



## **BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

### **MEETING OF THE COUNCIL**

**WEDNESDAY 25TH OCTOBER 2023**

**AT 6.00 P.M.**

### **PARKSIDE SUITE - PARKSIDE**

**MEMBERS:** Councillors S. Ammar (Chairman), B. Kumar (Vice-Chairman), A. Bailes, R. Bailes, S. J. Baxter, S. R. Colella, A. M. Dale, J. Elledge, S. M. Evans, D. J. A. Forsythe, E. M. S. Gray, C.A. Hotham, D. Hopkins, R. J. Hunter, H. J. Jones, R. Lambert, M. Marshall, K.J. May, P. M. McDonald, B. McEldowney, S. T. Nock, D. J. Nicholl, J. Robinson, S. A. Robinson, H. D. N. Rone-Clarke, J. D. Stanley, D. G. Stewart, K. Taylor, S. A. Webb and P. J. Whittaker

## **AGENDA**

### **WELCOME**

1. **To receive apologies for absence**
2. **Declarations of Interest**  
**To invite Councillors to declare any Disclosable Pecuniary Interests or Other Disclosable Interests they may have in items on the agenda, and to confirm the nature of those interests.**
3. **To confirm the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 20th September 2023 (Pages 1 - 6)**
4. **To receive any announcements from the Chairman and/or Head of Paid Service**
5. **To receive any announcements from the Leader**

6. **To receive comments, questions or petitions from members of the public** (Pages 7 - 8)

A period of up to 15 minutes is allowed for members of the public to make a comment, ask questions or present petitions. Each member of the public has up to 3 minutes to do this. A councillor may also present a petition on behalf of a member of the public.

7. **Urgent Decisions**

8. **Changes to Committee Membership**

To receive a verbal update on changes to the membership of the Licensing Committee.

9. **Outside Bodies - Appointment**

To consider the appointment of a substitute member to the West Mercia Police and Crime Panel (Worcestershire County Council have confirmed that, as part of the political balance arrangements, Bromsgrove District Council's substitute Member on the panel must be a member of the same political party as the main member, which is Councillor H. Jones).

10. **Audit, Standards and Governance Committee Annual Report 2022-2023** (Pages 9 - 26)

11. **Recommendations from the Constitution Review Working Group** (Pages 27 - 44)

Due to the length of the full Constitution Review Working Group report, the covering report only has been included in the main agenda pack. The full length report, including appendices, can be accessed in the Supplementary Papers 1 pack.

12. **To receive and consider a report from the Portfolio Holder for Environmental Services and Community Safety** (Pages 45 - 54)

Up to 30 minutes is allowed for this item; no longer than 10 minutes for presentation of the report and then up to 3 minutes for each question to be put and answered.

13. **Recommendations from the Cabinet** (Pages 55 - 56)

To consider the recommendations from the meeting(s) of the Cabinet held on 13<sup>th</sup> September 2023 and 18<sup>th</sup> October 2023.

The outstanding recommendation from 13<sup>th</sup> September 2023 meeting is due to be considered at this meeting of Council. The other recommendation made at the meeting in respect of the Governance Systems Task Group was considered at the Extraordinary meeting of Council held on 20<sup>th</sup> September 2023.

Any recommendations from the meeting of the Cabinet held on 18<sup>th</sup> October 2023 will follow in a Supplementary Papers pack.

14. **Background Information on the recommendations from the Cabinet**

(i) Equality Annual Report 2021 (Pages 57 - 74)

(ii) Finance and Performance Quarter 1 Monitoring 2023/24 (Pages 75 - 114)

(iii) Upgrading of Sewage Treatment Plants and introduction of Service Charging to contributing properties - 1) Frankley Green Lane, Frankley Green, 2) Fockbury Road, Dodford 3) Dusthouse Lane, Tutnall (Pages 115 - 126)

15. **To note the minutes of the meetings of the Cabinet held on 13th September and 18th October 2023** (Pages 127 - 142)

The minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on Wednesday 13<sup>th</sup> September 2023 are attached.

The minutes of the Cabinet meeting due to take place on 18<sup>th</sup> October 2023 will follow in a Supplementary Papers pack.

16. **Questions on Notice** (Pages 143 - 144)

To deal with any questions on notice from Members of the Council, in the order in which they have been received.

A period of up to 15 minutes is allocated for the asking and answering of questions. This may be extended at the discretion of the Chairman with the agreement of the majority of those present.

17. **Motions on Notice** (Pages 145 - 152)

A period of up to one hour is allocated to consider the motions on notice. This may only be extended with the agreement of the Council.

18. **To consider any urgent business, details of which have been notified to the Head of Legal, Democratic and Property Services prior to the commencement of the meeting and which the Chairman, by reason of special circumstances, considers to be of so urgent a nature that it cannot wait until the next meeting**

19. **To consider, and if considered appropriate, to pass the following resolution to exclude the public from the meeting during the consideration of item(s) of business containing exempt information:-**

**"RESOLVED:** that under Section 100 I of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended, the public be excluded from the meeting during the consideration of the following item(s) of business on the grounds that it/they involve(s) the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Part I of Schedule 12A to the Act, as amended, the relevant paragraph of that part, in each case, being as set out below, and that it is in the public interest to do so:-

<u>Item No.</u>	<u>Paragraph(s)</u>
20	3&4
21	3
22	3&4

20. **Finance and Performance Quarter 1 Monitoring 2023/24** (Pages 153 - 158)

21. **Upgrading of Sewage Treatment Plants and introduction of Service Charging to contributing properties - 1) Frankley Green Lane, Frankley Green, 2) Fockbury Road, Dodford 3) Dusthouse Lane, Tutnall**

22. **Exempt Minutes from the Cabinet Meeting due to take place on 18th October 2023**

Any restricted minutes recorded during exempt session at the Cabinet meeting due to take place on 18<sup>th</sup> October 2023 will follow in a supplementary pack for this meeting.

Sue Hanley  
Acting Chief Executive

Parkside  
Market Street  
BROMSGROVE  
Worcestershire  
B61 8DA

17th October 2023

If you have any queries on this Agenda please contact  
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## **GUIDANCE ON FACE-TO-FACE MEETINGS**

Please note that this is a public meeting and will be live streamed for general access via the Council's YouTube channel.

You are able to see and hear the livestream of the meeting from the Committee Pages of the website, alongside the agenda for the meeting.

[Live stream of the Full Council meeting held on 25th October 2023](#)

If you have any questions regarding the agenda or attached papers, please do not hesitate to contact the officer named above.

### **GUIDANCE FOR ELECTED MEMBERS AND MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC ATTENDING MEETINGS IN PERSON**

Meeting attendees and members of the public are encouraged not to attend a Committee if they have if they have common cold symptoms or any of the following common symptoms of Covid-19 on the day of the meeting; a high temperature, a new and continuous cough or a loss of smell and / or taste.

#### **Notes:**

Although this is a public meeting, there are circumstances when Council might have to move into closed session to consider exempt or confidential information. For agenda items that are exempt, the public are excluded and for any such items the live stream will be suspended and that part of the meeting will not be recorded.



## **INFORMATION FOR THE PUBLIC**

### **Access to Information**

The Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 widened the rights of press and public to attend Local Authority meetings and to see certain documents. Recently the Freedom of Information Act 2000 has further broadened these rights, and limited exemptions under the 1985 Act.

- You can inspect agenda and public reports at least five days before the date of the meeting.
- You can inspect minutes of the Council, Cabinet and its Committees/Boards for up to six years following a meeting.
- You can have access, upon request, to the background papers on which reports are based for a period of up to six years from the date of the meeting. These are listed at the end of each report.
- An electronic register stating the names and addresses and electoral areas of all Councillors with details of the membership of all Committees etc. is available on our website.
- A reasonable number of copies of agendas and reports relating to items to be considered in public will be made available to the public attending meetings of the Council, Cabinet and its Committees/Boards.
- You have access to a list specifying those powers which the Council has delegated to its Officers indicating also the titles of the Officers concerned, as detailed in the Council's Constitution, Scheme of Delegation.

You can access the following documents:

- Meeting Agendas
- Meeting Minutes
- The Council's Constitution

at [www.bromsgrove.gov.uk](http://www.bromsgrove.gov.uk)

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## **BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

### **MEETING OF THE COUNCIL**

**20TH SEPTEMBER 2023, AT 6.00 P.M.**

PRESENT: Councillors S. Ammar (Chairman), B. Kumar (Vice-Chairman), S. J. Baxter, S. R. Colella, A. M. Dale, J. Elledge, S. M. Evans, D. J. A. Forsythe, E. M. S. Gray, C.A. Hotham, R. J. Hunter, H. J. Jones, R. Lambert, K.J. May, P. M. McDonald, B. McEldowney, S. T. Nock, D. J. Nicholl, J. Robinson, S. A. Robinson, H. D. N. Rone-Clarke, J. D. Stanley, D. G. Stewart, K. Taylor, S. A. Webb, P. J. Whittaker and S. R. Peters

Officers: Mrs. S. Hanley, Mr P. Carpenter, Mr. G. Revans, Mrs. C. Felton, Ms. A.-M. Harley and Mrs. J. Bayley-Hill

36\23 **TO RECEIVE APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were recorded from Councillors R. Bailes, A Bailes, D. Hopkins and M. Marshall.

37\23 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

38\23 **TO CONFIRM THE ACCURACY OF THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COUNCIL HELD ON 19TH JULY 2023**

Councillor R. J. Hunter announced that whilst not an issue of accuracy of the minutes, he had omitted to state at the last meeting of the Council that he was a member of the Bromsgrove and Redditch Rail Users Partnership.

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting held on 19<sup>th</sup> July 2023 be approved as a true and accurate record.

39\23 **CHANGES TO COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP**

The Chairman drew Council's attention to the reported changes to membership of the Appointments Committee:  
Councillor S. Baxter (Member) and Councillor C. Hotham (substitute)  
Councillor David Stewart (substitute)  
Councillor Shirley Webb (substitute).

**RESOLVED** that the changes to the membership of the Appointments Committee as set out above be noted.

## **GOVERNANCE SYSTEMS TASK GROUP REPORT**

Councillor P. McDonald, the Chairman of the Governance Systems Task Group, introduced the Task Group report and in doing so outlined:

- the reasons for the work which had been undertaken;
- the process involved, including opportunities for all Councillors to attend briefings and ask questions, and consideration at Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny Board; and
- an additional recommendation which had been supported by Cabinet, to be included as '(f) A review to take place after 6 months by the Overview and Scrutiny Board'.

Councillor McDonald proposed the recommendations and these were seconded by Councillor S. Nock.

Council also considered the minutes of discussion of this item at the Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting held on 11<sup>th</sup> September 2023 and the Cabinet meeting held on 13<sup>th</sup> September 2023.

Councillor D. J. Nicholl proposed the following amendment: 'Council thanks the Task Group for its efforts to improve the governance and decision making and calls for the Task Group to reconvene and consider further evidence in order to deliver the best possible system for Bromsgrove in time for the final meeting of the year.' Councillor J. Robinson seconded the amendment.

In proposing the amendment, Councillor Nicholl referred to the high number of Councils across the country which operated the Committee system and other forms of governance. He suggested that the Task Group's research had been constrained by the time available to it, particularly as it included the 'summer recess' and examples given in its report were not of the same type of Council as Bromsgrove. Also, since the Task Group had completed its work, reports had been received about Councils which had severe financial issues, and he suggested that the new Governance system should maximise all Councillors' opportunities to check the financial standing of the Council.

