the promotion of cycling. It was queried why an increase in the Adult Social Care Precept of 2% was not proposed given the confidence expressed in the Government finding a solution to the funding crisis. The proposed 1% increase was not sufficient. The budget did nothing to tackle climate change or narrow the pay gap with neighbouring councils
- There needed to be more regard to green and climate change issues such as Active Travel in the budget
- The controlling group had placed a lower priority

on the lives of vulnerable people whilst boasting about a low Council Tax rise. It should be noted that a large amount of the savings made had been achieved through technical changes to accounting practices.

**On a named vote RESOLVED that:**

- a) **the budget requirement for 2021/22 be approved at £355.531 million as set out at Appendix 1B, having regard to the proposed Transformation and Reforms programme set out in section 9 of the report;**
  
- b) **the Council Tax Band D equivalent for 2021/22 be set at £1,343.83 which includes £129.15 relating to the ring-fenced Adult Social Care precept, and the Council Tax Requirement be set at £285.219 million, which will increase the Council Tax Precept by 2.50% in relation to two parts:**
  - **1.50% to provide financial support for the delivery of outcomes in line with the Corporate Plan 'Shaping Worcestershire's Future' and the priorities identified by the public and business community**
  
  - **1.00% Adult Social Care Precept ring-fenced for Adult Social Care services in order to contribute to existing cost pressures due to Worcestershire's ageing population;**
  
- c) **The Capital Strategy 2021-24 and Capital Programme of £391.654 million be approved as set out at Appendix 1C and 1D and Section 8 of the report;**
  
- d) **The earmarked reserves schedule as set out at Appendix 2 be approved;**
  
- e) **The Treasury Management Strategy and Prudential Indicators set out at Appendix 4 be approved; and**
  
- f) **the Council's Pay Policy Statement set out at Appendix 5 be approved.**

Those in favour of the motion were: Mr A A J Adams, Mr R C Adams, Mr A T Amos, Mr T Baker-Price, Mr R W Banks, Mr R M Bennett, Mrs J A Brunner, Mr B Clayton, Mr K Daisley, Mr N Desmond, Mrs E A Eyre, Mr S E Geraghty, Mr I D Hardiman, Mr A I Hardman, Mr P B Harrison, Mr M J Hart, Mrs A T Hingley, Mrs L C Hodgson, Dr A J Hopkins, Mr A D Kent, Mr S M Mackay, Ms K J May, Mr P Middlebrough, Mr A P Miller, Mr R J Morris, Mr J A D O'Donnell, Ms T L Onslow, Dr K A Pollock, Mrs J A Potter, Mr A C Roberts, Mr C Rogers, Mr A Stafford, Mr C B Taylor, Mr P A Tuthill, Ms R Vale, Ms S A Webb. (36)

Those against the motion were: Mr M E Jenkins, Mrs F M Oborski, Mrs E B Tucker (3)

Those abstaining were: Ms P Agar, Mr P Denham, Mr A Fry, Dr C Hotham, Mr R C Lunn, Mr P M McDonald, Prof J W Raine, Mrs M A Rayner, Ms C M Stalker, Mr R M Udall, Mr T A L Wells (11)

**2260 Reports of Cabinet - Summary of decisions taken (Agenda item 5)**

The Leader of the Council reported the following topics and questions were answered on them:

- Annual Update to the School Organisation Plan and Recommendation for Provision in Worcester
- School Admission Arrangements for Community and Voluntary Controlled Schools for 2022/23, Co-ordinated Admission Schemes 2022/23 and Published Admission Number Changes for 2022/23
- A Review of Day Opportunities for Adults with Learning Disabilities
- Scrutiny Report: The Council's Energy Purchasing Arrangements
- Corporate Landlord and Facilities Management Delivery Model.

**2261 Report of the Cabinet Member with Responsibility - Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Highways (Agenda item 6)**

The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Highways presented his report to Council which covered various topics.

The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Highways answered a broad range of questions from members.

The Chairman thanked the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Highways for his report

**2262 Notices of Motion - Notice of Motion 1 - Superfast Broadband (Agenda item 7)**

The Council had before it a Notice of Motion set out in the agenda papers standing in the names of Mr A D Kent, Mr J A D O'Donnell, Mr S J Mackay, Mrs L C Hodgson, Mr J H Smith, Mr R J Morris, Mrs K J May and Dr A J Hopkins.

