

COUNCIL

20th February 2024

Present: The Mayor, Councillor Louis Stephen, in the Chair

Councillors Agar, Ali, Allcott, Altaf, Amos, Bisset, Cleary, Cockeram, Collier, Cookson, Cooper, Cross, Denham, Desayrah, Geraghty, Gregson, Hodgson, Jagger, Lamb, Laurenson, Lawrance, Lewing, Murray, Norfolk, Pingree, Piotrowski, Riaz, Round, Sadiq, Smith, Stanley, Udall and Willmore

Apologies: Councillor Ditta

The Council stood and observed a minute's silence in memory of Councillor Paul Walters, former Chairman of St. Peter's Parish Council.

The Mayor's Orator, Rhianna Levi, had sent her apologies and the Mayor addressed the Council on her behalf before commencement of the formal business of the Council.

81 Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Councillor Ditta.

82 Declarations of Interest

The following declarations of interest were made:

Councillor Cleary - Fees and Charges 2024/25 (Minute 88) – As an allotment holder

Councillor Ali - Fees and Charges 2024/25 (Minute 88) – As a licensed taxi driver

Councillor Cockeram - Fees and Charges 2024/25 (Minute 88) – As an allotment holder.

83 Minutes

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 28th November 2023 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Mayor.

84 Mayor's Communications

Paul Walters

The Mayor paid tribute to Paul Walters, former Chairman of St. Peter's Parish Council, who had passed away unexpectedly in late January. Other Members spoke and paid their own tributes.

Public Speakers

The Mayor informed the Council that all public speakers at the last Council meeting in November had received a written response from Officers. Further details can be provided upon request.

Events in Worcester

The Mayor highlighted several successful events which had been held over the last few weeks including Love The Arbo, Light Night and the Chinese New Year celebrations.

Charity Fashion Show

The Mayor reminded Members that he will be hosting a charity fashion show on Thursday, 14 March at the Guildhall, in support of Age UK, with students from local schools designing and modelling collections using upcycled clothes and accessories.

Annual Charity Spring Concert

The Mayor informed the Council that this event, by Worcester Concert Brass, will take place on Friday, 15 March at 7.30pm at the Guildhall.

Council Questions

The Mayor advised the Council that, due to the large number of substantive items on the agenda, he had taken the decision to hear Questions after item 12.

Refreshments

The Mayor invited all Members to join him for refreshments in the Mayor's Parlour at the end of the meeting.

85 Public Participation

The following persons addressed the Council:

Elaine Watt spoke about the Council's sporting facilities, and in particular access to changing facilities and participation in women's sessions by a biological man claiming to be a woman. She was concerned that her daughters and her mother would feel unsafe using changing rooms in such circumstances. She asked for details to be provided of what policies the Council has in place.

Richard Coopey spoke on the proposed allotment rent rises and their impact. He commented on the value of allotments as environmental assets and the benefits which they offer to mental health. He expressed the view that the benchmarking used in proposing new fees had been flawed and misleading, and the administration costs were unclear as much of the administration work is done by site co-ordinators.

Lucy Graham highlighted the value of allotments, particularly for those with a chronic health condition, for educating children, for exercise and for people who use allotments to grow their own healthy food. She raised concerns over the suggested price increases over the next 3 years and impact on allotment holders who currently benefit from discounts. She also felt there had been poor communication regarding the proposed changes. She asked Members to work with allotment holders when taking such decisions, and for the Council to factor in the value of the many benefits which allotments provide.

Leisa Taylor spoke on the Notice of Motion regarding flooding. She spoke in support of the Motion, and urged the Council to invest in community engagement and public awareness campaigns to help residents to mitigate the effects of excessive rainfall and flooding.

The Mayor thanked all speakers and advised them that they will be provided with a written response.

86 Notice of Motion

The Council considered Notices of Motion submitted in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 8.

Flooding

This Council notes that:

- 1) Climate change means that Worcester and the River Severn catchment experience periods of more intense rainfall causing more frequent and costly floods;
- 2) The flooding disrupts residents trying to go about their daily lives, and afterwards, when the water has receded, buildings need to dry out and the public realm and street infrastructure need to be cleaned. This work diverts council staff from their usual roles and, as floods become more frequent and more severe, other council services are increasingly impacted;
- 3) The financial support from the government for the public sector to carry out this work is not adequate. Sometimes no funding is made available at all. It is not fair for the council to have to use our ever-dwindling reserves; and
- 4) That there is a link between flooding and sewage dumps.

This Council therefore refers to the Environment Committee to enable Councillors to have a full debate, discussion and determine the following proposals:

To ask the Managing Director to write to the government:

- a) to ask the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities to overhaul the funding arrangements and provide guaranteed levels of flood recovery funding for our city with the level of funding to be regularly reviewed in line with the frequency of flooding;
- b) to ask the Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs to implement natural flood management techniques along the length of the Severn so that rainwater can be absorbed rather than flow out to sea; and
- c) to call for the River Severn Partnership to be given a renewed purpose and funding base which can benefit Worcester at a local level, or otherwise look into setting up another cross-council working group of stakeholders to actively involve Worcester in discussions with other frequently flooded towns and cities along the River Severn (such as Shrewsbury, Bewdley and Tewkesbury), to bring together experience and voices to work together, to implement meaningful and rapid local improvements while working together on long-term changes throughout the River Severn valley.

The proposer, Councillor Lewing, spoke in support of the Motion, which was seconded by Councillor Pingree.

The following amendment was proposed by Councillor Udall and seconded by Councillor Denham:

Delete "Council resolves" and insert "Council refers to the Environment Committee to enable Councillors to have a full debate, discussion and determine the following proposals:"

Upon being put to the vote this amendment was agreed.

The following amendment was proposed by Councillor Jagger and seconded by Councillor Murray:

Add the following words: "4. Frequent flooding increases the chances of sewage dumps into the River Severn having an overall detrimental impact on the quality of our water."

Councillor Lewing did not accept this and suggested it be brought as a separate Motion. Councillor Jagger therefore proposed shortening the wording to read: "This Council notes that there is a link between flooding and sewage dumps into the River Severn." She clarified that this was a point for noting, not an action. Having received clarification, her amendment was put to the vote and was agreed.

Other Members spoke on the Motion, following which the Council proceeded to vote on the Motion, as amended. It was agreed and

RESOLVED: That this Council:

1. notes that:

- 1) Climate change means that Worcester and the River Severn catchment experience periods of more intense rainfall causing more frequent and costly floods;**
- 2) The flooding disrupts residents trying to go about their daily lives, and afterwards, when the water has receded, buildings need to dry out and the public realm and street infrastructure need to be cleaned. This work diverts council staff from their usual roles and, as floods become more frequent and more severe, other council services are increasingly impacted; and**
- 3) The financial support from the government for the public sector to carry out this work is not adequate. Sometimes no funding is made available at all. It is not fair for the council to have to use our ever-dwindling reserves.**
- 4) That there is a link between flooding and sewage dumps into the River Severn; and**

- 2. therefore refers to the Environment Committee to enable Councillors to have a full debate, discussion and determine the following proposals:**

To ask the Managing Director to write to the government:

a) to ask the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities to overhaul the funding arrangements and provide guaranteed levels of flood recovery funding for our city with the level of funding to be regularly reviewed in line with the frequency of flooding;

b) to ask the Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs to implement natural flood management techniques along the length of the Severn so that rainwater can be absorbed rather than flow out to sea; and

c) to call for the River Severn Partnership to be given a renewed purpose and funding base which can benefit Worcester at a local level, or otherwise look into setting up another cross-council working group of stakeholders to actively involve Worcester in discussions with other frequently flooded towns and cities along the River Severn (such as Shrewsbury, Bewdley and Tewkesbury), to bring together experience and voices to work together, to implement meaningful and rapid local improvements while working together on long-term changes throughout the River Severn valley.