During the debate on the amendment, the following points were made:

- the Task Group had been advised and supported by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny, which was an independent body with knowledge across the sector;
- The Task Group had looked at the effectiveness of the types of governance used and technical aspects. For example, some Councillors considered that the Cabinet form of governance was a 'closed shop' but this observation was also made about some Committee systems, where the Chairmen of Committees had collaborated and other Members had felt excluded from some big decisions;

- The role of a Council's culture in implementing its governance structures needed to be considered and the current proposals offered an opportunity for improving the future governance of the Council which was also affordable;
- The Task Group had fulfilled the brief set by the Council at its meeting in May 2023 and its members had approached the work with open minds. The Group had considered what was working well in the current arrangements and what could improve this further and be embedded. It would not be appropriate to delay implementation of the recommendations as there was a lot of work to do to enable the new system to be implemented for the municipal year 2024/25. However, the view was also expressed that more information should be obtained so that a robust and thorough case for the final form of governance could be made. It was suggested that a delay until the Council meeting in December 2023 would still enable changes to be made in time for the new municipal year;
- Some Members considered that the Task Group's research of a unitary Council's experience of changing its governance system was inappropriate for Bromsgrove as a District Council with different responsibilities and scale; others pointed out that the principles considered applied across different types of local authorities; and
- The view was expressed that it was disappointing that the potential costs of a Committee system meant that it was not recommended. However, the additional recommendation to review the operation of the new governance structure after 6 months meant that it could be changed or refined based on experience.

In accordance with Procedure Rule 18.3, a recorded name vote was requested by Councillor J. Robinson and voting was as follows:

Members voting FOR the amendment proposed by Councillor D. Nicholl:

Councillors S.M. Evans, R.J. Hunter, D.J. Nicholl, J.W. Robinson and S.A. Robinson. (5)

Members voting AGAINST the amendment proposed by Councillor D. Nicholl:

Councillors S. Ammar, S.J. Baxter, S.R. Colella, A.M. Dale, J. Elledge, D.J.A. Forsythe, E.M.S. Gray, B. Kumar, R.E. Lambert, K.J. May, P.M. McDonald, S.T. Nock, S.R. Peters, H.D.N. Rone-Clarke, J.D. Stanley, D.G. Stewart, C.B. Taylor, S.A. Webb, P.J. Whittaker (19)

Members ABSTAINING in the vote:

Councillors C.A. Hotham, H.J. Jones and B.M. McEldowney (3)

On being put to the vote, the amendment was declared lost.

During debate of the original proposal, the following were the main points made:

- The proposals had come forward as the result of collaborative effort across the Council;
- The proposals from the Task Group would empower scrutiny and the role of front-line Councillors;
- The proposals did not enable all Members to have a vote, which would be the only way for all Members to feel enfranchised;
- Whichever system was pursued would be likely to involve informal discussions between leading Members to develop policy proposals;
- The view was expressed that the proposed Cabinet Member Advisory Panels would not be transparent or influential as they would meet in private. However, it was suggested that experience of the Finance and Budget Working Group showed that cross party input at an early stage could influence policy development;
- The proposals were an opportunity to improve the operation of the Council and to meet the challenges facing it, such as levelling up;
- The Deputy Leader invited Cllr J. Robinson to discuss with her outside the meeting his concerns that some members of the opposition felt disenfranchised in the current system;
- The view was expressed that if the proposals led to maintaining a hybrid of the Cabinet system there was a risk of slipping back to the previous culture of the Council. However, the Leader of the Council confirmed that she was committed to continuing to change the culture. The detail of how the changes proposed would work would be discussed in Constitution Review Working Group meetings and proposals brought forward to the Council for agreement;
- If the Council chose to move to the Committee system, then it would be enshrined in legislation and the hybrid system proposed did not have that security. However, Group leaders had committed to agree a memorandum of understanding which demonstrated their commitment to making this work and the inclusion of a review by Overview and Scrutiny also provided an opportunity to reconsider;
- In response to a query, the Monitoring Officer confirmed that most of the proposals in the report to the Council would be included in the constitution, but other aspects would be subject of protocols; and
- The mechanism for review by Overview and Scrutiny was discussed and it was confirmed that this would be reported to Council.

Further to a request by Councillor J Robinson, in accordance with Procedure Rule 18.3, a recorded name vote was undertaken and voting was as follows:

Members voting FOR the recommendations in the report of the Governance Systems Task Group and with the addition of recommendation (f) from Cabinet:

Councillors S. Ammar, S.J. Baxter, S.R. Colella, A.M. Dale, J. Elledge, D.J.A. Forsythe, E.M.S. Gray, C.A. Hotham, H.J. Jones, B. Kumar, R.E. Lambert, K.J. May, P.M. McDonald, B.M. McEldowney, S.T. Nock, S.R. Peters, H.D.N. Rone-Clarke, J.D. Stanley, D.G. Stewart, C.B. Taylor, S.A. Webb, P.J. Whittaker (22)

Members voting AGAINST the recommendations in the report of the Governance Systems Task Group and with the addition of recommendation (f) from Cabinet:

Councillors S.M. Evans, R.J. Hunter, D.J. Nicholl, J.W. Robinson and S.A. Robinson. (5)

Members ABSTAINING in the vote:

No Councillors (0)

On being put to the vote, the motion was declared carried.

**RESOLVED** that Bromsgrove District Council should have a hybrid Leader and Cabinet governance model from May 2024 onwards. To achieve this model, the Council should do the following:

- a) Agree changes to the Council's constitution during the 2023/24 municipal year, as detailed in the report.
- b) Introduce working protocols designed to embed more collegiate working in the Council's governance culture.
- c) Introduce Cabinet Advisory Panels.
- d) Take action to improve communication with Members.
- e) Introduce a Memorandum of Understanding between all political group leaders to maintain these working arrangements for at least the next four years, and
- f) A review to take place after 6 months by the Overview and Scrutiny Board.

41\23

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

There was no urgent business on this occasion.

The meeting closed at 7.45 p.m.

Chairman

**Bromsgrove District Council – 25<sup>th</sup> October 2023**  
**Public Questions**

**1. From Ms L. Clinton**

**Question for the Chairman:**

“Can the Bromsgrove Council please advise as to why their charges for a High Hedge Complaint is **£595.10** when neighbouring councils charge significantly less?

It is recognised that the Bromsgrove Council do offer a reduced rate for those that qualify on certain benefits.

Examples of the charges from other local Councils are as follows:

Coventry City Council - **£190**

Telford & Wreakin Council - **£250**

Redditch Council - **£250**

Birmingham City Council - **£350.**”

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Bromsgrove District Council



Audit, Standards and  
Governance Committee

# ANNUAL REPORT

2022-2023



**Bromsgrove**  
District Council

[www.bromsgrove.gov.uk](http://www.bromsgrove.gov.uk)

## **CHAIRMAN'S FOREWORD**

On behalf of the Committee, I would like to thank Councillor Luke Mallett for his Chairmanship during this municipal year and wish him every success in the future.

I have had the pleasure of chairing the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee for the remaining municipal year and honour of chairing the Section 24 Audit Task and Finish Working Group.

My particular thanks go to Democratic Services Officers for their support, Mr Carpenter, Mrs Felton and Ms Howell for guiding the Task Group through what has been a very detailed process and members of the Task Group for reading through over 1,000 sides of reports and participating in almost 20 hours of Teams meetings.

Thanks should also go to those interviewees who have been open and honest in helping complete the Task Group's investigations.

There is one observation, from my short time as Chairman and that is that I believe the membership of this Committee should be expanded in line with similar challenge committees in this Council.

**Councillor Steven Colella**

**Chairman of the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee**

**MEMBERSHIP**



Steven Colella (Chairman)  
December 2022 - May 2023



Adrian Kriss (Vice-Chairman)



Andrew Beaumont



Rachel Jenkins



Janet King



Peter Whittaker



Maria Middleton



Luke Mallett  
(Chairman - May-  
December 2022)



Caroline Spencer



Kate Van Der Plank  
(May – December 2022)

## **INTRODUCTION**

This report provides an overview of the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee's activities during the municipal year 2022-23.

The ultimate responsibility for Audit rests with the Portfolio Holder with responsibility for Finance and the Section 151 Officer. The Portfolio Holder is expected to attend each meeting as determined in the Council's Constitution.

During the year the Committee has considered reports and updates on the following subjects:

- Monitoring Officer's Report – which details complaints and training which has taken place during the period between meetings.
- Updates from the external auditors, Grant Thornton in respect of their work.
- Updates on the work of the Internal Audit Team.
- Section 24 Notice
- Risk Update
- Annual Review from The Local Government Ombudsman
- Financial Savings Monitoring Report
- The Statement of Accounts
- Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 (RIPA) Report.

Further information about some of the key responsibilities of the Committee are detailed within this report.

Meeting dates and minutes of the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee meetings can be found on the Bromsgrove District Council website, link detailed below:

[Meeting dates and minutes of the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee meetings 2022-23](#)

## **THE ROLE OF THE AUDIT, STANDARDS AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE**

### **Scope and Responsibility**

The Audit, Standards and Governance Committee provides independent assurance to the Council in respect of:

- The effectiveness of the Council's governance arrangements
- The Annual Governance Statement
- The Review of the Annual Statement of Accounts
- Risk Management Framework and strategies
- The effectiveness of the Council's financial and non-financial performance
- Anti-Fraud arrangements
- Whistle-blowing strategies
- Internal and external audit activity
- Democratic governance

The Committee is also responsible for the Council's Standards Regime which covers both District and Parish Councils. Areas encompassed within the Standards Regime include:

- Promoting High Standards of Conduct by Councillors and co-opted members of Council bodies.
- Assisting Councillors and co-opted members to observe the Members' Code of Conduct.
- Advising and training Members and co-opted members in respect of the Code of Conduct.
- Formulating advice to members and officers in declarations of gifts and hospitality.
- Granting dispensations to Councillors and co-opted members from requirements relating to interests as set out in the Code of Conduct.
- Considering reports from the Monitoring Officer following investigation into complaints about elected Members.

### **Meetings of the Committee – 2022-2023**

The Council's constitution requires the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee to hold quarterly meetings.

## **Standards Regime**

There are two main areas which are considered regularly in terms of the Committee's responsibility for Standards.

### **Monitoring Officer's Report**

This covers Member Training, Member Complaints and Parish Council matters.

If the elected Member was found to have breached the Authority's Code of Conduct, the powers available to the authority include a formal letter of warning to the Member and formal censure by motion, of a committee, for the removal of the Member from a committee (which did not legally prevent the Councillor in question from attending) and adverse publicity.

The Head of Legal, Democratic and Property Services added that the Council's Code of Conduct was designed primarily with the view of maintaining standards through a conciliatory approach and that there was a high reliance on the Monitoring Officer working in cooperation with political group leaders when finding resolutions to Member complaints.

It was reported through the Monitoring Officer's report that Members received training throughout the 2022-2023 municipal year. The training included the following sessions:

- Cyber Security training
- Safeguarding
- Member Safety Training
- Members on the Elections Act 2022

The Member Development Steering Group met a number of times throughout the municipal year and discussions took place regarding the Member Induction training that would be undertaken following the District Elections due to take place in May 2023.

The Constitution Review Working Group continued to meet during 2022-2023. Recently the group has discussed Supplementary Questions at Full Council meetings and Quorum Arrangements for the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee.

A number of Member complaints were received throughout the municipal year 2022-2023. In addition to this a number of general Parish Council queries of a procedural nature were also received and were being dealt with at a local level. It was also confirmed that a number of complaints have been made to the Monitoring Officer by Parish Councillors regarding matters that related to the Parish Councils. It was noted that these were most appropriately dealt with by Parish Councils and not by the District Council's Monitoring Officer.

## Dispensation Report

At the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee meeting held on 21<sup>st</sup> July 2022 the Dispensations Report was presented to the Committee. This report explained that under the Localism Act 2011 there was a requirement to consider the granting of Individual Member Dispensations. In addition to this, it was also necessary to consider General Dispensations (including Budget and Council Tax discussions) and Outside Body Appointment Dispensations. The dispensations agreed at this meeting remain valid until the first meeting of the Audit, Governance and Standards Committee following the next District Council Elections in May 2023.