The motion was moved by Mr A D Kent and seconded by Mr J A D O'Donnell who both spoke in favour of it, and Council agreed to deal with it on the day.

In the ensuing debate, the following points were raised:

- Significant progress had been made over a number of year so that currently 97.3% of residents and 90% of businesses had access to Superfast Broadband. The Council's foresight had meant that many residents in Worcestershire had been able to work from home during the pandemic. However, this should not be the extent of the Council's ambition and with the support of the Government, the aspiration should be for every household to have a gigabyte connection speed
- Broadband connectivity impacted on all residents in the county. In particular, the impact on home-schooling, home-teaching, doctors' appointments, entertainment, the democratic process and the social interaction could not be under-estimated during this pandemic. The strive for improvement meant that the Council was looking forward in terms of how technology could improve people's lives in the future
- Although the introduction of Superfast Broadband was welcomed, there was a significant number of families who could not afford it or did not have the necessary equipment and this was impacting on the education of vulnerable children
- A lot of good work had taken place to provide support to schools and children to access Superfast Broadband as well as for Council members and staff
- Superfast broadband was vital for families with multiple users within the family home
- Members of the Council had a leadership role in providing support to local residents through the Superfast Broadband project and members were encouraged to look at gov.uk as a means of providing support for community-led projects
- The Cabinet Member for Infrastructure and Economy commented that he would ensure that a full report was brought to Council in the near

future on Superfast Broadband. There were many ways to achieve the target speed of one gigabyte whether through the gap funded projects, the gigabyte vouchers or commercial developments. This Council had targeted support at local businesses as well as residents. £2.7m had been spent on 3k premises over the last 18 months. Grants had been made available to residents and businesses. The Council was one of the top five councils in the country for its performance in this area. Another £1m was committed in the next financial year. There were difficulties but the Council was fully committed to supporting the project working with the Government and commercial partners. He thanked members and officers for their contribution

- Although there remained a small number of outlying areas where coverage was limited, the overall response to Superfast Broadband from local communities was very positive
- Superfast Broadband was a vital means of help for people receiving home care support
- It was important to provide support for farmers, particularly in outlying areas because Superfast Broadband was vital to the ways of working agricultural sector
- The review needed to address the circumstances where individual properties had connectivity problems despite the overall coverage in their locality being good
- It was queried whether the Council was lobbying the Government to enable council meetings to continue online
- The Cabinet Member for Transformation and Commissioning commented that Superfast Broadband project had been particularly vital during the pandemic with the increased requests for members of the community to respond to requests for information online
- The Cabinet Member for Education and Skills commented that a thousand laptops had been allocated to vulnerable learners and the Government had extended the criteria for the assessment of a vulnerable learner
- The ability to hold council meetings online had saved time, money and had had a positive impact on the environment.

**RESOLVED** “Council recognises that Superfast Broadband has become far more than an aspiration



**2263 Notices of Motion - Notice of Motion 2 - Bus Franchising (Agenda item 7)**

and has following recent events become extremely important for the residents of Worcestershire, particularly bearing in mind the needs of those involved in home schooling.

Recently the qualifying speed for the Rural Gigabit Connectivity Programme has been increased to 100Mbps, opening up even more areas that qualify to receive broadband vouchers to support the cost of gigabit-capable connections. Council therefore requests that the Cabinet Member responsible brings a report to Council on progress to date and future goals and aspirations.”

The Council had before it a Notice of Motion set out in the agenda papers standing in the names of Mr R C Lunn, Ms C M Stalker, Ms P Agar, Mr L C R Mallett, Mr P Denham and Mr R Udall.

The motion was moved by Mr P Denham and seconded by Mr R C Lunn who both spoke in favour of it, and Council agreed to deal with it on the day.