Debate Not Hate

The increasing intimidation and abuse of councillors, both in person and online, is eroding democratic principles. Such behaviour undermines the ability of elected representatives to serve their communities effectively, dissuades potential candidates from participating in elections, and corrodes the democratic processes that form the foundation of public life.

This Motion is brought to seek commitment from across the Council Chamber to civility in public life and a safe and respectful working environment for councillors.

This Motion is aligned with the principle of fostering a healthy, respectful, and inclusive political environment. It upholds the values of safeguarding democracy, ensuring elected officials can perform their roles without fear, and promoting civic engagement free from harassment and intimidation. Alongside this it supports our goals of equality and diversity in local politics by ensuring that all candidates feel safe and supported when standing for election.

Recent training for Worcester city councillors on civility in public life has highlighted the Local Government Association's current national campaigns as well as the important role that we can all play as individuals to set the right standards of respectful debate.

This Council resolves:

- (1) To actively support the LGA's Debate Not Hate campaign and their ongoing work on Civility in Public Life. The LGA campaigns aim to raise public awareness of the role of councillors in local communities, encourage healthy debate, and improve the response to and support those in public life facing abuse and intimidation;

- (2) To ask the Council's Standards Committee to ensure there are clear reporting and review mechanisms in relation to the abuse, intimidation and public safety of councillors, and that information is shared with other agencies as appropriate so that decisive actions can be taken; and
- (3) To ask the Council's four Political Group Leaders to show their support of a zero-tolerance approach to abuse of councillors and officers, and their support to promoting respectful debate and civility in public life.

The proposer, Councillor Collier, spoke in support of the Motion, which was seconded by Councillor Cooper.

Other Members spoke on the Motion. The Council then proceeded to vote on the Motion. It was agreed and

RESOLVED: That the Council agrees:

- 1. to actively support the LGA's Debate Not Hate campaign and their ongoing work on Civility in Public Life. The LGA campaigns aim to raise public awareness of the role of councillors in local communities, encourage healthy debate, and improve the response to and support those in public life facing abuse and intimidation;**
- 2. to ask the Council's Standards Committee to ensure there are clear reporting and review mechanisms in relation to the abuse, intimidation and public safety of councillors, and that information is shared with other agencies as appropriate so that decisive actions can be taken; and**
- 3. to ask the Council's four Political Group Leaders to show their support of a zero-tolerance approach to abuse of councillors and officers, and their support to promoting respectful debate and civility in public life.**

87 Report from the Relevant Committee on Matters which are Referred to Council for Decision

The Council received reports on matters which by law or in accordance with the Constitution are referred to Council for decision.

88 Referral Report from Policy and Resources Committee 6th February 2024 - Proposed Budget 2024/25 and Medium Term Financial Plan 2024-2029

The Council considered a referral report from Councillor Denham in her capacity as one of the Vice-Chairs of the Policy and Resources Committee and as Joint Leader.

Prior to consideration of the report, the Corporate Director – Finance and Resources spoke and clarified that, in relation to Allotments Fees and Charges, the reference on page 94 of the report to the Advance 25% concession given to tenants should read Advance 33% concession, in accordance with the recommendation of the Policy and Resources Committee.

Councillor Denham then spoke and explained that the Committee at its meeting of 6th February 2024 had considered the proposed Budget for 2024/25 and the Medium Term Financial Plan 2024-2029. The Council were recommended to approve the proposed the Budget and Council Tax and Medium Term Financial Plan including revenue projects approved by the Committee, the proposed Capital Programme and Capital Financing, and the Earmarked Reserves Balance. The Council were also recommended to approve the Treasury Management Strategy Statement, Pay Policy Statement and Fees and Charges 2024/25.

The Budget was proposed by Councillor Denham and seconded by Councillor Bisset.

In accordance with the rules set out in the Constitution, the Council considered the following Budget amendments which had been proposed by Members. The S151 Officer, Monitoring Officer and Relevant Director had provided advice and implications on the amendments.

The Officer advice stated that the total cumulative impact of the proposals below is £317,000. The cumulative withdrawal from the business rate risk reserve would reduce the balance to £1,131,379, which is below the £1.4m balance required under previous Council decisions. The project deficit for 2025/26, as presented in Appendix 1 to the budget report, is £1.369m. There would not be sufficient reserves to set a balanced budget for that year without significant savings identified elsewhere.

Proposed Amendment 1 - The following amendment was proposed by Councillor Cleary and seconded by Councillor Geraghty:

Proposed Amendment:	Financial implications and funding source:	Advice and implications from (as appropriate):
Freeze proposed increase in Allotment Fees	£14,000 The amount saved is modest in terms of the overall Council budget and has caused much disquiet. Follow up suggestions made by Allotment users who say operating costs can be reduced (equipment, maintenance, supplies and materials)	Income from allotment fees forms part of the revenue budgets for the Council. Reversing the decision of the Policy & Resources Committee of 16 October 2023 would increase the budget requirement for 2024/25 from £12,728m to £12.742m and by £14,000 in all subsequent years in the MTFP. If the reversal is applied for one year only and the policy subject to review during 2024/25 this change could be funded as a one-off take from reserves. The anticipated balance on the risk reserve at 31/3/24 is £1,951,079. The committees propose withdrawal of £114,700

Proposed Amendment:	Financial implications and funding source:	Advice and implications from (as appropriate):
		<p>and Council is asked to approve a projected budget requirement deficit of £388,000. This leaves a projected balance of £1,448,379.</p> <p>Accepting the proposal would reduce the balance to £1,434,379, which is above the £1.4m balance required under previous Council decisions.</p> <p>The projected deficit for 2025/26 as presented elsewhere on the agenda is £1.369m.</p>

The Council then entered into a debate on the amendment. Upon being put to the vote, the amendment was lost. Record of voting:

For:	Against:	Abstain:
Councillors Allcott, Altaf, Amos, Cleary, Geraghty, Hodgson, Jagger, Lawrance, Murray, Stanley	Councillors Agar, Ali, Bisset, Cockeram, Collier, Cookson, Cooper, Cross, Denham, Desayrah, Gregson, Lamb, Laurenson, Lewing, Norfolk, Pingree Piotrowski, Riaz, Round, Sadiq, Smith Stephen, Udall, Willmore	
Total: 10	Total: 24	Total: 0

Proposed Amendment 2 - The following amendment was proposed by Councillor Stanley and seconded by Councillor Hodgson:

Proposed Amendment:	Financial implications and funding source:	Advice and implications from (as appropriate):
Continue current hours for fountains at Quay and Cripplegate Park	£21,000 The 2024/25 budget projections are relatively conservative. This forgone cost saving should be able to be accommodated.	The cost of managing and maintaining the fountains forms part of the revenue budgets for the Council. Reversing the decision of the Policy & Resources Committee

Proposed Amendment:	Financial implications and funding source:	Advice and implications from (as appropriate):
		<p>of 16 October 2023 would increase the budget requirement for 2024/25 from £12,728m to £12.749m and by £21,000 in all subsequent years in the MTFP.</p> <p>If the reversal is applied for one year only and the policy subject to review during 2024/25 this change could be funded as a one-off take from reserves.</p> <p>The anticipated balance on the risk reserve at 31/3/24 is £1,951,079. The committees propose withdrawal of £114,700 and Council is asked to approve a projected budget requirement deficit of £388,000. This leaves a projected balance of £1,448,379.</p> <p>Accepting the proposal would reduce the balance to £1,427,379, which is above the £1.4m balance required under previous Council decisions.</p> <p>The projected deficit for 2025/26 as presented elsewhere on the agenda is £1.369m.</p>

