

Cabinet**Thursday, 7 January 2021, Online only,
10.00 am****Minutes****Present:**

Mr S E Geraghty (Chairman), Mr A T Amos,
Mr A I Hardman, Mr M J Hart, Mrs L C Hodgson,
Ms K J May, Mr A P Miller, Dr K A Pollock,
Mr A C Roberts and Mr J H Smith

Also attended:

Mrs E A Eyre, Mrs F M Oborski, Mrs M A Rayner,
Mrs E B Tucker and Mr R M Udall

**2014 Apologies and
Declarations of
Interest**

None

**2015 Public
Participation**

There were six public participants:

1. Janice Bell asked a question about how the Council's £10 million cutting congestion programme would be compatible with the Government's commitment to cut carbon gasses, how much consideration had been given to encouraging alternative transport and how the Council would ensure that climate change was central to all decisions that were made in all areas of the budget?
2. Alan Spencer asked that following the announcement that combustion engine vehicles would be banned by 2030, did the Council have a plan for the upgrade of homes, commercial and council locations to include vehicle charging points?
3. Rosemary Wormington commented that she was shocked that the budget report made no mention of climate change and asked how the Council would urgently address the greenhouse gas emission reductions for the whole of Worcestershire, not just its direct services, as she felt it was the Council's duty to take a leadership role in guiding businesses and residents towards zero carbon emissions.
4. Dr Johnny Birks also pointed out that the budget report did not mention climate change and asked

if the Council – in drafting its budget and financial plan –recognised its duty to protect Worcestershire’s residents and businesses against the impacts of climate change that would dwarf those of the Covid pandemic?

5. Susan Porter asked how the funding that the Council had received for active travel would impact on climate change targets and reduce traffic, pollution and carbon emissions?

6. Philip Oliver did not join the meeting but his question about tree planting would be answered by the relevant Cabinet Member.

2016 Confirmation of the Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 10 December 2020, were agreed to be a correct record of the meeting and would be signed by the Chairman.

2017 Budget and Council Tax 2021/22

The Leader, also the Cabinet Member with responsibility for finance, introduced the report. He highlighted that the report was the draft budget upon which views and comments would be sought. The budget would return to Cabinet and then Council in February. The draft was being presented later than normal due to Covid and the fact that funding information from the Government had not been available.

It was pleasing that the budget being proposed was a balanced budget and it supported vulnerable people with increased investment in adult’s and children’s services which was needed as they were demand led services.

The most recent Viewpoint Survey had shown that satisfaction with the Council had risen and satisfaction in Worcestershire as a place to live had increased. The public’s priorities remained good roads, a reduction in congestion and improved public transport; this was being addressed with £10 million to cut congestion, £6 million investment in roads, £4 million in pavements as well as flood mitigation work and investment in street lighting. This contributed to the Council’s climate commitment and supported economic recovery.

With regard to Council tax it was recognised that there needed to be a balance between paying for Council services and financial pressures on Worcestershire residents. The proposed 2.5% increase equated to a 68p a week increase for a Band D property, which meant

Worcestershire remained in the lowest 25% of Local Authority Council tax rates.

Cabinet Members made the following contributions:

- The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Adult Services explained that due to the current situation with Covid, the review of future funding of Adult Social Care and the new Local Government Finance System had not happened and Local Authorities had only received a one year settlement. There was not a clear way forward but he praised the government for telling Local Authorities to spend what was needed with regard to dealing with Covid and the Government had met the costs. The Council had £11.3 million of cost pressures but was still internally reforming and working to provide services as efficiently as possible. He felt the proposed budget provided stability. He also welcomed the £1.5 million for flooding mitigation.
- The Cabinet Member for Children and Families supported the proposed budget with £7.7 million to deal with pressures in children's services such as home to school transport and an extra £4.2 million to help vulnerable children to be kept safe and £2.6m million for accommodation. A contingency amount would be available to help deal with the wide variance of cost which was needed for specialist care. Following improvements in Children's Services, the Council continued work to strengthen families which was in the best interests of the children and meant that the number of children entering care in Worcestershire was lower than in its statistical neighbours. He felt incredible progress had been made due to work by Catherine Driscoll and Tina Russell and their staff, but there was no room for complacency and more work was required. He recognised that Covid could be causing further problems in the future.
- Andy Roberts also wished to mention the sad passing of Pattie Hill who will be missed.
- The Cabinet Member for Education and Skills explained that the Dedicated Schools Grant had increased substantially and resulted in additional cash for pupils. Lobbying of Government would continue, as although Worcestershire had