Those in favour of the motion made the following points:

- The bus network was a vital service for isolated residents without access to cars. Bus services made a vital contribution to the economy and climate change. The reduction in Government funding over a number of years had resulted in a patchwork service provision. Increased funding and better co-ordination was necessary and this could be achieved by applying to Government to introduce a franchising model in Worcestershire. This would allow the Council to provide a quality comprehensive service in the county. The franchising model had proved successful in London and would allow the Council to dictate the quality and standard of the service including timetables, ticketing arrangements, types of buses used and information availability. It would allow a more strategic approach focusing services where they were most needed rather than where the best commercial opportunity was
- The current bus service provision in Worcestershire was fragmented and failing. The Franchising model would provide better value for money with the Council rather than the operator receiving direct funding from the Government
- Bus services should be available to local residents to get to work and link to with train services

- The benefits of deregulation had not materialised as bus services were expensive, slow and unreliable. There was poor coverage and a lack of competition. The Council had been subsidising private bus companies whilst having little control over their actions. Jersey had introduced a franchising model which had improved services, increased customer satisfaction and reduced subsidy costs. Their approach proved that franchising model could work outside big cities and was worth pursuing with the Government
- The level of bus patronage had a significant effect on the council's carbon footprint. There was a high level of customer dissatisfaction with the level of bus service provision. At least the bus franchising model was an attempt to solve this problem
- If bus service provision was made affordable then bus patronage would increase. Buses in Worcestershire were too expensive, too infrequent and did not take people where they wanted to go.

Those against the motion made the following points:

- It was impossible to consider that bus provision could be made available to everyone. There were very few examples where public sector provision was better than private sector provision. If service provision was poor, it was a result of low demand. The Mayor of London had requested a 9% increase in Council Tax to help subsidise the bus franchise model in London
- The Cabinet Member for Highways commented that the Passenger Transport Strategy included proposals for demand-responsive community transport. The budget included an extra £750k of additional funding to subsidise bus routes together with additional funding for improvements to bus infrastructure. The Council was constantly looking to improve service provision. Buses were the main and only alternative to the car. The Bus Services Act 2017 provided the option of the bus franchising model, primarily intended for mayoral authorities and predominately provided in urban areas with well-defined and viable commercial networks. No shire county had shown interest in this model and no local authority had implemented it. There were only a few services in Worcestershire that would be deemed sufficiently commercially viable to support a franchise model. The appetite for commercial operators to compete for a franchise in the county would be very low. An

**2264 Notices of Motion - Notice of Motion 3 - Commonwealth and veterans support (Agenda item 7)**

application for a franchising model would destabilise an already fragile bus operating model. To put together a case for a franchising model would be expensive with uncertain benefits for a rural county and significant disadvantages

- For a bus franchising model to be successful, it would need a high level of patronage and this was not the case in Worcestershire.

**On being put to the vote, the motion was lost.**

The Council had before it a Notice of Motion set out in the agenda papers standing in the names of Mr R C Lunn, Ms C M Stalker, Ms P Agar, Mr P M McDonald, Mr L C R Mallett, Mr P Denham and Mr R Udall.

The motion was moved by Mr R C Lunn and seconded by Ms P Agar who both spoke in favour of it, and Council agreed to deal with it on the day.

The following amendment had been proposed and was accepted as an alteration by the mover and seconder of the motion which therefore became the substantive motion:

*“Mindful of this Council’s commitment to the Armed Services Covenant Partnership, we call upon the Council to make their Armed Forces Champions and lead officers aware of the difficulties experienced by Commonwealth veterans and ensure that those who are currently experiencing problems, whether financial or immigration difficulties, are not disadvantaged whilst their applications are ongoing.*

*We welcome the Commonwealth Visa Fees Campaign being organised by the British Legion and support the Armed Forces Bill going through Parliament. Through the Armed Forces Partnership there is support for all Commonwealth veterans who have served a minimum of 4 years to be granted the automatic, free of charge right to remain in the UK and that any veteran who completes 12 years of service to be automatically given British Citizenship.*

*We call upon our Armed Forces Champions to lobby their MPs to ask that they continue to press the government for a change in the legislation that affects those who have served diligently and honourably for this Country.”*

In the ensuing debate, the following points were made:

- This motion was concerned with Commonwealth armed forces veterans who had not been properly advised when they left the service. They faced costs of approximately £2k per family member to apply for indefinite leave to remain the UK and did not receive any financial assistance. Approximately 500 veterans per annum were faced with this challenge. This Council was committed to the Armed Forces Covenant and therefore supporting veterans' rights. The legislation needed to be amended to ensure that veterans were treated fairly
- These veterans had given a lot to the country with consequences for the physical and mental health. There was therefore a morale principle to provide an automatic right to remain in the UK free of charge
- The armed forces relied on the support of Commonwealth citizens serving alongside UK servicemen/women to achieve its targets
- It was important that reference in the motion was made to the British Legion campaign and the Armed Forces Bill. Partnership working with a number of different agencies was key to supporting the rights of veterans. The Armed Forces Champion could play a major role in the lobbying process and enable a speedy response
- The county's Armed Forces Champions had already worked well together to achieve success particularly in relation to housing policy and mental health support for veterans
- The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Communities commented that it was important that the British Legion lead on this campaign and the Council was keen to support them. The Armed Forces Covenant partnership with the support of the Armed Forces Champions had been successful in supporting local initiatives. The Armed Forces Champions were the appropriate representatives to lobby MPs because they understood the issues.

**RESOLVED** “Mindful of this Council’s commitment to the Armed Services Covenant Partnership, we call upon the Council to make their Armed Forces Champions and lead officers aware of the difficulties experienced by Commonwealth veterans and ensure that those who are currently experiencing problems, whether financial or immigration difficulties, are not disadvantaged whilst their applications are ongoing.

**We welcome the Commonwealth Visa Fees Campaign being organised by the British Legion and support the Armed Forces Bill going through Parliament. Through the Armed Forces Partnership there is support for all Commonwealth veterans who have served a minimum of 4 years to be granted the automatic, free of charge right to remain in the UK and that any veteran who completes 12 years of service to be automatically given British Citizenship.**

**We call upon our Armed Forces Champions to lobby their MPs to ask that they continue to press the government for a change in the legislation that affects those who have served diligently and honourably for this Country.”**

**2265 Question Time  
(Agenda item 8)**

Four questions had been received by the Assistant Director for Legal and Governance and had been circulated in advance of the meeting. The answers to all the questions are attached in the Appendix.

**2266 Reports of  
Committees -  
Pensions  
Committee  
(Agenda item 9)**

The Council received the report of the Pensions Committee containing a summary of the decisions taken.

**2267 Reports of  
Committees -  
Planning and  
Regulatory  
Committee  
(Agenda item 9)**

The Chairman of the Committee introduced the report and commented that as part of the consideration of the application for the proposed roundabout at A38 / A4104 junction, the Committee agreed to add a condition to establish a community liaison group which would help inform the local community through the construction phase.

The Council received the report of the Planning and Regulatory Committee containing a summary of the decisions taken.

**2268 Reports of  
Committees -  
Standards and  
Ethics  
Committee  
(Agenda item 9)**

The Chairman of the Committee introduced the report and reported that the Council had received 9 formal complaints in 2018.

The Council received the report of the Standards and Ethics Committee containing a summary of the decisions taken.

The meeting was adjourned from 12.40pm to 1.30 pm and ended at 4.05pm.

Chairman .....

### COUNCIL 18 FEBRUARY 2021 - AGENDA ITEM 8 – QUESTION TIME

*Questions and written responses provided below.*

**QUESTION 1** – Mr F M Oborski asked Alan Amos:

*“All too frequently there are traffic collisions at the traffic lights at the A449/A448 crossroads outside King Charles 1 School Kidderminster. The accidents occur when vehicles coming up the A449 Chester Road South seeking to turn right onto the A448 towards Bromsgrove collide with vehicles coming straight down the A449. Collisions occur because there is no “Right turn only” phase at those lights. Please can the decision to refuse to allow the installation of a right turn phase for traffic coming up from Hoobrook be reconsidered?”*

#### **Answer**

I thank Cllr Oborski for her question regarding the traffic lights at the A449/A448 junction, Kidderminster.

The introduction of a right turn filter on these lights was considered in 2014 as a proposed safety improvement. The traffic signal modelling showed a very high increase in AM peak delay per vehicle: 170% on Chester Road North and 194% on Comberton Road West. There are also significant increases in delay on other arms and during the PM peak, at 20-30%, not as dramatic.

Due to the impact on congestion and delay, the recommendation is not to implement a right turn filter. The manoeuvre in question does have road markings and a STOP line mid junction to remind right turn drivers they must give way. The introduction of very long delays such as those modelled do have safety consequences, with drivers becoming frustrated and then more likely to run a red light. As the implementation of a right turn filter requires a signal remodel at a cost of around £12,000, such a proposal is not recommended as a trial. However, I would stress that it is the negative impact on both congestion and safety, rather than cost, that is the main determining factor here.