The Council then entered into a debate on the amendment. Upon being put to the vote, the amendment was lost. Record of voting:

For:	Against:	Abstain:
Councillors, Altaf,	Councillors Agar, Ali,	

Amos, Cleary, Geraghty, Hodgson, Stanley	Allcott, Bisset, Cockeram, Collier, Cookson, Cooper, Cross, Denham, Desayrah, Gregson, Jagger, Lamb, Laurenson, Lawrance, Lewing, Murray, Norfolk, Pingree, Piotrowski, Riaz, Round, Sadiq, Smith, Stephen, Udall, Willmore	
Total: 6	Total: 28	Total: 0

Proposed Amendment 3 - The following amendment was proposed by Councillor Stanley and seconded by Councillor Hodgson:

Proposed Amendment:	Financial implications and funding source:	Advice and implications from (as appropriate):
Retain free admission to Worcester Show	£27,000 At the 2023 Worcester Show it cost more to collect the voluntary admission charge than collect it. The saving calculated by council officers is very optimistic and is unlikely to be achieved. Increased stall charges, advertising and sponsorship should be sought to mitigate this.	<p>The cost of managing the Worcester Show forms part of the revenue budgets for the Council. Reversing the decision of the Policy & Resources Committee of 16 October 2023 would increase the budget requirement for 2024/25 from £12,728m to £12.755m and by £27,000 in all subsequent years in the MTFP.</p> <p>If the reversal is applied for one year only and the policy subject to review during 2024/25 this change could be funded as a one-off take from reserves.</p> <p>The anticipated balance on the risk reserve at 31/3/24 is £1,951,079. The Committee agreed withdrawal of £114,700 and Council is asked to approve a projected budget requirement deficit of £388,000. This leaves a projected balance of £1,448,379.</p> <p>Accepting the proposal would reduce the balance to £1,421,379 which is above the £1.4m balance required under previous</p>

Proposed Amendment:	Financial implications and funding source:	Advice and implications from (as appropriate):
		Council decisions. The projected deficit for 2025/26 as presented elsewhere on the agenda is £1.369m.

The Council then entered into a debate on the amendment. Upon being put to the vote, the amendment was lost. Record of voting:

For:	Against:	Abstain:
Councillors, Altaf, Amos, Cleary, Geraghty, Hodgson, Stanley	Councillors Agar, Ali, Allcott, Bisset, Cockeram, Collier, Cookson, Cooper, Cross, Denham, Desayrah, Gregson, Jagger, Lamb, Laurenson, Lawrance, Lewing, Murray, Norfolk, Pingree, Piotrowski, Riaz, Round, Sadiq, Smith, Stephen, Udall, Willmore	
Total: 6	Total: 28	Total: 0

Proposed Amendment 4 - The following amendment was proposed by Councillor Amos and seconded by Councillor Cleary:

Proposed Amendment:	Financial implications and funding source:	Advice and implications from (as appropriate):
Gull and pest control to continue at 2023/24 budget level	£20,000 The 2024/25 budget projections are relatively conservative. This forgone cost saving should be able to be accommodated.	The Environment Committee agreed a one-off contribution of £4,700 from reserves to support gull control measures. Extending this to £24,700 would require a reduction in reserves. The anticipated balance on the risk reserve at 31/3/24 is £1,951,079. The committees propose a withdrawal of £114,700 and Council is asked to

Proposed Amendment:	Financial implications and funding source:	Advice and implications from (as appropriate):
		<p>approve a projected budget requirement deficit of £388,000. This leaves a projected balance of £1,448,379.</p> <p>Accepting the proposal would reduce the balance to £1,428,379 which is above the £1.4m balance required under previous Council decisions.</p> <p>The projected deficit for 2025/26 as presented elsewhere on the agenda is £1.369m.</p>

The Council then entered into a debate on the amendment. Upon being put to the vote, the amendment was lost. Record of voting:

For:	Against:	Abstain:
Councillors, Altaf, Amos, Cleary, Geraghty, Hodgson, Stanley	Councillors Agar, Ali, Allcott, Bisset, Cockeram, Collier, Cookson, Cooper, Cross, Denham, Desayrah, Gregson, Jagger, Lamb, Laurenson, Lawrance, Lewing, Murray, Norfolk, Pingree, Piotrowski, Riaz, Round, Sadiq, Smith, Stephen, Udall, Willmore	
Total: 6	Total: 28	Total: 0

Proposed Amendment 5 - The following amendment was proposed by Councillor Hodgson and seconded by Councillor Murray:

Proposed Amendment:	Financial implications and funding source:	Advice and implications from (as appropriate):
Ash dieback budget increase from £65,000 to £100,000	£35,000 As with the current Ash	The Environment Committee agreed a one-off contribution of £65,000 from reserves to

Proposed Amendment:	Financial implications and funding source:	Advice and implications from (as appropriate):
	dieback proposal funding will need to be drawn from an existing risk reserve, so as not to create an additional revenue budget pressure for 2024/25.	<p>support the need to procure specialist tree management services during 2024/25. Extending this to £100,000 would require a reduction in reserves.</p> <p>The anticipated balance on the risk reserve at 31/3/24 is £1,951,079. The committees propose a withdrawal of £114,700 and Council is asked to approve a projected budget requirement deficit of £388,000. This leaves a projected balance of £1,448,379.</p> <p>Accepting the proposal would reduce the balance to £1,413,379 which is above the £1.4m balance required under previous Council decisions.</p> <p>The projected deficit for 2025/26, as presented in Appendix 1 to the budget report, is £1.369m.</p>

The Council then entered into a debate on the amendment. Upon being put to the vote, the amendment was lost. Record of voting:

For:	Against:	Abstain:
<p>Councillors, Altaf, Amos, Cleary, Geraghty, Hodgson, Murray, Stanley</p>	<p>Councillors Agar, Ali, Allcott, Bisset, Cockeram, Collier, Cookson, Cooper, Cross, Denham, Desayrah, Gregson, Lamb, Laurenson, Lawrance, Lewing, Norfolk, Pingree, Piotrowski, Riaz, Round, Sadiq, Smith, Stephen, Udall, Willmore</p>	<p>Councillor Jagger</p>

Total: 7	Total: 26	Total: 1
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Proposed Amendment 6 - The following amendment was proposed by Councillor Hodgson and seconded by Councillor Stanley:

Proposed Amendment:	Financial implications and funding source:	Advice and implications from (as appropriate):
Freeze car parking charges for 2024/25	£200,000 Above figure based on 6% of 2023/24 Income forecast. This number represents a worst-case scenario, because this £200k extra revenue is unlikely to be raised due to less car park use because of high charges that discourage car park use with cheaper alternatives available. Experience of previous financial years has shown the freezing of parking charges has been close to cost neutral.	<p>Income from car parking charges forms part of the revenue budgets for the Council. Reversing the decision of the Policy & Resources Committee of 6 February would increase the budget requirement for 2024/25 from £12,728m to £12.928m and by £200,000 in all subsequent years in the MTFP.</p> <p>If the reversal is applied for one year only and the policy subject to review during 2024/25 this change could be funded as a one-off take from reserves.</p> <p>The anticipated balance on the risk reserve at 31/3/24 is £1,951,079. The committees propose a withdrawal of £114,700 and Council is asked to approve a projected budget requirement deficit of £388,000. This leaves a projected balance of £1,448,379.</p> <p>Accepting the proposal would reduce the balance to £1,248,379, which is below the £1.4m balance required under previous Council decisions.</p> <p>The project deficit for 2025/26, as presented in Appendix 1 to the budget report, is £1.369m. There would not be sufficient reserves to set a balanced budget for that year without significant savings identified elsewhere.</p>