## Parish Council Involvement

The Parish Council representative is able to add any item on to the agenda as required and this is highlighted within the Monitoring Officer's Report. Whilst Parish Councils have the opportunity to appoint two representatives on to the Committee, as has happened in previous years, only one of these places was taken up and the Parish Council representative for the municipal year 2022-2023 is Mr B. McEldowney.

## Investigations and Enquiries

There have been a number of complaints this year at both a Parish and District level. These continue to be investigated locally by the Monitoring Officer.

There have been no investigations about Members which required a Hearings Sub-Committee to be convened.

The appointed Independent Person has continued to support the Monitoring Officer where necessary.

## **INTERNAL AUDIT REPORTS**

During the year the Committee has continued to receive updates on the work of the Internal Audit team including details of the following completed audit reports:

- Internal Audit Plan 2022-2023
- Internal Audit - Progress Report
- Interim Auditor's Annual Report and Audit Opinion 2020-21

## **EXTERNAL AUDITORS**

During the year the Committee received reports from the current External Auditors, Grant Thornton on the following subjects:

- Grant Thornton - Sector Update
- Section 24 Report

The Progress Reports were considered at each meeting of the Committee and covered a range of issues including the following:

- Value for money
- Significant Risks
- Financial Statements
- Housing Benefits

## **SECTION 24 NOTICE**

In November 2022, Bromsgrove District Council was issued with a Section 24 Notice with the key reason being the non-delivery of the 2020-2021 Statement of Accounts. As a result of this, it was agreed at a Full Council meeting held on 7<sup>th</sup> December 2022 that a root and branch investigation would be undertaken on how the Council arrived at the Section 24 Notice. Further details of this investigation and any recommendations are available in the Audit Task Group's final report. The following Members of the Committee were appointed to the Audit Task Group on 19<sup>th</sup> January 2023:

- Councillor S. Colella (Chairman)
- Councillor A. Beaumont
- Councillor J. King
- Councillor A. Kriss
- Councillor M. Middleton
- Councillor P. Whittaker

### RIPA Report 2022-23

This report is considered annually by the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee as the legislation it relates to is required to be reviewed each year.

As part of the presentation Members were informed that the regime was overseen by the Investigatory Powers Commissioner's Office and included inspections of organisations by an Inspector appointed by the Commissioner.

At this meeting Members were advised of changes which had taken place since the Committee considered the last report in 2021 and were provided with details of refresher training which had also taken place.

### Grant Thornton - Housing Benefit 2020-21 Certification Letter

This is a report that is presented annually to Members in respect of the work undertaken each year in the certification of the Council's Housing Benefit subsidy claim to the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).

During consideration of the Certification Letter for 2020-2021 it was reported that the workbook completion undertaken by Officers at the Council was of good quality. However, a number of issues had been identified and therefore additional testing needed to take place. It was also confirmed to the Committee that although the values were very small, any difference in monetary value was classified as a 'fail' and needed to be reviewed.

However, overall, it was a good news story as the number of errors had reduced and the Officers work was considered excellent.

### Internal Audit Plan 2022-2023

At this meeting it was outlined that this was a risk-based plan which considered the adequacy of the Council's risk management, performance management and other assurance processes, as well as organisational objectives and priorities. Included in the report was the following:

- The adequacy of the resource allocation.
- The changing internal environment and ongoing transformational work being undertaken.
- Internal and external audit findings in respect of the financial systems and their inclusion as audit areas, as it is considered certain risks remain in these areas.

- The flexibility of the plan and the balanced approach taken, with progress being monitored and reviewed regularly.
- If the plan were to be amended in the future this would be done in consultation with the Interim Section 151 Officer and brought back to this Committee.

Cyber Security was highlighted as currently of great concern to all Councils particularly in respect of insurance.

### Internal Audit Annual Report & Audit Opinion 2021-22

This report was a summary of looking back over the last year's work and provided commentary on Internal Audit's planned delivery for the period 1st April 2021 to 31st March 2022, against the performance indicators agreed for the service and further information on other aspects of service delivery.

During consideration of this report, it was noted that 4 reviews had limited or no assurance with potential risks to be addressed and 10 had moderate or above assurance and that an action plan was in place to address those areas with no or limited assurance.

At this meeting it was suggested that there was no doubt that the biggest challenge faced had been working through the new finance system together with the significant loss of experienced staff. It was noted that there had been a number of implementation issues, particularly with regards to cash receipting.

### Risk Register Update

At the meeting that took place on 21<sup>st</sup> July 2022 the Risk Register report was considered. As part of this report, it was noted that the Corporate Management Team (CMT) had met in March 2022 and although there was a risk management system in place further work was needed to be done to embed this into Council practices. As a result of this, Members were informed that a Risk Group was to be established. In addition to this, it was confirmed that Risk Champions had been appointed and trained for each service area and that they provided a pro-active role in cascading down information to other Officers.

## **13<sup>th</sup> October 2022**

### Annual Review from The Local Government Ombudsman

The Committee considered the report on the Local Government Ombudsman's Annual Review Letter, which set out the statistics for complaints made against the Council covering the years ending 31st March 2021 and 31st March 2022.

During consideration of this report, it was noted that the Monitoring Officer was required to report to Members, to summarise the findings on upheld complaints over a specific period. It was reported that any costs incurred from upheld complaints had been met from existing budgets and as such there was no direct financial implication to the Council resulting from any Ombudsman's recommendations.

#### Grant Thornton - Sector Update

The Committee received a local government audit sector update from the Engagement Lead for Grant Thornton. Included in this update was information regarding the future requirement from the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) for an Independent Member to be introduced to sit on Audit Committees at Local Councils. Members discussed the potential need for remuneration for this post and the difficulties the Council had encountered with past attempts at recruiting an Independent Member to the Committee.

#### Internal Audit - Progress Report

At this meeting the Committee received the Internal Audit Progress Report that summarised progress made against the delivery of the Internal Audit Plan 2022-23 as of 31st August 2022.

Information was provided regarding the Core Financial Systems which continued to occupy a substantial part of the internal audit team's planned time, due to the rectification work associated with the Council's new finance system. It was also reported that work continued on making progress with respect to areas which had returned a level of 'limited' assurance as reported in the Internal Audit Annual Report at the July Committee meeting.

There were concerns raised at this meeting regarding the 'limited' assurance in core areas of Council business such as Safeguarding and Fire Safety and at the request of Members the Council's Chief Executive attended the next meeting of the Committee.

#### Financial Savings Monitoring Report

The Interim Director of Finance presented the Financial Savings Monitoring Report and provided information on vacancy levels within the organisation, the staff pay award and increased energy costs.

#### Risk Update (Q1 & Q2)

During this update the Committee was advised that the Officer Risk Board continued to take place and that the process of risk monitoring was resulting in more risks being registered and mitigated.

The number of Departmental Risks continued to reduce and in terms of Corporate Risks, a risk had been added in relation to the delivery of Levelling Up, the UK

Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) and the Towns Fund projects, due to resource implications and the time limited spend of the funding.

## **9<sup>th</sup> November 2022**

### Section 24 Report

As this meeting Members were provided with the Section 24 Report from the external auditors and that they had powers under the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 to make, if necessary, statutory recommendations under Section 24 of the Act.

The background to the statutory recommendations was outlined for Members information with regard to the implementation of the new financial ledger system and the significant challenges experienced in respect of the Cash Receipting module.

Members were informed that the Cash Receipting module issues had been resolved and that the module was now live. However, the delays experienced had resulted in the non-delivery of the financial statements for 2019-20. This, in turn, had also impacted on the delivery of the publication of the 2020-21 accounts, which had been due by the end of July 2022.

Included in this report was the management response to the statutory recommendations and the actions that had already been undertaken.

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

- Strict timescales and protocols that needed to be followed by the Council and auditors concerning the issue of a Section 24 Notice.
- The disappointment in respect of the statutory recommendations that had been issued by Grant Thornton
- The loss of Council staff and staffing levels within the Finance Team during the implementation of the new finance system.
- The timeline for completion of the outstanding financial statements for 2020-2021, 2021-2022 and 2022-2023 financial statements.
- The external auditors' capacity to look at the financial statements.
- The approval process of the ERP including a Cash Receipting module system.
- The impact of Covid-19 on the finalisation of the accounts and implementation of the financial ledger system.
- The role of Internal Audit in the implementation of the new financial ledger system.
- Risk Management during the implementation of the new financial ledger system.

### Interim Auditor's Annual Report 2020-21

The Interim Auditor's Annual Report 2020-21 was presented at this meeting. The report covered arrangements that were in place in the period up to 31st March 2021 and highlighted the following 3 key areas:

1. Financial Sustainability
2. Governance
3. Improving economy, efficiency and effectiveness

In addition, there were 5 key recommendations and 13 improvement recommendations contained within the report.

During consideration of this report the importance of delivering the Medium Term Financial Plan 2023-2024 in two tranches and to have the correct staffing levels in order to do this was highlighted as vital to the Committee. In addition to this the following information was provided to Members:

- That the Corporate Management Team were driving extremely hard to increase the savings and a significant amount of the budget deficit had been covered.
- A considerable challenge that was still unknown was the large rise in inflation and associated pressures.
- Information on the Chancellor's Autumn Statement due on 17th November 2022.

Some concerns raised by Members during this item were as follows:

- Budget Holders' Responsibilities
- Workforce Planning
- Procurement Strategy

#### Audit Assurance of Safeguarding And Fire Evacuation (Verbal Update)

This verbal update in respect of the Audit Assurance of Safeguarding and Fire Evacuation was requested by the Chairman at the previous meeting of the Committee.

Members were reminded that the Safeguarding Audit, was given a moderate assurance not a limited assurance and that the Committee had received a report in April 2022, which had updated Members on the status and had highlighted that all actions had been completed. A further Safeguarding Audit would be undertaken in 2023-24 and the outcomes would be reported to the Committee. In addition to this, the Safeguarding Policy had been updated and Safeguarding training had also been rolled out to all Officers across the Authority.

The Health and Safety Training Records Audit, which had been undertaken in 2018 had been followed up and a report presented to the Committee in October 2021, stating that all of the actions had been completed and addressed.

## Annual Appointment of Risk Champion

At this meeting no nominations were received for the role of the Risk Champion and therefore it was agreed that this item be considered at the next meeting of the Committee.

## **14<sup>th</sup> December 2022**

### Annual Governance Statement 2020-21

The Interim Director of Finance presented the Annual Governance Statement 2020-21 which formed part of the annual closure of accounts process.

- Officers clarified that the purpose of this Annual Governance Statement was to provide the Council's governance position as of the 2020-21 financial year with sections on significant governance issues, including governance recommendations from the Section 24 Statement and the Interim 2020-21 Audit Report providing additional commentary on the progress that had been made up to the current point in time.
- Members requested that references to 'robust financial management' be removed from the Annual Governance Statement on the basis that the document referred to the financial year 2020-21, with only the appended sections in the tables referring to the progress that had been made since.
- It was clarified that AP/AR processes referenced on page 34 of the main agenda pack referred to the Accounts Payable/Accounts Receivable (AP/AR) systems. It was explained that the AP side of the system had worked correctly, whilst on the AR side the issue with cash receipting had been rectified as of 6 November 2022, but the process still required embedding.
- Officers noted that the Council's finance department was now almost up to full capacity, holding four vacancies with three agency staff covering those vacancies.
- Members asked how the effectiveness of working from home arrangements could be measured from an internal audit perspective. In response, it was stated that this was a matter of service delivery rather than audit and its effectiveness would be measured primarily by customer satisfaction rates, followed by the savings that it delivered. It was highlighted that local authorities had generally experienced a growth in productivity after switching to hybrid working measures.