There have been 2 casualty accidents recorded for the last 3 years 01/01/2018-31/12/20:

1. A vehicle ran a red light colliding with a vehicle mid junction; and
2. A right turn collision on the A448 Comberton Hill (West) turning into A449 Chester Rd (South)

Of course, I am happy to reconsider the matter if Cllr Oborski can give me some new compelling information which would affect this analysis.

#### **Supplementary question**

The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Highways undertook to meet Fran Oborski and Tracy Onslow on site, when it was safe to do so, to look at the issues associated with the A449/A448 crossroads, Kidderminster.

**QUESTION 2** – Mrs J A Brunner asked Alan Amos:

*“Does the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Highways agree with me that replacing the old sodium lights with LED is good for the environment? Furthermore, can he tell this council how many LED columns have been installed since 2017 in:*

- i. Arrow Valley East.
- ii. Redditch.
- iii. Worcestershire.”

## Answer

LED (light-emitting diodes) have many benefits over the existing non-LED lamp sources, ranging from their longevity to their durability. Some of these benefits include:

- LED lights depreciate at a much slower rate than other alternative lamp sources;
- They are light-emitting diodes so they do not have filaments or burn out quickly, and have extremely long lives;
- They contain no toxic chemicals, unlike the sodium lamps that they are replacing;
- Reduced maintenance costs as they do not require regular bulk lamp changes as previous lamp sources required;
- The long life of the LEDs, particularly in areas where it is difficult for our street lighting contractor to access, such as divorced footpaths, will be hugely beneficial when these locations are converted;
- LED lanterns do not produce a lot of heat;
- They use significantly less energy and this is reducing the County Councils' overall energy consumption and carbon footprint;
- The light control of the modern LED lanterns being fitted is excellent and results in minimal light spill on to nearby properties and into the night sky;
- Much improved colour rendering as compared to sodium lighting;
- They are available in a range of different colours to suit a range of environments including a number of different “white” colour temperatures i.e. cool, neutral or warm. Red LEDs have been installed in areas where there are known populations of bats which are averse to white light sources so there can also be important ecological advantages by changing to LED.

**As for how many LED columns have been installed since 2017, I can confirm the following:**

- i. Arrow Valley East - We do not hold data by Division, but by town
- ii. Redditch - The latest figures show that we have installed 4,268 LED lanterns in Redditch, out of a total of approx. 9600 street lights.
- iii. Worcestershire - The roll-out of LEDs continues throughout the County, the latest total is 24,992.

**QUESTION 3** – Mr R C Lunn asked Simon Geraghty:

*"As this is the last meeting of the 2017 to 2021 Council, can the Leader tell us what his greatest regret is during that period?"*

## Answer

Firstly, can I thank Robin for his question. Looking back over this Council term I had anticipated we would have been able to make more progress in securing a national long term funding solution for Adult Social Care. As colleagues know protecting the most vulnerable in society is key priority of this Council and we have invested considerable sums over the lifetime of this Council to ensure we can meet this demand led service, now spending some 40% of our net budget on Adult Social Care. However, through the County Council Network we will continue to press this issue and I hope post Covid that this will be addressed by Government.



### Supplementary question

In response to a query about the Government's response to funding issues associated with Adult Social Care, the Leader commented that Adult Social Care and its inter-relationship with health in terms of funding and eligibility was a complex matter. This Council would wish to see a long term funding solution for Adult Social Care and the Government was being lobbied through the CCN accordingly. He hoped to see progress in the next term of the Council.

### **QUESTION 4** – Mrs F M Oborski asked Andy Roberts:

*"There have been a lot of reports nationally about a rise in children and young people coming into Care during Covid and a shortage of Foster Carers. Could the Cabinet Member tell me what, if any implications there are for Worcestershire County Council and Worcestershire Children First?"*

### **Answer**

Thank you for the question.

Some of the statistics surrounding the pandemic are confusing.

Nationally the first three months of 2020 saw numbers coming in to care drop by 6% but there was also a 10% decrease of children leaving care. Since then The Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS) are reporting increases across children services but, as yet, actual data hasn't been released.

By August the Research by the Women's Resource Centre found more babies were being taken into care. It was said that this was because of rising economic problems and a surge in cases of domestic abuse during the pandemic. Barnardo's cited a 44 per cent rise in demand for foster parents, while people looking to become foster parents halved.