The Council then entered into a debate on the amendment. Upon being put to the vote, the amendment was lost. Record of voting:

For:	Against:	Abstain:
Councillors, Altaf, Amos, Cleary, Geraghty, Hodgson, Stanley	Councillors Agar, Ali, Allcott, Bisset, Cockeram, Collier, Cookson, Cooper, Cross, Denham, Desayrah, Gregson, Jagger, Lamb, Laurenson, Lawrance, Lewing, Murray, Norfolk, Pingree, Piotrowski, Riaz, Round, Sadiq, Smith, Stephen, Udall, Willmore	
Total: 6	Total: 28	Total: 0

The Council then entered into a debate on the Budget, as proposed, following which it was put to the vote and

RESOLVED: That the Council agree to:

- 1. approve the proposed Budget and Council Tax for 2024/25 as set out in this report, in particular:**
 - a. The Budget Requirement for Worcester City Council (excluding Parish Precepts) 2024/25 at £12,728,175;**
 - b. The Council Tax Requirement for Worcester City Council (excluding Parish Precepts) 2024/25 at £7,021,078; and**
 - c. The Band D Council Tax for Worcester City Council (excluding Parish Precepts) at £213.08;**
- 2. approve the Council Tax Resolution 2024/25 set out at Appendix 9;**
- 3. approve the proposed Budget for 2024/25 as detailed in the following appendices:**
 - i. the summary budget 2024/25 as set out at Appendix 1**
 - ii. the detailed Budget 2024/25 as set out in the Budget Book at Appendix 2**
 - iii. the Treasury Management Strategy Statement 2024/25 as set out in Appendix 3**
 - iv. the Pay Policy Statement 2024/25 as set out in Appendix 4**
 - v. the detailed Fees and Charges 2024/25 as set out in Appendix 5 (as amended) and in Appendix 5a (exempt item);**
- 4. approve the proposed Medium Term Financial Plan for the next five-year period 2024/25 – 2028/29 as detailed in Appendix 1 and the**

forecast Earmarked Reserves balance at 31 March 2024 as set out in Appendix 7;

- 5. approve the proposed Capital Programme and Capital Financing as set out in Appendix 6; and**
- 6. endorse the list of revenue projects proposed by the Policy Committees in Appendix 8.**

Record of Voting:

For:	Against:	Abstain:
Councillors Agar, Ali, Allcott, Bisset, Cockeram, Collier, Cookson, Cooper, Cross, Denham, Desayrah, Gregson, Jagger, Lamb, Laurensen, Lawrance, Lewing, Murray, Norfolk, Pingree, Piotrowski, Riaz, Round, Sadiq, Smith, Stephen, Udall, Willmore	Councillors, Altaf, Amos, Cleary, Geraghty, Hodgson, Stanley	
Total: 28	Total: 6	Total: 0

The Mayor then proposed a short adjournment. The meeting adjourned for a 15 minute period.

89 Referral Report from Policy and Resources Committee 6th February 2024 - Savings Plan - St Martin's Gate Multi Storey Car Park - LED Lighting Retrofit

The Council considered a referral report from the Chair of Policy and Resources Committee.

At the meeting on 6th February 2024, the Committee had considered a report on an energy saving proposal for replacement of LED lighting with motion sensors for St Martins Gate Car Park. The Committee agreed the preferred option, which was to replace the lighting on the top 3 floors of the car park (Floors 2, 3 and 4) with new LED fittings which will be motion sensor activated. The cost of this project will be £55,000 including a contingency. It will be necessary to revise the Capital Programme.

It was proposed by Councillor Stanley and seconded by Councillor Denham and on being put to the vote it was agreed and

RESOLVED: That the Council agree an adjustment to the Capital Programme to include £55k funding for this project.

90 Referral Report from Policy and Resources Committee 6th February 2024 - Council Tax - Second Homes Premium

The Council considered a referral report from the Chair of Policy and Resources Committee.

At the meeting on 6th February 2024, the Committee considered a report on new discretionary powers that allow billing authorities to introduce a council tax premium of up to 100% in respect of dwellings occupied periodically, which are generally called 'second homes.' The Committee agreed to recommend the introduction of a 100% Council Tax premium for second homes from 1 April 2025. In accordance with the Constitution, changes to the Policy and Budgetary Framework are reserved to full Council to determine.

It was proposed by Councillor Stanley and seconded by Councillor Bisset and on being put to the vote it was agreed and

RESOLVED: That the Council agree that from 1 April 2025 properties classed as second homes be charged a Council Tax premium equivalent to 100% of the Council Tax and that the Corporate Director - Finance and Resources be authorised to agree individual exemptions based on government guidance.

91 Referral Report from Joint Consultative and Safety Committee 29th November 2023 - Employees' Code of Conduct

The Council considered a referral report from the Chair of the Joint Consultative and Safety Committee.

At the meeting on 29th November 2023, the Committee considered a report on the review of the Employees' Code of Conduct. The Committee agreed to approve proposed amendments to the Employees' Code of Conduct, subject to minor typographical changes, which had now been made. A clean final draft of the amended Code was attached to the report. The revised Code of Conduct was supported by trade union representatives and each of the four Political Group Leaders.

A formal decision from the full Council was required because this Code forms part 14 of the Council's Constitution.

It was proposed by Councillor Denham and seconded by Councillor Bisset and on being put to the vote it was agreed and

RESOLVED: That the Council agree to adopt the amended Employees' Code of Conduct at Appendix 1 to the report, as part 14 of the Constitution.

92 Independent Remuneration Panel Recommendation for Members' Allowances 2024/25

The Council considered the report and recommendations of the Independent Remuneration Panel for Members' Allowances (IRP) for 2024/25. The full report and recommendations were appended to the report.

In summary, the IRP recommended a Basic Allowance for 2024/25 of £5,518 and the consequential change to the value of Special Responsibility Allowances (SRAs). The recommended increase to the Basic Allowance represented an 8.6% increase on its recommendation for 2023/24. The recommended Basic Allowance represented a 15.17% increase to the Basic Allowance which the Council agreed for 2023/24.

The Council were advised that, on 8th January 2024, Group Leaders were presented with nine options. Eight of those options ranged from a 1% increase through to an 8% increase on the current Basic Allowance paid. A ninth option represented the IRP's recommendation for the Basic Allowance for 2024/25, being £5,518. All options included the IRP's recommendation to increase the multiplying factors for the SRA's for the Chairs and Vice Chairs of Planning Committee and Licensing and Environmental Health Committee.

Following the meeting on 8th January 2024, Group Leaders and Deputy Group Leaders were unable to reach a consensus on one option to recommend to Council for consideration. As a result the report identified all the nine options.

It was proposed by Councillor Allcott and seconded by Councillor Bisset that the Council agrees Option 6 (6% Basic Allowance increase to £5,078 and the consequential change to the value of Special Responsibility Allowances), as this is in accordance with the budget provision for staff pay for 2024/25.

An amendment in relation to the multiplier and consequential value for each SRA was proposed by Councillor Amos, but following discussion was subsequently withdrawn.

The Council proceeded to debate the proposal, following which it was put to the vote. The proposal was agreed and it was

RESOLVED: That the Council adopt a Scheme for Members' Allowances and agree a 6% increase on the current basic allowance and the consequential change to the value of Special Responsibility Allowances with effect from 1st April 2024.