### Statement of Accounts 2020-21

The Interim Director of Finance presented the draft Statement of Accounts 2020-21 which provided the Committee with an opportunity to review the Accounts and formally approve them prior to the commencement of the external audit, estimated to

start in mid-January 2023. A verbal update in respect of the Statement of Accounts was presented at a further meeting of the Committee on 19<sup>th</sup> January 2023.

### Recommendation from Council for the Consideration of the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee

As stated earlier in this report, at a meeting of Full council on 7<sup>th</sup> December 2022 a recommendation was made that the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee carry out a root and branch review of the process leading up to the Council's Section 24 Notice.

Following discussion of the recommendation it was agreed that an Audit Task Group would be set up and the investigation to take place in a timely manner.

### Election of a Risk Champion

During consideration of this item Members requested that a role of the Risk Champion be presented for Members consideration at the next meeting of the Committee.

## **19<sup>th</sup> January 2023**

### Root and Branch Review of how the Council arrived at the Section 24 Notice

At this meeting the Committee considered the arrangements for the proposed Audit Task Group to enable the root and branch investigation of how the Council arrived at the Section 24 Notice.

It was proposed that the meetings would start in early February 2023 and conclude prior to the Local Government Association's Corporate Peer Review which was due to commence on 6<sup>th</sup> March 2023.

### Verbal Update On Submission Of Statement Of Accounts 2020-21

It was reported that the indicative timeline for the issuance of opinion on the 2020-21 Statement of Accounts was July 2023 or later, with 2021-22 Accounts not expected to have an opinion issued before the end of the 2022-23 financial year, and the delivery of the 2022-23 Accounts expected before the end of the 2023-24 financial year; by which time the Council should be up-to-date with the auditing of the financial statements.

In response to questions from Members, it was noted that the Section 24 Notice issued to the Council would lapse once the 2020-21 Statement of Accounts had been signed-off by the Auditors.

### Internal Audit Progress Report

The Head of Worcestershire Internal Audit Shared Service reported that the main internal audit report before the Committee concerned the monitoring of the Council's fleet, and that three follow-up reports had also been submitted following the Committee's request for follow-up internal audit reviews in these areas.

Cyber security was raised at this meeting. The Committee was informed that cyber security insurance would not be available to local authorities after the end of this financial year as insurers were withdrawing this option due to the high risk. Bromsgrove District Council was covered by cyber security insurance until June 2024. But it was imperative that the Local Government Association (LGA) was lobbied on this matter to ensure that a 'self-insurance' option was available in the sector in the absence of private insurance provision.

### Financial Savings Monitoring Report

This was the second Financial Savings Monitoring Report provided to Members this municipal year. During consideration of this item the overspend position of the Council and the amount of reserves were highlighted for Members' attention.

### Risk Report

The Committee considered the Quarterly Risk Update at this meeting and that the Council now had an agreed definition of a Corporate Risk and that the number of departmental risks had continually reduced in the last 9 months. Issues with mould/damp in private sector properties and the cost of living would be included as a separate risk items in the future.

**Legal, Equalities and Democratic Services**

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### Recommendations from the Constitution Review Working Group

Relevant Portfolio Holder		Councillor Charlie Hotham
Portfolio Holder Consulted		
Relevant Head of Service		Claire Felton, Head of Legal, Democratic and Property Services
Report Author Claire Felton	Job Title: Head of Legal, Democratic and Property Services Contact email: <a href="mailto:c.felton@bromsgroveandredditch.gov.uk">c.felton@bromsgroveandredditch.gov.uk</a>	
Wards Affected		All
Ward Councillor(s) consulted		N/A
Relevant Strategic Purpose(s)		An Effective and Sustainable Council
Non-Key Decision		
If you have any questions about this report, please contact the report author in advance of the meeting.		

#### 1. RECOMMENDATIONS

**Council is asked to RESOLVE that:-**

- 1) Meetings of the Planning Committee should be live streamed;**
- 2) White nameplates should be used at meetings of the Planning Committee for Councillors;**
- 3) The Chairman should introduce all the officers present at the start of Planning Committee meetings;**
- 4) A review should be carried out of the content of officer reports to ensure that they are proportionate to the size and complexity of the proposal being determined;**
- 5) Members of the Planning Committee should continue to be offered the choice to either access agenda packs for meetings electronically or in paper form;**
- 6) A greater number of spare copies of the supplementary packs containing the update reports should be made available for the consideration of the public at meetings of the Planning Committee, with clarification provided to the public that copies will be made available on a first come first served basis to residents attending meetings in person;**

- 7) Where possible, members of the Planning Committee should provide Officers with prior notice of any technical questions relating to applications on the agenda;
- 8) Refresher training should be provided on the roles and responsibilities of Planning Committee members;
- 9) Appeal decisions and planning application performance should be reported to and discussed by the Planning Committee;
- 10) the Code of Practice – Planning Services, at Part 25 of the Constitution, be amended to require all Members to leave the room when they have spoken as a Ward Councillor on a Planning Matter, draft wording of the amendments proposed is contained within Appendix 1. These amendments should be incorporated into the Constitution for ratification at Full Council;
- 11) the quorum for meetings of the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee should be reduced to 3 Members;
- 12) the content of the Policy Framework be updated as detailed in Appendix 5 to the report;
- 13) the Chief Executive be delegated authority, as Proper Officer, to declare the office of Councillor vacant immediately after a person has ceased to be a Councillor where they have not attended a Council or Committee meeting for six months or more; and
- 14) the Council should undertake a trial allowing Members to ask supplementary questions at Council meetings during consideration of Questions on Notice.

## **2. BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 Meetings of the Constitution Review Working Group took place on Thursday 26<sup>th</sup> January, Thursday 31<sup>st</sup> August 2023 and Thursday 28<sup>th</sup> September 2023.
- 2.2 During these meetings, a range of issues were discussed by Members of the group and a number of recommendations were agreed which have implications for the content of the Council's constitution as well as arrangements for both Council and Planning Committee meetings.

- 2.3 This report provides further information about the background to each of these recommendations and Council is asked to consider whether to approve the actions proposed.

**3. OPERATIONAL ISSUES**

External Review of the Planning Committee

- 3.1 During the 2022/23 municipal year a review was undertaken by the independent Planning Advisory Service (PAS) of the Council's Planning Committee. The outcomes of this review were recorded in a report alongside nine recommendations that were proposed by PAS and which were designed to improve the operation of the Planning Committee at the Council (Appendix 1).
- 3.2 The Constitution Review Working Group discussed each of the recommendations that had been made by PAS in turn and in doing so considered and agreed the following:
- Live streaming: Members discussed the benefits arising in terms of the transparency of Planning Committee meetings where these meetings could be live streamed. It was noted that group leaders had already requested that Council meetings should be live streamed moving forward. As there tends to be public interest in the items on the agenda for Planning Committee meetings, Members agreed that live streaming of these Committee meetings on a regular basis would be justifiable.
  - White nameplates for Members at Planning Committee meetings: The group noted that Planning Committee meetings are quasi-judicial meetings which should be apolitical. The use of white nameplates for Councillors at meetings of this Committee reflects the apolitical nature of these meetings. Therefore, Members agreed that the proposal to use white nameplates at meetings of the Planning Committee should be agreed.
  - The Chairman introducing Officers present at Planning Committee meetings: Members agreed that where the Chairman introduces the officers present and clarifies their roles, this provides greater transparency in the process. It should be noted that these introductions have already been incorporated into Planning Committee meeting arrangements at Bromsgrove District Council.

- Review of the content of reports to Planning Committee: The group discussed the content of reports to the Planning Committee and agreed that the proposal from PAS to ensure that the content of reports is commensurate with the size and complexity of the application was sensible. Members raised concerns that at present, the use of a standard format for all reports results in a significant amount of repetition of points between reports which Members suggested was unnecessary.
- Accessing Agenda Packs for Planning Committee Meetings: In their report, PAS had suggested the Council should improve connectivity to facilitate a paperless process. Members of the group had some concerns about this proposal, on the basis that they felt that Councillors should be able to choose whether to opt to receive paper copies of agenda packs or to access these electronically. The group did note that Members can access agenda packs electronically using the modern.gov app and training can be provided by Democratic Services to Members in respect of how to use the app.
- Availability of Update Reports and Supplementary Packs at Planning Committee Meetings: The PAS report proposed that the update report should be made available to everybody present at the meeting. The group noted that, in addition to already providing all interested parties with electronic access to these packs on the Council's website, spare paper copies of this pack are always made available for members of the public to access at the meeting. Unfortunately, it is not possible to predict in advance the exact number of members of the public who will attend each meeting, as this varies. Therefore, the group agreed that, in addition to printing a higher number of update reports for Planning Committee meetings, clarification should be provided in the papers that these would be available in hard copy form on a first come first served basis.
- Prior Notice of Members' Questions at Planning Committee: The PAS report had proposed that Members should provide Officers with 48 hours' notice of questions due to be asked at Planning Committee meetings and during the group meeting it was clarified that this related to questions of a technical nature. Members expressed concerns about this proposal, noting that questions could arise during a debate that had not previously been anticipated and also that this could be viewed as curtailing the democratic process. To assist planning officers, due to the time that could be required to answer questions of a technical nature, the group instead suggested that, where possible, notice should be provided by Members to Planning Officers of any technical questions.

- Refresher Training on the Roles and Responsibilities of Planning Committee Members: The group noted that comprehensive training had been provided to Members at the start of the 2023/24 municipal year, including refresher training to more experienced Members and there was general agreement that this should continue.
- Reporting Appeal Decisions and Planning Performance to Planning Committee: The group was advised that the outcomes of appeals in respect of decisions taken at meetings of the Planning Committee had implications for the authority's performance in respect of planning matters. In this context, Members agreed that it was important to ensure that Planning Committee Members were kept informed about the outcomes of appeals in respect of their decisions and how this had impacted on the Council's performance.

Planning Committee – Code of Practice

- 3.3 During the 2022/23 municipal year, issues were raised by Members in terms of Councillor involvement in Planning Committee meetings, in particular when a member of the Planning Committee wishes to speak as a Councillor in respect of an application that affects their Ward.
- 3.4 The issues raised by Members of the Planning Committee in this context have included;
- Having to leave the room prior to the debate and the decision.
  - Having to leave the room prior to public speaking.
  - Being disadvantaged by being on the Planning Committee compared to Councillors who are not a member of the Planning Committee.
- 3.5 The Planning Procedure Rules within the main body of the Council's Constitution (at Part 14) currently do not specifically address any of these issues. However, to date Councillors affected are asked to leave by the Chairman of the Planning Committee and do so in line with good practice, which is an arrangement that has been in place for a number of years.

- 3.6 Part 25 of the Constitution at paragraph 2.2 broadly states that if a member speaks on a Planning Matter they must remain in the public gallery. Also, in Part 25 in paragraph 2.9 it is stated that *“where a Member has campaigned for or come to a final view prior to a meeting, the member should not take part in the decision making process. Depending on the circumstance and to preserve the appearance of propriety, the member should also consider whether or not to withdraw from the public gallery, after making his or her representations to the planning committee.”*
- 3.7 Guidance is given in the publication ‘Probity in Planning: Advice for Councillors and Officers making planning decisions’ which is published by the Local Government Association (LGA). A relevant extract from page 13 states *“If any councillor, whether or not a committee member, speaks on behalf of a lobby group at the decision making committee, they would be well advised to withdraw from the meeting once any public or ward member speaking opportunities have been completed. This is to counter any suggestion that members of the committee may have been influenced by their continuing presence. This should be set out in the authority’s code of conduct for planning matters.”*
- 3.8 It should be remembered that Planning Committees are quasi-judicial Committees and are subject to appeals to the land Tribunal as well as Judicial Review. That is the basis as to why it is considered best practice for Planning Committee Members to leave the room to prevent any allegations that they influenced any decisions either by their presence or by their conduct.
- 3.9 It is still considered good practice, even when a Councillor insists their presence would not influence any decision. Planning Committee decisions often attract considerable interest both from the applicant and/or the community and it is entirely possible that even if a Councillor does not believe or intend to influence, their actions could be interpreted as such and form part of an appeal, it is also possible that such allegations could be made maliciously. In addition to the potential impact on an appeal, such actions could be the subject of Code of Conduct complaints either in isolation or in addition to any appeals.
- 3.10 During the PAS review of the Planning Committee, Officers were advised that current arrangements are considered good practice and that the majority of Councils exclude members of their Planning Committee from the room during the debate and decision, where they have declared an interest and/or addressed the Committee as an interested party. In addition, Officers have been informed that a significant number of Councils exclude all Councillors from the room during the debate and

decision in those circumstances, whether they are a member of the Planning Committee or not.