ADCS (I think a very credible source) can see 'no evidence to suggest that levels of need will reduce'. It predicted more:

- Referrals to children's social care
- Children in need
- Section 47 enquiries (where a child comes into care because it is suspected to be suffering or at risk)
- Children subject to a child protection plan
- Children looked after

The ADCS [this is significant to the question] said demand will depend on 'the ability to stabilise and re-build early help, maintain strong leadership and system-wide approaches'.

*Councillor Oborski will recognise this is what we have been doing for the last three years (in fact as the chair of scrutiny she has been part of the process).*

For the benefit of all corporate parents I will give an outline of the local picture:

First children coming into care.

We have lower rates of children coming into care. This year (to date) we have received 135 new entrants, compared to 159 for the same period last year - so we have not seen an excessive demand for care during the pandemic.

However, we have seen a change in the ages of children coming into care. Our new starters reflect the national increase in care for babies (birth – 2yrs). At quarter three last year they comprised 29% care entrants, but this has risen to 39% this year.

The change for children coming into care aged over 11 was far less dramatic, 38% this year compared to 36%.

The numbers for our Section 20 young people (where children come into care with parental agreement) were significant. They are at a stable 12%, a low figure compared to our statistical neighbours' average of 21%.

Less within our control is the rise in Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children. Based on quarter three this rose from 5% of the total in 19/20 to 12% in 20/21.

Turning to children leaving care.

We have a slightly better than average performance against our statistical neighbours for children leaving care, at 19.8 per 10k compared to our statistical neighbours at 18.7.

So, our number of children in care (presently 846 at February 2021) continues to rise and we remain above statistical neighbours and England averages. However, from the data it can be seen that because of the impacts of our 'edge of care and permanency planning' there are fewer children coming into care and more leaving. So, the gap should decrease.

I feel the data provides an early but tangible sign of the success of our 'Strengthening Families First' strategy. It won't be lost on councillors that Tina Russell, who is taking over the role of Director of Children's Services, has been at the forefront of its introduction. I should also mention this is complimented by the 'Troubled Families' Programme.

With an effective model, support from the budget and the contingency for additional care costs agreed today we have resilience. In the future we will not be able to avoid the pressures outlined by the ADCS or the Covid-19 aftermaths and the future of Troubled Families is uncertain, so there is a need for vigilance and no room for complacency.

**QUESTION 5** – Mr R J Morris asked Alan Amos:

"Could the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Highways please advise on progress of the pedestrian crossing at Westland's roundabout in Droitwich please and the timeframes involved."

**Answer**

I thank Cllr Morris for his question and for his determination in pursuing this very important scheme with me.

An Options Assessment Report for the Westlands junction in Droitwich was completed in 2020 which considered different options for pedestrian crossings at Westlands Roundabout.

Several options were considered, all of which proposed pedestrian improvements via the use of toucan crossings, additional footways and / or signalisation of certain roundabout arms. The indicative cost of a scheme involving the provision of two toucan crossings, improvements to and upgrading of the footway to 3m shared width, lighting and drainage is approximately £465 000. This costing is an estimate only at this stage and would be confirmed as the scheme develops.

Options have been explored for funding a scheme, including existing funds such as the Worcestershire Network Efficiency Programme. However, as the roundabout does not experience congestion this funding is not available, so alternative sources of funding from local development will have to be sought.

The South Worcestershire Development Plan is currently being reviewed, with final sites selection subject to confirmation. I'm pleased to say that there are three proposed employment land allocations which could be linked to a scheme on the Westlands roundabout as an enhanced pedestrian route between the employment sites, residential areas and the town centre. (Two are new allocations and one is a reallocation from the current SWDP.) This will be linked to the transport modelling for the SWDP review which the County Council's consultants are currently carrying out to enable a Westland's scheme to be included within the SWDP review Infrastructure Delivery Plan. The SWDP2 is timetabled for adoption in 2023.

At the same time, other potential sources of funding will also be explored, and the Westlands scheme included in future delivery plans for other relevant documents as these are refreshed.

#### Supplementary question

In response to a query, the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Highways indicated that every possible source of available funding including Active Travel would be considered to progress the pedestrian crossing at the Westlands roundabout.

This page is intentionally left blank