93 Appointment of a Member to Planning Committee

The Council were advised that a vacancy had arisen on the Planning Committee, due to the non-attendance of Councillor Shafaz Ditta at the meetings of this Committee for a period of six calendar months. The seat was allocated to the Conservative Group in accordance with the principles of political balance.

The Conservative Group Leader nominated himself for this vacancy.

RESOLVED: That the Council agree to appoint Councillor Stanley to the Planning Committee.

94 Report of the Heritage Champion

The Council received a report from the Heritage Champion, Councillor Gregson, setting out the achievements and highlights over the last 12 months. Members thanked Councillor Gregson for his report.

95 Report from the Joint Leaders of the Council on Any Matters Which They Are of the Opinion Require Urgent Consideration by the Council

None.

96 Questions

The Council considered the following questions submitted in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 9.

Question No. 1	
Question from:	Councillor Hodgson
Question to:	Councillor Bisset, Joint Leader
Question:	On 15th January the Cabinet Office has released a new official portrait of His Majesty the King that will soon hang in public buildings the length and breadth of the United Kingdom. The portrait, taken at Windsor Castle last year by photographer Hugo Burnand shows His Majesty wearing a Royal Navy uniform of an Admiral of the Fleet and official medals and decorations. A copy of the portrait is being offered to public authorities across the United Kingdom free-of-charge as part of a scheme to celebrate the new reign. Has Worcester City Council applied for their copy, and where will it be displayed?
Answer:	A copy of the portrait of His Majesty King Charles III was ordered from the official king's portrait website by the Democratic and Civic Services Manager on 30 th November 2023. Confirmation of the order was received on 1 st December 2023 with the estimated delivery date given being between February and April 2024. The portrait will be displayed in a prominent, publicly accessible place within the Guildhall.
Supplementary Question:	Can we be reassured that this picture will continue to hang, because I know that in the event of the Green Party taking control of the Council, the Green Party have a record of being anti-monarchy, and one of their policies is PA600C which said the Monarch shall cease to be in the office of government. So, can she reassure us that we will see that picture on a permanent basis in the city until it becomes replaced by something else?
Answer:	I can so assure Councillor Hodgson that the portrait will continue to be displayed, because I am part of a civic institution, which is part of the structure of this country, part

	of the lifeblood of this country as you might say. I might disagree with the system, but we live in a monarchy and we - this Council - takes part in that monarchical structure, so as far as I'm concerned yes, that portrait will continue to be displayed.
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Question 2	
Question from:	Councillor Hodgson
Question to:	Councillor Lewing, Chair of the Environment Committee
Question:	At the Environment Committee a report was issue regarding weed control and the use of Glyphosate that included alternative methods including using hot water, fire, and root wave electric. Is this report a step towards a policy to end the use of Glyphosate weed killers by Worcester City Council?
Answer:	The investigation of alternatives is linked to the commitment this Council has made within its Environmental Sustainability Strategy, which is "to minimise the use of products or substances harmful to the environment."
Supplementary Question:	I'm pleased the word minimised is actually being used, because I know the Greens put a motion to the County Council on the 9 th November which basically implied they want to see an actual ending of this particular solution, so again will she reassure us that this will be kept as a means where it's appropriate, and obviously where it isn't, yes by all means use other methods?
Answer:	I'm going to give some context to this. I know it's very late, but I just want to say the UK is one of the most nature-depleted countries in the world. We have seen an accelerated decline in the loss of plants and animal species in our lifetimes, with one in six species of British wildlife at risk of extinction including a central pollinator - insects. The Royal Horticultural Society says the use of pesticides and herbicides should be avoided if possible and should only be used - if ever - in small and targeted applications. By making progress on this, we are actually joining many cities and districts around the country who are further ahead, who are also looking to take proactive action to reduce it whilst ultimately hoping to remove its use. However, a full options appraisal will be presented back to Environment Committee in due course and therefore at this stage no final decision has been made.

Question 3	
Question from:	Councillor Hodgson
Question to:	Councillor Bisset, Joint Leader of the Council

Question:	Worcester City currently has place protection orders in place for various anti-social activities including the Prohibition on the intentional feeding of gulls, Prohibition on aggressive begging and Prohibition on dangerous skateboarding and cycling. Does the Joint leader believe not renewing the orders will cause dismay and disappointment to many residents and stakeholders in the city?
Answer:	The Communities Committee will receive a decision report on the review of three Public Space Protection Orders that are due to expire in 2024 when they meet on the 13 th of March. Any decision taken by that Committee should focus on the key principles in determining whether an extension is necessary. These include whether the PSPO is necessary to prevent activity recurring, whether there has been an increase in frequency or seriousness of the activity. These decisions on whether to introduce or extend PSPOs should be evidenced based, not decided on the basis of what is going to be. I think whatever we decide to do, some people will not like it, but we can't decide on that basis, we need to make evidence-based decisions.
Supplementary Question:	To me this seems like waving a white flag to things that are actually too difficult, and I think that the bicycle rental scheme we saw last night, those bikes have particular technology in them so that somebody who is riding such a bike can be detected on the control centre and the information will be there, so it might well be possible to actually prosecute somebody who is riding one of those bikes inappropriately. I think it will send out the wrong message to people, that these are not being renewed and we do know the fact that regarding cycling the Greens are very much part of the pro-cycling lobby in this city, so what are your comments on that particular observation?
Answer:	Councillor Bisset chose not to respond to this question.

Question 4	
Question From:	Councillor Hodgson
Question To:	Councillor Denham, Joint Leader of the Council.
Question:	How much has been spent on architects' and surveyor's fees on the Scala Theatre Development since the earlier plans for a large theatre were abandoned? Does the revised business case for the Scala theatre rely on on-going subsidy and if so from where?
Answer:	The decision to take an alternative approach to the Scala and Corn Exchange buildings and development was made at P&R Committee in July 2023. We were faced with a difficult decision in that the previous plans were no longer affordable

	<p>or deliverable. Since that time the following sums have been approved via Committees, so:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £250,000 for continuation of design work – that was made at P&R in July 2023; and then • £100,000 to enable the preferred contractor to undertake preliminary works prior to construction – that decision was made at P&R in February 2024, about making the building safer. <p>Also at P&R in February, a further £80,000 has been – I should say those sums were within the agree project budget of funds available – a further £80,000 has been approved to support the continued engagement of the Creative Consortium in order to develop a delivery model. The outcome of that work will depend on what level, if any, of ongoing subsidy is required.</p>
Supplementary Question:	<p>We seem to have spent a considerable amount on these sorts of fees, because obviously there has had to be several redesigns as the project has gone on. My main concern is the cost of all this versus the cost if we had stuck with the original budget, which I think we would have been much better off doing, because all we've done is spend all this money on these fees, and also in terms of this facility, are we sure it's actually going to be viable, because it's not significantly unique anymore? Last week I was talking to somebody from the Methodist Church and they've got a 300 seat auditorium at St. Andrew's Methodist Church, so there's lots of venues like that in the city, so is this significantly unique, so it won't need subsidy to actually finance? Will this development require continued subsidy in order to keep it running?</p>
Answer:	<p>That is impossible to answer at this point in time. I would remind the Member that the original project, the original funding, was for capital only in order to produce a shiny building on the High Street ahead of the general election. That no longer is affordable or deliverable to that timescale, and there was no funding for an operational delivery, there was no business case for arts or delivery within that shiny building. What we now have is a really exciting possibility of unique creativity within really exciting spaces that use the space of the Scala building and of the Corn Exchange.</p>

Question 5	
Question from:	Councillor Hodgson
Question to:	Councillor Denham and Councillor Bissett, Joint Leaders
Question:	One in six of the UK adult population is affected by hearing loss, and modern hearing aids with compatibility to hearing loops can make a significant difference. In addition to Council meetings the Guildhall is used for a variety of events but does

	not have an adequate hearing loop system. When I go to my local church at St. Nicholas, I can hear perfectly by using the loop system, why hasn't the Guildhall got one yet?
Answer from Councillor Bisset:	Thank you for raising this very important matter. The Guildhall does offer an induction loop neckband for use at Council and Committee meetings ,and a separate hearing loop system for use at other functions and events held at the Guildhall. Your feedback regarding the system that we have at the moment is invaluable and Officers will discuss this with the supplier of the systems to agree how the service can be improved.
Supplementary Question:	It is very important that we that we have that, and can she reassure me that the system will be able to cover the Council Chamber, the Court Room and the main Assembly Room as an absolute minimum?
Answer:	I can't really do that, but I do have complete faith that the Officers will do their utmost to ensure that the hearing loop system works in every room that it needs to work in for the benefit of Councillors.