- 3.11 In the current context, the Constitution Review Working Group concluded that it would not appear to be a good time to reverse the practice of asking Planning Committee members to leave the room for the debate/decision. However, Members concluded that a reasonable concession would be to allow Councillors that are also members of Planning Committee (and relevant Parish Councillors) to remain in the room during public speaking of the applicant/supporters/objectors.
- 3.12 The group also agreed that another reasonable concession would be that, if a Councillor has been asked to leave the room, they should still be enabled to view the live stream of the meeting. The reasons for excluding Councillors from the debate/decision process is to prevent the appearance of influence, it is not intended to make it difficult for Councillors to report back to residents/interested parties or to prevent them from knowing what was discussed and the reason for any decision without waiting for the minutes to be published.
- 3.13 The final issue is about Councillors on Planning Committee feeling disadvantaged compared to other Councillors. The group concluded that the easiest way to 'level the playing field' would be to have all Councillors that speak on an issue leave the room.
- 3.14 Appendix 2 to this report outlines suggested amendments to the Code of Practice – Planning Services document that reflects these proposed arrangements.

**Audit, Standards and Governance Committee - Quorum**

- 3.15 Bromsgrove District Council has a single Audit, Standards and Governance Committee which focuses on making decisions on a combination of audit, governance and standards matters on behalf of the Council.
- 3.16 The Audit, Standards and Governance Committee has a very important role in the Council's corporate governance arrangements and in respect of the standards regime. The Committee is a key source of assurance about the organisation's arrangements for managing risk, maintaining an effective control environment, and reporting on financial and non-financial performance.
- 3.17 In this context, it is really important to ensure that meetings of the Committee take place when scheduled and that all business on the agenda is transacted in a timely manner.

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- 3.18 There are currently 11 members appointed to the Committee, which has a quorum of 5 members. In previous years there was a membership of 9 councillors and a quorum of 5 Councillors. The total membership of the Committee was increased at the start of this municipal year.
- 3.19 In recent years, there have been a limited number of occasions where all members of the Committee have been present, although attendance has improved so far in the 2023/24 municipal year. There have also been times when the meeting has only just been quorate or close to only just being quorate, as detailed in Appendix 3 to the report.
- 3.20 The terms of reference for the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee stipulate that members of the Cabinet and the Chairman of the Council must not be members of, nor act as substitutes at meetings of the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee. Whilst this helps to ensure that appropriate checks and balances are in place in the decision-making process, it does reduce the pool of potential members from which substitute appointments can be made.
- 3.21 To help address this problem, the Constitution Review Working Group is proposing that the quorum for the Committee should be reduced from 5 to 3. This would help to ensure that meetings could proceed without delay, particularly in cases where there may be limited numbers of possible substitutes available to attend meetings of the Committee at short notice.
- 3.22 The size of the quorum for the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee at Bromsgrove District Council is currently higher than the size of the quorum for equivalent Committees at other Councils in Worcestershire, as detailed in Appendix 4 to the report. Therefore, it would not be inappropriate to have a quorum of 3 for the Committee.

#### Policy Framework

- 3.23 Bromsgrove District Council has a Leader and Cabinet model of decision making and is working towards a hybrid Leader and Cabinet model following decisions made at the Council meeting held on 20<sup>th</sup> September 2023. Within this structure of decision making, there are some decisions that must be taken by full Council, some decisions that must be taken by the Cabinet, some decisions where there are shared responsibilities and some “local choice” functions, whereby the authority determines whether the decision is taken by Cabinet or Council.
- 3.24 The Council is required to have a policy framework, comprising a list of important policies and strategies. Only full Council can make decisions about policies and strategies included in the Policy Framework.

- 3.25 A list of items currently included in the Council's Policy Framework can be found at Paragraph 4 in the Articles of the constitution (an extract from which can be found at Appendix 5).
- 3.26 Items that form part of the Policy Framework can only be determined by Council, although will be debated at a prior meeting of Cabinet. This is a lengthier decision-making process than that in place for items that can be determined by the Cabinet alone, or which have been delegated to other Committees, and so can cause delays to implementation. It is therefore important for Members to ensure that the most appropriate items, including those items where there is a legal requirement to do so, are included in the Policy Framework.
- 3.27 The content of the Policy Framework can be reviewed by the Council from time to time to ensure that it remains suitable for the authority. When reviewing the content of the Policy Framework, Members should take into account the legal requirements in respect of responsibilities for functions, as detailed at Part 3 of the Council's constitution.
- 3.28 Members may also wish to take into account the current content of the Policy Frameworks at other local authorities in Worcestershire (Appendix 7).
- 3.29 Suggested changes to the Policy Framework have been highlighted in track changes in Appendix 6 to the report. The suggested changes are being proposed on the basis of the following information:
- Annual Performance Plan – There is no longer an Annual Performance Plan. Instead, the Council's performance is monitored in quarterly finance and performance monitoring reports. These reports are considered by the Cabinet and Finance and Budget Working Group (the latter in respect of the budget). The Constitution Review Working Group has suggested that the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee might be the most appropriate body to monitor the performance data in these reports alongside Cabinet.
  - Crime and Disorder Reduction Plan – Overview and Scrutiny has a statutory duty to scrutinise the work of the local Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership, which is the North Worcestershire Community Safety Partnership, on an annual basis. The Overview and Scrutiny Board fulfils this role, with the latest such meeting taking place on 8<sup>th</sup> February 2023. It is suggested that the Board could scrutinise the content of the plan as part of this work.

- Plans and strategies which together form part of the Local Development Framework / Development Plan – The Head of Planning, Regeneration and Leisure Services has reported that the Local Development Framework and Development Plan are essentially the same thing. It is therefore proposed that this should be reflected in the Policy Framework, with reference made to the Development Plan as a single item. Members are asked to note that planning policies require Council approval and cannot be determined by Cabinet alone.
- Carbon Reduction Strategy – Due to the importance of the green thread in the Council Plan, it is suggested that the Carbon Reduction Strategy should be added to the Policy Framework.
- Contract Procedure Rules – Due to the importance of effective Contract Procedure Rules to good governance, it is proposed that this should be added to the Council's Policy Framework. This should help to provide Members with assurance that the Council is complying with best practice.
- Pay Policy – It is proposed that the Pay Policy should be removed from the Policy Framework as it does not need to be listed in the framework. As the Pay Policy forms part of the Council's budget it will continue to be determined by Council.

Six Month Rule – Declaring a Vacancy

- 3.30 A Councillor ceases to be an elected Member should they fail to attend a meeting of the authority for six consecutive months since their previous attendance at a meeting. This could involve attendance at meetings of Council or Committees.
- 3.31 Currently, at Bromsgrove District Council, should a Councillor fail to attend a Council or Committee meeting in this period, the vacancy can only be declared at a Council meeting. This could potentially cause delays between the person ceasing to be a Member and the vacancy occurring as it is dependent on the date of the next Council meeting.
- 3.32 The Association of Electoral Administrators (AEA) has provided guidance indicating that it is considered best practice for a Council's constitution to provide delegated authority to the proper officer of the Council to declare vacancies that occur in these instances.

- 3.33 The Constitution Review Working Group is therefore recommending that the Chief Executive, as Proper Officer, be delegated authority to declare vacancies that occur in the event of a Councillor failing to attend a Council or Committee meeting in a six month period.

Supplementary Question at Council Meetings

- 3.34 During the meeting of the Constitution Review Working Group held on 31<sup>st</sup> August 2023 Members discussed arrangements for the consideration of Questions on Notice at Council meetings.
- 3.35 At present, each Member is entitled to submit a single Question on Notice for consideration at a Council meeting. However, supplementary questions are not permitted.
- 3.36 The Constitution Review Working Group made reference to arrangements for consideration of Questions on Notice at other Councils in Worcestershire. At present, a single supplementary question is permitted per Member at Council meetings held at Malvern Hills District Council, Redditch Borough Council, Worcester City Council, Worcestershire County Council and Wyre Forest District Council.
- 3.37 The Constitution Review Working Group agreed that it would be worthwhile to trial the inclusion of supplementary questions at Council meetings held at Bromsgrove District Council. In line with other Councils, this would consist of a single supplementary question per Member and the supplementary question would need to be based on the original question that was asked or the answer provided to that question.
- 3.38 During the Constitution Review Working Group meeting it was noted that there would be occasions where the Member to whom the question is directed would be unable to answer the supplementary question at the meeting. This could be because additional information might be required from partner organisations in order to provide an answer or because specific data might need to be referenced in the response. In such cases, Members were asked to note that responses to supplementary questions might need to be provided to the relevant Member in writing after the meeting.
- 3.39 Currently, there is a limit of 15 minutes at Council meetings dedicated to the consideration of Questions on Notice. Members may wish to give consideration to extending the time period available for the consideration of Questions on Notice during this trial period in order to accommodate the asking and provision of answers to supplementary questions.

Other Issues discussed by the Constitution Review Working Group

3.40 During the meetings of the Constitution Review Working Group held on 26<sup>th</sup> January, 31<sup>st</sup> August and 28<sup>th</sup> September 2023 Members also discussed a number of issues that did not result in recommendations being made to Council. This included consideration of the following points:

- Officer Scheme of Delegations – The Officer Scheme of Delegations is reviewed by Council on an annual basis. When the Scheme of Delegations was reviewed at the Annual Council meeting held in May 2022, a number of questions were raised and suggestions made about certain delegations. These delegations were revisited at the Constitution Review Working Group meeting together with responses that had been received from Officers to the points raised by Members at the Council meeting. Based on this information, the group chose not to recommend any changes in respect of those delegations.
- Government grant funding – The Constitution Review Working Group considered a proposal for the Section 151 Officer be delegated authority to accept, administer and distribute ring fenced Government Grant Funding, or funding from bodies acting on behalf of Government, and to make the necessary and corresponding adjustments to the Medium Term Financial Plan following consultation with the relevant Portfolio Holder and subject to meeting the conditions of grant funding. This would have related to grants that could only be used for specific purposes which were subject to tight deadlines and where there was a risk that the funding would need to be returned to the Government if it was not processed quickly. Members discussed this proposed delegation but did not agree any recommendation. Instead, the group proposed that this matter should be referred to the Finance and Budget Working Group for further discussion.
- The Governance Systems Task Group – At the meeting held on 28<sup>th</sup> September 2023 Members discussed the next steps in the process in terms of the proposals made by the Governance Systems Task Group and approved at the Council meeting held on 20<sup>th</sup> September 2023. Members agreed that there should be regular meeting of the Constitution Review Working Group, held on approximately a monthly basis, to consider progress in respect of these recommendations. It should also be noted that the Overview and Scrutiny Board is due to receive an update on progress at every meeting held during the 2023/24 municipal year.

**4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 No specific financial implications have been identified in relation to the recommendations detailed in this report.

**5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 Review and revision of the Constitution is governed by Article 15 of the Constitution.
- 5.2 Only Council can make changes to the constitution. The Constitution Review Working Group can review sections of the constitution and make recommendations to Council about changes that could be made to the constitution.