received more funding so had other authorities, which meant that Worcestershire was still one of the lowest funded areas in the country. There had been an overspend on special educational needs last year and it remained important that the Government tackle this issue for the long term. There was more money for home to school transport, Early Help and placements. He thanked schools in Worcestershire for remaining open for vulnerable children and children of key workers and it was recognised that all other teachers were now working hard from home. The Cabinet Member thanked Gavin Williamson for making an early announcement that there would be no GCSE and A Level exams in 2021 and teacher assessments would be used instead. In general, he felt the increase in Council tax was being kept under control and the investment in footways would allow more people to walk safely and help climate concerns.

- The Cabinet Member for Highways thanked Highways and Ringway staff for keeping the network open during the floods, snow and Covid. It was important to keep roads open to help support jobs and prosperity. Worcestershire's target to keep the quality of the County's roads in the top 25% of road quality had already been met. Congestion, along with the quality of roads and footways, were the top concerns for residents so the increased money spent on roads, footways, lighting, drainage and congestion schemes were welcomed. The passenger transport strategy was working to expand the bus and community transport network and subsidies from the Council for bus companies were important as buses were the main alternative to car use. Members would receive a third year of funding for the Capital Highways Fund which also contributed important improvements to the network.
- The Cabinet Member for the Economy and Infrastructure felt that it was impressive that this was a balanced budget. He highlighted the large amount of investment which showed that work continued during the pandemic as indicated by the town centre improvements and the major congestion schemes which were being completed. Local businesses were being helped and although superfast broadband was not available in all the rural parts of the County the Council would

continue to invest in the technology.

- The Cabinet Member for Communities praised the investment in I.T. and the staff from libraries and Public Health who had helped with the Here 2 Help scheme. She recognised that efficiencies still needed to be sought but welcomed the capital funding for highways and infrastructure as well as the on-going funding for the Malvern Science Park and the active travel corridor between Worcester and the Three Counties Showground.
- The Cabinet Member for Health and Well-being felt that it was a well thought out budget and acknowledged the support received from the government. He thought the 1% increase for social care was critical due to the demands in that area. He thanked the Directors of Public Health and People for their sterling work during the Covid pandemic.
- The Cabinet Member for the Environment explained that the Sustainability Team was working to decrease the carbon footprint of the Council and the County and all projects which were being planned had to complete a Joint Impact Assessment. Actions so far included replacing existing highways lights with LED which meant a reduction in the amount of energy used, as well as reducing maintenance which in turn reduced congestion and therefore the impact on the environment. The Government had announced the Green Recovery Fund which would provide £80 million of investment and 50,000 jobs in that area by 2030. Drainage schemes were also mentioned such as the contribution being made to the Environment Agency Scheme in Bewdley.
- The Cabinet Member for Transformation and Commissioning mentioned the work of the Commercial and Commissioning staff who were helping with Covid-19 testing and vaccinations and were ensuring Council buildings were safe and that services could continue online.
- The Chairman noted that the resources deployed behind the scenes were necessary to developing new ways of working and mentioned the £80 million received from Government, with more

promised, for the next financial year. The proposed balanced budget was an achievement due to work from the whole organisation.

RESOLVED that Cabinet:

- (a) approved for consultation the draft budget of £355.530 million as set out at Appendix 1B to the report;**
- (b) approved for consultation the capital programme of £382.3 million as set out at Appendix 1C to the report;**
- (c) approved for consultation an earmarked reserves schedule as set out at Appendix 2 to the report; and**
- (d) agreed that it is minded to recommend to Council in February 2021 an increase in Council Tax Precept of 1.5% and in the Adult Social Care Levy by 1.0%.**

The meeting ended at 11.13am

Chairman