Question 6	
Question from:	Councillor Amos
Question to:	Councillor Denham, Joint Leader of the Council
Question:	Is it in order for an officer of the Council to meet with one political Party's candidate in City Council elections at the candidate's request to discuss an issue in their election campaign, and which is then the subject of a media/press release claiming support from this officer, during the Purdah period?
Answer:	As we're not currently in the pre-election period, this is presumably referring to some historic episode of which I have absolutely no knowledge.
Supplementary Question:	Well, I'm staggered by that response because Officers are aware of this matter, because my question actually describes a specific situation that occurred last year, when Officers told me that this was in order, but I never received an apology, and no action was taken. So, can I therefore assume on that basis Mr Mayor that I can now do the same in this election on the grounds that it was satisfactory and okay last year in the May elections, it is okay in this year's May elections? This incident is known to Officers Mr Mayor, so I'm surprised that Councillor Denham hasn't been given the answer.

Answer:	<p>There is clearly an incident in Councillor Amos's head which is not in mine. I think it's inappropriate discuss an incident - a particular personal incident - in this context. If you have complaints to make then there are avenues to go down. It would appeared you have had some of those conversations.</p> <p>The pre-election restrictions are governed by Section 2 of the Local Government Act 1986, as amended in 1988. In relation to decision making within the Council, the position remains that it is 'business as usual' unless there are very good reasons why this should not be the case. In the vast majority of cases, the pre-election period will have no impact on normal Council business, including the approval of planning decisions. The Local Government Association's guidance states that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The primary restriction is on proactive publicity by the Council which particularly relates to candidates and other politicians involved directly in the election. • The Council can still issue media releases on factual matters provided that these do not identify individual Councillors or groups of Councillors. • Councillors are still free to respond to enquiries received from the media in a personal capacity. • Individual Councillors can issue their own statements, write letters to the local newspapers for publication, contact the media directly or say what they like in a personal capacity, but must not use Council resources to do so. <p>There is no formal restriction on Officers holding meetings as part of normal business, nor on candidates issuing press releases. Councillors should, however, bear in mind the LGA's guidance and the Monitoring Officer will be issuing a letter to all Councillors prior to the pre-election period, reminding them of this. Under our Constitution, a specific issue relating to a Council Officer is not a matter for debate at full Council, but should be raised with the Managing Director or relevant Corporate Director.</p>
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Question 7	
Question from:	Councillor Amos
Question to:	Councillor Denham, Joint Leader of the Council
Question:	Can she give me an update on the number of illegal immigrants currently in the Fownes Hotel; and on the provision of priority housing for up to a further hundred more which the Council has agreed to accommodate?
Answer:	Councillor Amos doesn't appear to have learned from his previous questions on this. We don't have illegal immigrants,

	we have people seeking asylum who are the responsibility of the Home Office and who have contracted that responsibility to SERCO. It's not a matter for the District Council.
Supplementary Question:	Well, in that case can I advise Councillor Denham that she is out of touch if she says we don't have illegal immigrants? Perhaps I could refer her to the Illegal Migration Act which is now law, passed last year, which does give a definition of an illegal immigrant. Such people are in the Fownes Hotel, so I'm surprised that she doesn't understand.
Answer:	I have heard you.

Question 8	
Question from:	Councillor Amos
Question to:	Councillors Denham & Bisset, Joint Leaders of the Council
Question:	Will they meet urgently with West Mercia Police to seek an assurance that the law will be enforced if illegal immigrants from the Fownes Hotel (or elsewhere) are working illegally for Deliveroo (or others)?
Answer from Councillor Bisset:	<p>Despite the exchange you've just heard, I don't accept that the term "illegal immigrants" is appropriate for the people in the Fownes Hotel, so I won't use it in my answer. I wonder if Councillor Amos has any evidence that this is going on, I don't know?</p> <p>Officers of this Council work with key public agencies to manage the range of impacts and challenges that both public authorities and the asylum seekers face in contingency hotel settings such as the Fownes Hotel. I will ask Officers to raise the importance of right to work rules with SERCO and local policing colleagues as part of their regular conversations.</p>
Supplementary Question:	Will she inform me of the outcome of any discussions that are had with SERCO, and can I tell her that there is evidence, the Police have been involved, but I'm seeking action rather than just observations?
Answer:	Yes, I will pass on to you any information that the Officers provide to me.

Question 9	
Question from:	Councillor Amos
Question to:	Councillor Denham, Joint Leader of the Council
Question:	Which Councillors on the westside were consulted about the

	chopping down of three beautiful mature trees in St. John's Cemetery before Christmas? Is she aware that such wanton vandalism has completely damaged the aspect and atmosphere of this highly sensitive and much-loved community facility? And will she tell me what other areas of the Cemetery, which are flat, were first inspected for extra capacity before vandalising this section of the site which is on a steep slope and not best suited for graves?
Answer:	I'm aware that the Corporate Director for Operations, Homes and Communities has provided Councillor Amos with several written responses on this issue following the matter being raised with him. These responses have set out the rationale for the work and why this location was chosen above others. I understand that St. John's Cemetery is within St. John's Ward. I don't think we should be taking up further time with this issue.
Supplementary Question:	I'm very disappointed with the kind of attitude in the answer to that question. A cemetery is a community facility. Presumably if I asked a question about the city centre that would have to be directed to one, possibly two or three Councillors who represent the city centre, so I can't ask a question about Astwood Cemetery either. Could I therefore remind Councillor Denham that I have had an interest in this facility, I am on the now defunct Council's Cemeteries and Crematorium Forum, which hasn't met for ages, and I am a westside Councillor, so does she think the Councillors are either too irrelevant or too stupid to be involved in important decisions of this nature?
Answer:	No.