Planning Committee

- 5.3 There are no Acts or Regulations that specifically address Planning Committee members speaking as ward Councillors. The general principle in terms of Local Authority Decision Making is addressed in the Localism Act Section 31 (10), which specifically refers to Disclosable Pecuniary Interests and states "*Standing orders of a relevant authority may provide for the exclusion of a member or co-opted member of the authority from a meeting while any discussion or vote takes place in which, as a result of the operation of subsection (4), the member or co-opted member may not participate.*"

Audit, Standards and Governance Committee

- 5.4 As detailed in the Local Government Act 1972 (Schedule 12, paragraph 6) the legal requirement in terms of the quorum for Council meetings is that at least one quarter of the whole number of members of the Council must be present.
- 5.5 A quorum of 3 would suffice under these rules for a Committee with a total number of 11 seats.
- 5.6 Councils can choose to set the quorum for each Committee at a particular level that the authority deems to be appropriate. This can include setting the quorum for the Committee at a level higher than one third of the members of the Committee.
- 5.7 At Bromsgrove District Council, the quorums for Committees are detailed in the Committee Terms of Reference at Part 5 of the constitution. The quorums for the Committees are also recorded in many of the Committee procedure rules that are included in the constitution.

Policy Framework

- 5.8 The Local Government Act 2000, in particular Section 13 (Functions which are the responsibility of an executive) details the matters which are the responsibility of the Executive (Cabinet).
- 5.9 The Local Authorities (Functions and Responsibilities) (England) Regulations 2000 (as amended) gives effect to section 13 of the Local Government Act 2000 by specifying in Schedule 1 to the regulations which functions are not to be the responsibility of the Executive (Cabinet). In other words, the Executive cannot by law make the decision on those matters.
- 5.10 The areas that the Executive (Cabinet) cannot determine, so instead are the preserve of full Council, fall under the following headings:
- Functions relating to town and country planning and development control (planning policies)
  - Functions relation to Licensing and Registration (many of which are delegated in Bromsgrove to the relevant regulatory Committees)
  - Functions relating to health and safety at work
  - Functions relating to elections (many of which are delegated to the Electoral Matters Committee)
  - Functions relating to name and status of areas and individuals
  - Power to make, amend, re-enact or enforce byelaws
  - Power to promote or oppose local or personal Bills
  - Functions relating to pensions
  - Miscellaneous functions

Six Month Rule – Declaring a Vacancy

- 5.11 Section 101 of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended) gives a general power to local authorities to discharge functions through officers. Local Authorities are required by the same Act to maintain a list of these, which is referred to as the Scheme of Delegation. This sets out those powers of the Council which can be carried out by officers of the Council.
- 5.12 Section 85 of the Local Government Act 1972 states that if a member of a local authority fails, throughout a period of six consecutive months from the date of their last attendance, to attend a meeting of the authority, they shall cease to be a member of the Council. An exception applies if their non-attendance has been approved by Council before the expiry of the six-month period.

5.13 Section 86 of the Local Government Act 1972 states that where a Councillor has ceased to be a Member, the Council will forthwith declare the office to be vacant.

5.14 The AEA advises that the requirement for the Council to forthwith declare the office to be vacant places an expectation that this will happen without delay. By delegating authority to the proper officer, any such vacancies can be declared in the timely manner anticipated by the legislation.

**6. OTHER - IMPLICATIONS**

**Relevant Strategic Purpose**

6.1 It is appropriate to review the operation of Committees from time to time to ensure that they function in a manner that supports the strategic purpose “an effective and sustainable Council”.

6.2 Similarly, it is important to review the Council’s Policy Framework on occasion to ensure that the content remains relevant and supports the Council’s ability to be “an effective and sustainable Council”.

6.3 Members need to ensure that meetings of the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee are quorate so that the business on the agenda can be transacted in a timely manner.

6.4 Regular review of the Council’s Scheme of Delegations helps Members to determine whether the delegations remain fit for purpose. This supports the strategic purpose to be an Effective and Sustainable Council.

**Climate Change Implications**

6.5 Currently, the Carbon Reduction Strategy and plans do not form part of the authority’s Policy Framework. Given the significance of the green thread as a priority in the Council Plan, the Constitution Review Working Group is suggesting that the item should be added to the Policy Framework.

6.6 Any other changes to the Scheme of Delegations which could have climate change implications would be reviewed on a case by case basis.

**Equalities and Diversity Implications**

6.7 There are no specific equalities and diversity implications to this report.

**7. RISK MANAGEMENT**

- 7.1 There is a risk that if the quorum for the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee remains at 5 Members, there may be meetings of the Committee in future which are not quorate. Should this occur, decisions could not be taken at these meetings, which could undermine the Council's corporate governance processes.

**8. APPENDICES and BACKGROUND PAPERS**

Appendices:

Appendix 1 – Bromsgrove District Council Planning Committee Review – Planning Advisory Service

Appendix 2 – The Code of Practice – Planning Services with suggested amendments (Part 25 of the Constitution)

Appendix 3 – Audit, Standards and Governance Committee – Committee Attendance Figures

Appendix 4 – Quorums for Audit Committees in Worcestershire

Appendix 5 – Extract from the Articles – Current Policy Framework

Appendix 6 – Extract from the Articles – Suggested Amendments to the Policy Framework

Appendix 7 – Policy Frameworks at other Councils in Worcestershire

Background Papers:

AEA Guidance – 'Casual Vacancy – Failure to Attend Meetings.'

Bromsgrove District Council's constitution

The Localism Act 2011, paragraph 31: [Localism Act 2011 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk)

Minutes of the meeting of the Annual Council meeting held on 18<sup>th</sup> May 2022: [Minutes of the Annual Council meeting - 18th May 2022](#)

Probity in Planning: Advice for Councillors and Officers making planning decisions by the Local Government Association.

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Review of Delegations, report to the Annual Council meeting held on 18<sup>th</sup> May 2022: [Scheme of Delegations Review - 18th May 2022](#)  
Scheme of Delegations, report to the Annual Council meeting held on 24<sup>th</sup> May 2023: [Scheme of Delegations report](#)

**9. REPORT SIGN OFF**

<b>Department</b>	<b>Name and Job Title</b>	<b>Date</b>
Portfolio Holder	Councillor Charlie Hotham	
Lead Director / Head of Service	Claire Felton, Head of Legal, Democratic and Property Services	
Financial Services	Pete Carpenter, Interim Section 151 Officer	
Legal Services	Claire Felton, Head of Legal, Democratic and Property Services	
Policy Team (if equalities implications apply)	Helen Mole, Business Transformation Manager	
Climate Change Team (if climate change implications apply)	Judith Willis, Head of Communities and Housing Services	



**Portfolio Holder Report**

**Portfolio Holder Report – Environmental Services & Community Safety**

**Introduction and Overview:**

At Bromsgrove District Council Portfolio Holders provide an annual update to Council on services within their portfolio remit. These services are delivered in accordance with the Council's Strategic Purposes, as detailed in the Bromsgrove District Council Plan 2019 – 2023.

This report provides an outline of services and activities within the remit of this particular Portfolio Holder. Information is included in relation to the Council's Strategic Purposes, relevant key activities, partnership working, projects and programmes and news stories.

A version of this report, focusing on each Portfolio Holder's remit in turn, will be considered at each meeting of Council (except for the Annual Council meeting).

Whilst services will be contributing information into this report it is worth noting that not all sections of the report will be relevant to all service areas. In this circumstance, some sections may not be completed by all services.

The report will be structured as follows:

- 1) Update on Strategic Purposes
- 2) Partnership working
- 3) Key activities and priorities
- 4) Good news stories and awards (if applicable)
- 5) Other

The Council has the following Strategic Purposes and Priorities:

<b>Strategic Purposes</b>	<b>Council Priorities</b>
Run and grow a successful business	Economic development and regeneration
Work and financial independence	Skills for the future
Living independent, active and healthy lives	Improving health & well being
Affordable and sustainable homes	A balanced housing market
Communities which are safe, well maintained and green	Reducing crime & disorder
The Green Thread runs through the Council Plan	<b>Internal priorities</b>
	Financial stability
	High quality services
	Sustainability



**Portfolio Holder Report**

**1. Update on Strategic Purposes**

**Relevant Strategic Purpose: Communities which are safe, well maintained and green**

The Community Safety Team supports Council to meet its statutory duties under the Crime & Disorder Act 1998 and all subsequent community safety legislation. The Community Safety Team is made up of 5 officers who work across Bromsgrove & Redditch and with partners, other service areas and local communities to develop projects, initiatives and interventions to reduce crime, disorder and ASB.

The team also works with other agencies to provide victim support and implement actions to reduce fear of crime. The team operates in an advisory and co-ordinating capacity mainly via the Safer Bromsgrove operational group to improve community safety in local neighbourhoods. Reducing Crime & Disorder is also corporate priority and the team uses its considerable expertise and experience to help other council services embed crime and ASB prevention into mainstream corporate service delivery.

Environmental Services are one of the most visible representatives of the Council for our residents, providing street cleansing and horticultural work to maintain the appearance of the district, and providing Waste Collection Services to every household to support them with the management of their residual waste, dry recycling, and their garden waste if they wish to sign up to our chargeable "Brown Bin" service.

Tanker service to support our residents who do not have access to mains sewerage and provide a high-quality service at an affordable price, which also influences the pricing of private service providers to ensure good value for everyone.

As well as the direct services to deliver these actions, Environmental Services also carry out Enforcement Work to tackle environmental crime and works with partners such as the Worcestershire County Council Highways team and BDHT to support residents and ensure issues reach the right people for resolution.

Through our work with NWWM we manage and enforce the District Council's responsibilities for Land Drainage and flooding.

**Relevant Strategic Purpose 2: Run and grow a successful business**

Environmental Services operates a successful Commercial Waste Service that supports businesses to manage their waste responsibly and cost effectively. As well as supporting the businesses to flourish, it also links local businesses success back to the local taxpayers, as the income from this service offsets wider costs of providing services to our residents, adding a social value for businesses when they choose to use us to manage their waste.



**Portfolio Holder Report**

**Relevant Strategic Purpose: Living independent, active and healthy lives**

Another area the Community Safety Team co-ordinates is support for residents and communities who are victims of crime or more susceptible to crime and disorder to help them to move toward a better quality of life, free from the fear of crime. The team works with partners and voluntary sector services to provide support to those who have experienced crime and disorder, for example providing security assessments for Domestic Abuse survivors, encouraging and supporting victims of hate incidents to make reports and seek help and co-ordinating a problem-solving approach those experiencing anti-social behaviour. The team also co-ordinates activity and interventions to help protect young people who are at more risk of becoming victims of crime and providing interventions for young people at risk of falling into criminality and anti-social behaviour.

**Key activities since last report:**

The NWCSP Action Plan priorities for 2023-24 are to Reduce Violence & Abuse, Reduce Theft & Acquisitive Crime and Reduce ASB, Damage & Nuisance. Two cross-cutting themes of Reducing the Harm Caused by Drugs & Alcohol and Reducing Re-Offending.

North Worcestershire Community Safety Partnership funding is provided by the West Mercia PCC and for 2023-24 has been allocated as follows to address the CSP priorities and develop relevant interventions and projects.

The projects in grey are West Mercia wide projects where the PCC top slices each CSP's ring-fenced grant prior to allocation in order to support on-going force wide delivery.