Question 10	
Question from:	Councillor Amos
Question to:	Councillor Bisset, Joint Leader of the Council
Question:	Given that meat-eaters are about 93% of the population and that - rightly - alternative provision is invariably made for vegetarians and vegans, why has a decision been made to deny any choice for the 93% at post-Council receptions by instructing that no meat option for the 93% should be provided? Who made this decision? Who else was consulted? Is this another example of the tyranny of the illiberal Left?
Answer:	It is the Mayor's prerogative to decide what food and drink will be offered to Members at the gatherings after full Council meetings. Councillor Amos is well aware of this, since he has been the Mayor. Our current Mayor, being mindful of the gravity of the climate emergency, has chosen to highlight the importance of all of us doing what we can to mitigate the

	<p>seriousness of the emergency, by offering plant-based food. We should all eat less meat. Far more land on this planet is given over to growing food for farmed animals than growing food for humans. Vast swathes of the rainforests of the world, which store carbon and are rich in biodiversity, are being cut down to grow yet more soya to feed yet more cattle. There are only six such meetings a year. Is it really such an imposition to be deprived of meat on these six occasions? I remind him that the Council's policy on what food it offers at other events has not changed. If the Councillor's answer is yes, then I suggest he brings his own ham sandwiches.</p>
Supplementary Question:	<p>Well, can I tell Councillor Bissett it's not actually about me, because I'm the first to admit I eat too much anyway, and if I'm not welcome at these events I won't attend and that is of no consequence. The issue here, Mr Mayor, and could I ask Councillor Bissett this - does she not agree with me that this is an important point of principle, because does she not see that given the Council's policies on equality, diversity and inclusion, is this not just another example of the double standards and hypocrisy of certain people who say one thing but do something else? Why are these 93% being denied a choice?</p>
Answer:	<p>I don't think not being able to eat meat at a particular event is really an equality and diversity issue, but there is an issue here, which is that if we offer plant-based food only, it is actually more inclusive, because some people don't eat beef and pork, or maybe they only eat meat if it's been prepared according to the halal method, so by offering plant-based you can be sure that you are going to meet everybody's requirements.</p>

Question 11	
Question from:	Councillor Amos
Question to:	Councillor Bissett, Joint Leader of the Council
Question:	Will she list the main achievements of the Council's Cycle Officer.
Answer:	<p>We don't actually have a Cycle Officer. So, I'm going to be magnanimous and answer the question that I think you might have intended to ask, which is about what the new Sustainability Support Officer has achieved.</p> <p>So, this role was appointed to in November 2022. It supports the Sustainability Team Leader in delivering the Council's Environmental Sustainability Strategy and also has a particular focus on Active Travel. Active travel means making your journeys in physically active ways like walking, wheeling, using a wheelchair or mobility aid) or cycling.</p>

	<p>The Council's work on active travel is overseen by Health and Wellbeing Committee, which approved the Council's first Active Travel Plan in June 2023. The latest performance report was considered by Health and Wellbeing Committee at its January meeting. Highlights reported to Committee related to cycling include the Town Investment Plan projects that support active travel. Working with the County Council we have provided funding to support improved off road active travel routes linking Diglis & St Peters, Ronkswood, The Lyppards and Spetchley Road, and extending the surfaced canal towpath to Sixways. The Towns Fund grant is also contributing to the new Kepax bridge. The major project being delivered this year is the bikeshare scheme being operated by Beryl Bikes, which was subject of a Member briefing last night.</p> <p>Also support to schools implementing the Bike Worcester bike bus scheme; improvements in changing facilities and cycle parking at the Council's main buildings, to support cycle commuting; delivery of Bikeability training, including the Civil Enforcement Team, who regularly utilise ebikes for enforcement work outside the city centre; implementation and promotion of the SHIFT scheme that allows staff and Councillors to log active business and commuting travel and trigger a small donation per kilometre to the Mayor's Charity; and promotion of the cycle to work salary sacrifice scheme, which has enabled staff to make a tax saving on cycle purchase.</p>
Supplementary Question:	<p>Well, notwithstanding we don't have a Cycle Officer, and we spent £100,000 on this Officer, perhaps I can ask Councillor Bisset nonetheless a question about the cycling Officer. Clearly most cyclists are law abiding and responsible people, however a small minority - a small minority - so on the proposed bike hire scheme will Councillor Bisset ensure that warnings and reminders are issued to all users that it is in fact illegal to cycle in the pedestrianised city centre and on pavements, and will she comment on the imminent abolition of the PSPO in respect of dangerous cycling in the city centre, which removes any element of enforcement whatsoever, because the Police don't enforce anything either?</p>
Answer:	<p>On the question of advising people who hire Beryl Bikes about their obligations, it's difficult for me to say, to go into detail, but I do have faith in the Officers of this Council to ensure that the bike scheme is run in a way that optimises safety for users and for all the residents of the city.</p>

Question 12	
Question from:	Councillor Amos
Question to:	Councillors Denham & Bisset, Joint Leaders of the Council

<p>Question:</p>	<p>Will they meet with the Regional Manager of the Post Office or other appropriate operational Executive of the Post Office to discuss ways of ending the permanently unacceptable delays and queues in getting served throughout the day at the Worcester High Street Branch where it has now become normal for there to be only one counter open and two of the three self-service machines to be out of order?</p>
<p>Answer from Councillor Denham:</p>	<p>Thank you for a very interesting question. I'm not aware that this Council has any responsibility for how the Post Office operates. I've been advised by some colleagues who are well-informed on these matters that actually scrutiny of the Post Office is the responsibility of the County Council, and sits within the Worcestershire County Council Overview, Scrutiny and Performance Board, and in fact Labour Councillors have been requesting in the past that scrutiny of the Post Office did take place. To date, this has been refused, including I gather at a period in which Councillor Amos was himself Vice-Chair of that Board, of that Committee.</p> <p>A separate item, which I think is very relevant and of interest, is that one of the things I'm involved with is I'm Chair of Worcester Dementia Action Alliance, and we had a campaign over a period of time which was ultimately successful about improving access, because the fact is that the Post Office is upstairs on the first floor and you have to go up an escalator. Escalators are problematic for many people living with dementia and obviously people with disabilities, and the signage for the lift at the back of the store was extremely poor. Following a campaign, I did meet with the manager of WH Smith's shop. There is now a much better sign close to the bottom of the escalator and it is easier to find the lift at the back of the shop, so that has improved access to the Post Office counter, albeit a deficient service when you get there.</p>
<p>Supplementary Question:</p>	<p>I think the purpose of this question Mr Mayor, and I think Councillor Denham may well write about responsibility to this, that or the other, but we just had a question about cycling and transport and travel that's clearly the responsibility of the County Council as well, but it doesn't stop this Council employing an Officer to deal with the same issue. So, just to get practically to try and deal with the problem that the people of Worcester have about queuing in the Post Office, frankly I don't mind how it's done or who does it, but there is an issue here and all I'm asking for - so will Councillor Denham agree nonetheless to meet with somebody from the Post Office, unless they actually refuse to meet with her, to meet with somebody and discuss on behalf of the Council the problem that the people of Worcester have. That's what I ask to try and find a way forward - is she prepared to do that?</p>
<p>Answer:</p>	<p>It's a pity you don't listen to what I said earlier. It is the</p>

	responsibility of Worcestershire County Council and the scrutiny processes within the County Council. You are a County Councillor, you need to take your questions there, not in this Chamber.
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Question No. 13	
Question from:	Councillor Laurenson
Question to:	Councillors Bisset and Denham, Joint Leaders of the Council
Question:	Last month, the Economic Activity of Public Bodies (Overseas Matters) Bill, known as the anti-boycott bill, passed the third reading in the House of Commons. It has now moved to the House of Lords. If implemented, public bodies such as local councils will no longer be able to spend according to their ethics if they contradict UK foreign policy, particularly if they are in support of Palestinian rights. Please could you let us know your opinions about this?
Answer from Councillor Bisset:	<p>I find this Bill very worrying. I align myself with the views of Sacha Deshmukh, the Amnesty UK's Chief Executive, who said: "This dangerous and draconian law will stifle free speech among members of public bodies, and is likely to deter even the most modest efforts to procure goods and services free from slavery, environmental harm or other human rights abuses." It is alarming that the Bill singles out a country - Israel - and gives it unique exemption from international law. Instead of bringing forward divisive and unnecessary legislation, Ministers should focus on pressing all parties to the conflict in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories to adhere to international humanitarian law, for the International Criminal Court to investigate possible war crimes by all parties, and for the root causes of the current crisis to be addressed to prevent future violations.</p> <p>The UK was one of the first countries in the world to seriously embrace the notion that businesses should uphold and promote human rights, and this legislation flies in the face of that. Council officials and members of NHS Trusts now face the daunting prospect being investigated, with their correspondence and social media being seized and examined for signs of political opinions. There is no evidence of a problem here in the first place, and this scaremongering legislation is set to choke off responsible decision making by our public bodies.</p>
Supplementary Question:	None.

Question No. 14	
Question from:	Councillor Piotrowski

Question to:	Councillors Bisset and Denham, Joint Leaders of the Council
Question:	<p>What is your opinion about the proposed plans of cuts within Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service under the current Resource Review Consultation that will result in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the removal of 8 Fire engines • downgrading the 9th fire engine to provide night-time cover only • and axing 45 on call fire fighters?
Answer from Councillor Denham:	I have not looked at the resource review and the information, I therefore have not formed any opinion at this point.
Supplementary Question:	I've read the documents. I'll be very happy to share additional information. Would Councillor Denham be mindful and prepared to take the consideration, based on that reading, potentially to the Chief Fire Officer?
Answer:	This is a live consultation on proposals that are set out in information from the Fire Authority. Any Member who wishes can raise concerns and I understand the Fire Officer is willing to come and talk to people. Unfortunately, in terms of time the consultation closes on the 4 th of March, otherwise we could have invited Chief Fire Officer to Communities Committee, but there is limited time available. The Fire Authority is made up of elected members from the County Council and they will be the decision making body.

Question No. 15	
Question from:	Councillor Jagger
Question to:	Councillors Bisset and Denham, Joint Leaders of the Council
Question:	<p>As many Members will be aware a popular GP practice Farrier House surgery will be closing its doors on the first of March. The Liberal Democrats started a petition to keep but having engaged with various stake holders it became apparent that the practice problems are too complex. However, through this exercise it became evident that there's room for improvement in the way key players in the city communicate and collaborate on healthcare decisions and that Worcester city council could play a key role in facilitating this communication. Would you be willing meet with the relevant officer/committee to explore ways in which Worcester City Council can improve formal Communication with Hereford and Worcestershire Integrated Care Board in cases where a specific planning decision may have an impact on GP provision?</p>

	<p>For example, while the ICB must be informed/consulted when new housing developments are considered in planning the same does not apply to nursing homes.</p>
<p>Answer from Councillor Denham:</p>	<p>I mean there is potentially more than one question in there. I absolutely share your concern about the closure of Farrier House surgery and its impact on healthcare provision within the city. It actually was developed as the alternative when the walk-in centre was closed, and particularly to meet the needs of vulnerable people in the city centre. You are correct that the commissioning of GP care is extremely complicated, and healthcare structures are complicated, it's a question of how long you've got as to how much detail you want me to go into.</p> <p>On Monday, Councillor Udall and I attended the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee which takes place at the County Council. I attend as a County Councillor, Councillor Udall is our City Council representative, and in fact we had a one item agenda, which was about access to GP primary care. So, a significant level of debate, concern around the whole county.</p> <p>The way that the GP contract works is it mitigates against, the surgery has closed because those GPs couldn't make it financially work. The way that the fees work and the way that the national contract works is out of date and doesn't meet the needs of younger population and more mobile population.</p> <p>We have coming to Health and Wellbeing Committee, our next Committee of the City Council next month - part of the remit of that Committee is health provision, health needs of homeless population and homelessness. At our last Health and Wellbeing Committee we flagged up concern and that is going to be an agenda item at the next Health and Wellbeing Committee.</p> <p>Earlier today, I was at the Worcestershire Health and Wellbeing Board as a Worcester City Council representative. So, as Chair of Health and Wellbeing Committee I am the lead for this Council on health and wellbeing. So, the invitation, the place at the Board is for the Chair of the Health and Wellbeing Committee. If I am unable to attend then the Vice-Chair attends. We have - and that also leads to - we have a place on a similar basis on the integrated Care Board Assembly Stakeholder Assembly.</p> <p>Officers and this City Council are intimately involved with the district collaborative network, which is collection of primary care services partners and stakeholders with the City Council, which covers a whole range of health and well-being issues. It's probably worth noting again, both myself</p>

	and the Vice-Chair of Health and Wellbeing Committee have an invitation to that, and we attend whenever we are able to do so.
Supplementary Question:	One of the key issues that was raised with me was that, at the moment, the ICB must be informed and consulted when housing developments are considered in planning, but the same does not apply to nursing homes because it's not a statutory requirement. But they indicated that this will be very useful for them to be able to plan GP provision in the future. Is that something that could be explored?
Answer:	I think it's a matter of national legislation. It was mentioned at Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee on Monday. I think the planning law and Section 106 and how section 106 money is used is for capital investment, so it would potentially be used for extension of a GP surgery. It's not an income stream and the income and the revenue is dependent on the GP contract, and is dependent on the occupants of the new homes paying council tax and other taxes.

Question 16	
Question from:	Councillor Murray
Question to:	Councillor Lewing Chair Environment Committee
Question:	Worcester City Council Environment Sustainability Strategy states that the Council will work to improve and enhance our green and blue infrastructure, including the river, canal and other watercourses. In the last four years, what work has been carried out on the Nature Reserves in the City boundaries and specifically in Offerton Lane Nature Reserve ponds?
Answer:	<p>I'd like to thank Councillor Murray for her question because I too am concerned about blue and green infrastructure in the city and particularly the pond in Warndon, and I'm very pleased to update you. But what I'd also like to say as Environment Chair is that I'd like to extend a welcome to all Councillors with issues relevant to the Committee to talk to me or the Vice-Chair, we will always be happy to help, they don't have to wait for Committees like this.</p> <p>I have been informed that there have been staffing resource challenges in this area of the business over several months, but recruitment into vacant posts will be taking place over the coming weeks. In addition, this area of the business now forms part of the Bereavement and Green Spaces Service, which will have benefits in terms of skills, knowledge, capacity and resilience.</p>

	<p>Despite these challenges, work has been carried out under the Town Investment Plan to improve accessibility to the Cherry Orchard Nature Reserve. Our Tree Team has also continued to manage trees within our nature reserves across the city to ensure health and safety is maintained and promoted.</p> <p>Officers have recently assessed Offerton Lane Nature Reserve ponds with a view to carrying out improvement works during 2024/25. This will include inlet and outlet clearance; drainage channel works and sensitive management of the reed beds. As well as to improving this particular site, the works will also have drainage benefits for residential areas further upstream. A study has been commissioned to identify biodiversity improvements to the City's waterway corridors as well and will be subject of a future Environment Committee report.</p>
Supplementary Question:	<p>I think Councillor Lewing's probably answered most of it. I wanted to ask if the Environment Committee will commit to working with officers and strategic partners and agencies to return the ponds to their formative operational space. They are an integral part of our drainage system in Worcester and the fact that they are so silted up and the drains are blocked is almost certainly contributing to flooding in the city, and really I just wanted assurance that the Environment Committee will commit to working with partners to improve biodiversity, which Councillor Lewing has just confirmed, so that residents and visitors can thrive in a flourishing and natural environment, so thank you Councillor Lewing.</p>
Answer:	None.

97 **Items Involving the Disclosure of Exempt Information**

RESOLVED: That under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of information as defined in Schedule 12A of the said Act.

98 **Fees and Charges 2024/25 (Exempt Items)**

The Council agreed the proposed fees and charges for Trade Waste, Building Control and some Licensing charges as part of the overall Budget item.

RESOLVED: That the Council approve the exempt Fees and Charges for Trade Waste, Building Control and Licensing for 2024/25.

Duration of the meeting: 7.00p.m. – 11.44p.m.

Chair at the meeting on
26th March 2024