<b>NWCSP Funded Projects</b>	<b>Funding</b>
Contribution to West Mercia CSP Analyst Team	£20,000
Contribution West Mercia Integrated Offender Management	£1,000
Contribution to West Mercia Hate Crime Project	£5,412
Contribution to West Mercia Crimestoppers	£2,000
Bromsgrove Youthwork, Outreach & Mentoring	£15,000
RUN – Resources for new Bromsgrove DA Survivors Support Group	£ 2,000
Bromsgrove Youth Hub – Friday Sessions (part-funding)	£ 3,500
Safer Bromsgrove Projects & Initiatives	£ 5,512.67
Redditch Allocation	£29,012.67
Wyre Forest Allocation	£32,012.68
NW Domestic Abuse Homicide Reviews and Support	£20,000
NW Safe Places Scheme	£ 3,800
Total Grant	£139,250.00



**Portfolio Holder Report**

**Key activities since last report – Environmental Services**

Following a motion to Full Council in 2022 regarding how we manage the grass cutting of our Open Spaces and Highway Verges within settlements, we have reviewed how we currently provide our services, and put forwards proposals to support working with resident groups and ward members to identify areas suitable for naturalising to support habitat creation and the creation of green corridors to support pollination during the Summer Months, whilst maintaining aesthetic maintenance in those areas that matter most to our residents. This has also supported wider consideration on our Biodiversity responsibilities that are also being reviewed to support our Climate Change ambitions.

In 2019 the Government announced their Waste and Resources Strategy, which set out ambitious aims for supporting higher environmental standards, which had a number of elements regarding how waste would be managed in future. This has been through public consultation, and partially enacted through the Environment Act 2021, and in order to meet the requirements expected through this, we have been working closely with the six other Councils in Worcestershire, as well as the Climate Action Group WRAP to consider options for future waste arrangements to ensure we are delivering the right services for our residents, whilst ensuring compliance with our legal responsibilities.

Sickness rates have continued to put pressure on our services as we have emerged from the Coronavirus pandemic, and having maintained our services across the District through an exceedingly challenging period, we are now working to review our standards and prioritise areas that will have the greatest benefit for residents. Road sweeping is an often overlooked area of work that can have a large impact on the appearance of an area, and over the last six months we have made changes to how this work is carried out and managed to help improve the standards and then maintain them as we move into the Winter. This has seen a considerable improvement across our towns and villages in recent months, and is now targeting known flooding areas and our road networks outside of settlements to improve the overall appearance of our roads and support the County Council in their maintenance of the drainage systems.

We have been reviewing the options available to us regarding how we manage our fleet of vehicles and equipment to reduce our Carbon emissions and provide effective and efficient services, and have made changes to how we manage the working life of our Refuse Collection fleet, by refurbishing rather than replacing vehicles in order to extend their lifespan. Not only is this a more environmentally sustainable way to refresh and optimise our fleet, it is also more cost effective than buying new vehicles, and the savings will help support future investment in vehicles that will further reduce our carbon impact as technology develops and is able to support the local needs and pressures of providing our services across Bromsgrove District.

Our Commercial Services team have continued to grow our customer base and support local businesses **Page 48** their waste effectively, with

**Portfolio Holder Report**

extremely strong customer retention as a result of our quality standard of service, and instantly recognisable yellow lorries. With an increasing aware of social responsibility, many of our customers have also appreciated the benefits of using our services and knowing that their costs are also supporting their local community, as our income helps to offset the wider pressures on Council Finances, and secure services for residents.

Fly Tipping remains an on-going pressure for our Place Teams to manage across the District, although over the last two years, the Place Teams have significantly increased the use of warning signs across the district, and invested in more advanced camera systems to improve our evidence gathering capabilities which has resulted in a number of Fixed Penalty Notices being issued and paid this year, and several cases being considered for further Court Action.

**Anticipated Activities/Key Milestones For Next Period**

**Implementing the Serious Violence Duty** - The Community Safety Team will be supporting the Council to meet its requirements with regard to the Serious Violence Duty. Statutory guidance updated on 22 June 2023 outlines how specified authorities (of which the Council is one) can exercise of their functions in relation to the SV Duty, as set out in the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts (PCSC) Act 2022.

The guidance sets out how specified authorities should work together to deliver the requirements in the SV Duty to prevent and reduce serious violence within a defined area. It has been agreed that local arrangements will operate at a county level with the Worcestershire Safer Communities Board and the two Community Safety Partnerships in North/South Worcestershire working together to address serious violence. The Partnerships have adopted the following definition of Serious Violence which recognises the types offences that have such a devastating impact on lives of victims and families and instil fear within our communities.

***West Mercia's definition of Serious Violence:***

*Violence, both physical and sexual, causing lasting psychological or physical harm, or where lasting harm was intended. This includes offences where there is an inherent threat of physical harm, such as county lines or offences involving use of an offensive weapon, blade or pointed article or any corrosive substance. To include:*

- Violence with injury resulting in serious harm
- Homicide including attempted murder
- Serious sexual harm –rape and sexual assaults
- Robbery
- Violence, including threats and aggravated offences such as those involving use of an offensive weapon, blade or pointed article or any corrosive substance
- Violence, including threats and aggravated offences which involve use of a firearm
- Offences with a county lines marker
- Violence with injury marked as domestic abuse
- Violence with injury marked as hate crime
- Modern slavery offences



**Portfolio Holder Report**

**Anticipated Activities/Key Milestones For Next Period – Environmental Services**

As part of his speech about net zero on 20 September 2023, the Prime Minister indicated a change of direction in Government policy on recycling, and appears to be reinstating local discretion to collect waste and increase recycling in the way that councils know will work best for local communities. The announcement was very high-level and having already had delays of over two years regarding what the requirements will be for Local Authorities under the Environment Act 2021, it is unknown as to when we may have clarity on how far Defra proposes to amend other aspects of the proposals, which have now been re-labelled as “simpler recycling”.

The Senior Worcestershire Waste Officers Group is continuing to support consideration of future options for the provision of waste collection services for Bromsgrove and wider Worcestershire, and this is being supported and reviewed by the Waste Task and Finish Group set up by the Worcestershire Leaders Board to make recommendations that best support our needs and aspirations. This will allow the Council to make informed decisions on future services to meet our responsibilities as the District continues to grow.

**2. Partnership Working:**

The Council works with a range of partner organisations to meet the needs of residents and businesses in the District. The following section details work delivered within the remit of this Portfolio Holder.

**Partnership working examples:**

Alongside the Council’s statutory duty to work in partnership to address crime and disorder via North Worcestershire CSP, the council is represented on a number of sub-groups and multi-agency forums to address specific community issues. For example: -

**GET SAFE Child Exploitation Strategic and Operational Groups.**

GET SAFE is the Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Partnership’s response to addressing all forms of exploitation that could affect young people in our local neighbourhood. GET SAFE is the Worcestershire partnership title for the identification and management of multi-agency support and protection for children and young people at risk of **G**ang-related activity, **S**exual **E**xploitation, **T**rafficking, **M**odern Day **S**lavery, **A**bsent and **M**issing, **F**orced **M**arriage, **H**onour Based **V**iolence and **F**emale **G**enital **M**utilation, and **C**riminal **E**xploitation.

**Worcestershire Adult Exploitation Group** – This group is a sub-group of the Adult Safeguarding Partnerships and is currently developing an Adult Exploitation Strategy to protect those people over 18 who have Care & Support Needs from being targeted and exploited by criminals and predators. The group is aligning its processes to the GET SAFE structure to

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ensure there is a consistent approach to exploitation work across the county and a smooth transition from child to adult services for those most in need.

**Prevent Strategy Group** – provides a multi-agency response to Preventing Violent Extremism actions and supporting the work of the statutory Channel. The Home Office have recently reviewed its Prevent Duty Guidance, which will come into force on 1<sup>st</sup> Jan 2024. A Local Government Toolkit has also been developed to support councils in implementing the new guidance, in recognition of the key role local authorities have in identifying and supporting those at risk of radicalisation.

**Environmental Services**

- Herefordshire and Worcestershire Waste Partnership (BDC/ RBC/ WFDC/ Wychavon/ Worcester City Council/ MHDC/ WCC/Herefordshire County Council). Strategic and Operational partnership with collective work on Central Government Consultation responses and future service planning, with joint projects and funding to review service delivery in preparation for the changes being implemented by Central Government.
- Worcestershire County Council Highways Department & their contractors “Ringway” – The Place Team work closely with both teams to ensure consistency of service across the District.
- Parish Councils – The Place Teams work closely with many of our Parish Councils throughout the year, and provide additional services on behalf of some through the Lengthsman Scheme which supports communication and understanding of local issues through the additional working relationship.
- DEFRA – Providing information on services to support planning for the Extended Producer Responsibility payments model for Local Authorities, which is one of the changes arising from the Environment Act 2021.

**Key activities since last report:**

**Youth Outreach and Detached Youth work** - Patrols continue to be delivered across Bromsgrove. The youth team respond to emerging issues and also calls for intervention from partners and residents. They also carry out scheduled patrols in identified areas of concern such Sidemoor (Tues), Bromsgrove Town Centre (Weds) and Catshill (Thurs). The team engage with young people on street in local areas and either carry out diversionary work to encourage teens into regular club provision which is outreach youthwork or where young people are significantly disaffected and/or not ready to attend mainstream provision youth workers will work with them in the spaces they choose, at a pace and schedule that they decide. This is known as detached youthwork. The team also support the Street Pastor Night Time Economy patrols on late Fri Night/early Sat Morning to support any young people under 18 who are out at these high risk times and locations.

**Crime Risk Surveys and Assessments** - Dave Rischmiller and Sarah McIntosh are both College of Policing qualified Designing Out Crime Officers (DOCOs) which allows them to regularly examine and comment on Planning Applications, making recommendations based on the principles of Crime



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Prevention through Environmental Design (CPtED). Last year Dave and Sarah examined 34 applications, totalling 1052 residential units, 10 Commercial Units and 1961 Sq.m of commercial development. The team are actively engaged in the project to re-develop of the old Market Hall site in Bromsgrove Town Centre providing designing out crime advice for this substantial regeneration project.

**Community Engagement** - Across the summer, the team supported a number of community events including the BDHT Fun days, raising awareness of crime prevention methods with local residents, supporting them to keep themselves and their property safe. The team also attended the Freshers Fayre at HOW College, Bromsgrove Campus on the 14<sup>th</sup> Sept. This event was well attended by new and current students and provided a great opportunity to engage with a vulnerable group about keeping themselves and their property safe.

- Responding to Government consultations on the proposed changes to Waste Collection requirements linked to the Environment Act 2021.
- Modelling of future Waste Collection service options, considering financial, environmental and legislative factors alongside what matters to our residents.

**Anticipated Activities/Key Milestones and Priorities For Next Period**

The team will be supporting the Council to respond and implement the **Government's new ASB Action Plan**. Many of the recommendations in the plan are still out for consultation but the Government is clear that Local Authorities have a key role in addressing issues of ASB in local neighbourhoods and ensuring that victims and witnesses are at the heart of any responses to problems that are identified.

The team will also be instrumental in supporting the Council to respond to the requirements of the **Protect Duty** which is pending UK wide legislation that will be known as Martyn's Law. It will place a requirement on those responsible for certain publicly accessible locations to consider the threat from terrorism and implement appropriate and proportionate mitigation measures.

Martyn's Law is the government's response to the terrorism attack at Manchester arena and other atrocities. It is expected that when enacted the new legislation will apply to anyone responsible for publicly accessible locations used for purposes such as entertainment and leisure, retail, food and drink, museums and galleries, sports grounds, public areas of local and central Government buildings (e.g., town halls), visitor attractions, temporary events, Places of Worship, health, and education.

Discussions are ongoing with Worcestershire County Council regarding the financial contributions we receive towards services such as grass cutting, that is done on behalf of the County to meet their statutory duties, as these are



**Portfolio Holder Report**

being reviewed to ensure we are receiving appropriate funding that reflects our expenses, whilst continuing to work in partnership.

The Place Teams are continuing to coordinate works with WCC Highways, and looking at how our Road Sweeping can better support central reservations and splitters at junctions across the District to further improve the aesthetics of these areas alongside other planned maintenance to minimise the need for additional disruption and cost associated with dedicated traffic management.

**3. Good News Stories and Awards (if applicable)**

**Title of news story:**

**Hate Crime Awareness Week 2023** takes place between the **14<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> October**. During the week the community safety team will be working with West Mercia Police and Victim Support to host a Hate Crime awareness event at the Parkside Council House, Bromsgrove 19<sup>th</sup> October.

The focus of the event is Disability Hate Crime and a community theatre company has been engaged to deliver sessions about service users experiences of Hate Crime. 'About Face' theatre company will be providing performances on the day, followed by exercises supporting individuals to complete a hate incident reporting form and developing understanding of how the Police handle Hate Crime reports.

There will be three sessions held across the day, at 11am, at 1:30pm and at 4pm. For more information about the event, please contact:  
[communitysafety@bromsgroveandredditch.gov.uk](mailto:communitysafety@bromsgroveandredditch.gov.uk)

**Title of news story:**

**National White Ribbon Campaign against Domestic Abuse – 25<sup>th</sup> Nov to 10<sup>th</sup> Dec**

The Community Safety Team will be hosting a Domestic Abuse Awareness stall on Bromsgrove High Street on Tues 5<sup>th</sup> Dec 11am to 1pm to promote local services and engage with residents and visitor to the town centre. The team will also be supporting various online Domestic Abuse campaigns sharing information and content from support services and agencies

The Community Safety Team will again be promoting the Herefordshire and Worcestershire White Ribbon Conference. This annual event will take place on **Friday 24 November 2023 via Microsoft Teams between 9.30 am and 3.15pm.**

The White Ribbon Conference is jointly organised by Worcestershire and Herefordshire County Councils. It aims to raise awareness about domestic abuse. Increasing our knowledge and confidence around this subject is a key part of our approach to tackling violence against women, girls and all victims of abuse in across our two communities.

Book a place at: [Joint Herefordshire & Worcestershire White Ribbon Conference - 24 Nov 2023 Tickets, Fri 24 Nov 2023 09:05:31](https://www.eventbrite.com/e/joint-herefordshire-worcestershire-white-ribbon-conference-24-nov-2023-tickets-fri-24-nov-2023-09-053) [Eventbrite](https://www.eventbrite.com/e/joint-herefordshire-worcestershire-white-ribbon-conference-24-nov-2023-tickets-fri-24-nov-2023-09-053)



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This year's conference will see another a wide range of guest speakers and topics. Businesses across the two counties will be encouraged to expand their role in identifying, supporting, and signposting those suffering from abuse. The conference will see **Employers Initiative on Domestic Abuse**, share national best practice in relation to policies. This further embraces the ethos of "Domestic abuse is everyone's business."

**DCC Maggie Blyth**, the National Police Chiefs Council Lead for Violence against Women and Girls will be a keynote speaker. Maggie lives in Herefordshire and was previously the Chair of the Children's Safeguarding Board.

Also attending is **PEGS, a social enterprise** set up to support parents, carers and guardians who are experiencing Child to Parent Abuse (CPA).

Attendees will also hear about how domestic abuse impacts on blind victims.

The conference will also celebrate the **launch of a new initiative "cut it out"**. This initiative focuses on how people working in the beauty and hair industry can play their part in helping victims of domestic abuse.

Plus **Gareth Rogers and Joe Cole from The Right Path – Guiding Change** will present "The Journey of Educating Male Students on Misogyny & Violence Against Women & Girls".

The theme for this year's White Ribbon UK campaign is **#ChangeTheStory**. This starts with challenging harmful words, attitudes and behaviours that perpetuate violence. The conference aims to do just that and encourage all of us to make that difference.

Environmental Services is upgrading the Computer systems that support us in managing customer enquiries, and planning our work across the District, and have been rolling this out across the services over the last 12 months.

The ABAVUS system will increase our ability to identify issues and direct our staff towards issues, as well as ultimately support our residents to report and track issues that they have identified through their online accounts, either through an app on their devices or through our online portal, with updates on their issues as the team do them.

Already implemented to support our Bulky Waste Collection Service, and the services provided by our Place Teams, alongside in-cab technology to support access to information and issues even whilst out working, we are currently building the system to support our Waste Collection teams and expect to start trialling this element of the new system in the Spring, as we also further refine how residents can interact with us and improve our ability to keep them updated through the system.

The potential benefits of this system have led to ABAVUS being looked at as a corporate wide system to support other teams across the Council in making it easier for residents to access the services we provide.

**Recommendations from the Cabinet Meeting that took place on  
13<sup>th</sup> September 2023**

**Equalities Annual Report**

**RECOMMENDED** that

the Equality Annual Report 2022, as attached at Appendix 1 to the report, be endorsed.

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#### Equality Annual Report 2022

Relevant Portfolio Holder	Councillor C Hotham Cabinet Member for Finance and Enabling
Portfolio Holder Consulted	No
Relevant Head of Service	Deb Poole, Head of Business Transformation and Organisational Development
Report Author	Emily Payne Job Title: Engagement and Equalities Advisor Contact email: emily.payne@bromsgroveandredditch.gov.uk Contact Tel: 01527 548284
Wards Affected	All
Ward Councillor(s) consulted	N/A
Relevant Strategic Purpose(s)	Underpins all Strategic Purposes, due to being General Equality Duty
Non-Key Decision	
If you have any questions about this report, please contact the report author in advance of the meeting.	

#### 1. RECOMMENDATIONS

**Cabinet is requested to RECOMMEND to COUNCIL that: -**

- 1) that the Equality Annual Report 2022 attached at Appendix 1 be endorsed.**

#### 2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Annual Report informs the progress on the Council's equality objectives covering the period January 2022 to December 2022. Building on our last report and work carried out since 2021, this progress report provides a detailed insight into our ongoing commitment to equality.
- 2.2 The Council adopted its new Equality Strategy 2022 to 2026 and this provides a detailed insight into our ongoing commitment to equality,
- 2.3 As we continued to recover from COVID-19, the Cost of Living hit and this impacted greatly the work being undertaken by the council and its partners, generating new activity to help support disadvantaged groups and promote equality during this challenging period.

- 2.4 It should be noted that the examples included in this report are not a complete list of everything the Council has done or will do to achieve our equality objectives.

**3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 3.1 There are no financial implications arising directly from this report.

**4. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 The Equality Act 2010 consists of a General Equality Duty, supported by specific duties, requires public authorities, like Bromsgrove District Council, to consider or think about how their policies or decisions affect people who are protected under the Equality Act.

- 4.2 The specific duties require the Council to: -

- Publish equality information at least once a year to show how they've complied with the equality duty
- Prepare and publish equality objectives at least every four years

- 4.3 This Annual Report informs the progress on the equality agenda covering the period January 2022 to December 2022.

**5. STRATEGIC PURPOSES - IMPLICATIONS**

**Relevant Strategic Purpose**

- 5.1 The report contributes to all Strategic Purposes, predominantly the support element of the 'High Quality Services' priority, under 'An effective & sustainable Council', as identified in the Council Plan.

**Climate Change Implications**

- 5.2 There are no climate change implications arising from this report.

**6. OTHER IMPLICATIONS**

**Equalities and Diversity Implications**

- 6.1 Our approach to equalities corporately, so we can support all our residents and customers, is set out in the Council's Equalities Strategy.
- 6.2 This report supports our legal requirement to report the progress made during 2022.

**Operational Implications**

- 6.2 There are no operational implications directly arising from this report; the report details clearly our organisational responsibilities and provides clarity at an operational level.

**7. RISK MANAGEMENT**

- 7.1 There are no risks directly arising from this report.

**8. APPENDICES and BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- Appendix 1            Equality Strategy Annual Report 2022

**9. REPORT SIGN OFF**

<b>Department</b>	<b>Name and Job Title</b>	<b>Date</b>
Portfolio Holder	Councillor C Hotham Cabinet Member for Finance and Enabling	22/08/2023
Lead Director / Head of Service	Deb Poole Head of Business Transformation and Operational Development	26/07/2023
Financial Services		
Legal Services		
Policy Team (if equalities implications apply)	Emily Payne Engagement and Equalities Advisor	22/08/2023



## **Bromsgrove District Council Equality Strategy Annual Report 2022**

### **1 Introduction**

1.1 This annual report informs the progress on the equality agenda covering the period January 2022 to December 2022. Building on our last report and work carried out since 2021, this progress report provides a detailed insight into our ongoing commitment to equality. It highlights our achievements and sets out the different ways the council is seeking to ensure that our services are fair, inclusive, and accessible to all our residents and support good equalities practice for our employees.

1.2 The Council adopted its new Equality Strategy 2022 to 2026 during this year, this provides a detailed insight into our ongoing commitment to equality, set out in one place our equality objectives and other arrangements for embedding equality into everything we do and, perhaps most importantly, set out where we must improve.

1.3 As we continued to recover from COVID-19, the Cost of Living hit and this impacted greatly the work being undertaken by the council and its partners, generating new activity to help support disadvantaged groups and promote equality during this challenging period.

### **2 The Council's Vision, Purposes and Priorities**

2.1 Bromsgrove District Council's vision is to enrich the lives and aspirations of all our residents, businesses, and visitors through the provision of high-quality services, ensuring that all in need receive appropriate help and support. People are at the heart of everything we do; whether they live in our district, work here, or choose to visit. Everyone deserves to receive the best possible service and support and we aim to put those in need at the forefront.

2.2 The Council is committed to providing residents with effective & efficient services that not only meet their needs but understand them too. Through considering what really matters to our residents the Council's Strategic Plan 2019-2023, sets out eight key priorities, underpinned by five strategic purposes.

#### **Eight Key Priorities for 2019-2023**

- Economic development and regeneration
- Skills for the future
- Improving health and well being
- A balanced housing market
- Reducing crime and disorder
- Financial stability
- High quality services
- Sustainability

Five Strategic Purposes, with our communities at the heart:

- Run and Grow a Successful Business
- Work and Financial Independence
- Living Independent, Active and Healthy Lives
- Affordable and Sustainable Homes
- Communities which are Safe, Well Maintained and Green

### **3 Meeting our Equality Duties**

3.1 The Equality Act 2010 legally protects people from discrimination in the workplace and in wider society. The Act covers nine protected characteristics, and these are the grounds upon which discrimination is unlawful. The characteristics are

- Age
- Disability
- Gender Reassignment
- Marriage and Civil Partnership
- Pregnancy and Maternity
- Race
- Religion or Belief
- Sex
- Sexual Orientation

Although it is not stated in legislation as a protected characteristic, we also commit to treating everyone equally regardless of their socio-economic status. Our 2022-2026 Equality Strategy will include it and will work to eliminate discrimination and disadvantage caused by a person's socio-economic status.

3.2 The Equality Act 2010 consists of a General Equality Duty, supported by specific duties, and requires public authorities, like Bromsgrove District Council, to consider or think about how their policies or decisions affect people who are protected under the Equality Act. The General Duty requires public bodies to have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not

In addition, public authorities also have specific duties and must do the following:

- Publish equality information at least once a year to show how they've complied with the equality duty
- Prepare and publish equality objectives at least every four years

## 4 Population Overview

4.1 Between the last two censuses, held in 2011 and 2021, the population of Bromsgrove increased by 5.9%, from just over 93,600 in 2011 to around 99,200 in 2021. This is made up of 48.9% male and 51.1% female.

The age breakdown was:

- 18.2% aged under 15 years.
- 58.9% aged 15-64 years
- 22.9% aged 65 years and over.

The number of people aged 50 to 64 years rose by around 1,800, an increase of 9.4%, while the number of residents between 35 and 49 years fell by just over 2,300, a 11.1% decrease.

4.2 In 2021 people in Bromsgrove identified their ethnic group as

- 93.1% White, compared with 95.8% in 2011.
- 2.4% Mixed or Multiple, compared with 1.5% the previous decade.
- The number of Bromsgrove residents identifying their ethnic group as Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh was 3.2%, up from 2.1% in 2011.
- The percentage of people who identified their ethnic group within the Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African increased from 0.5% in 2011 to 0.8% in 2021.

4.3 In 2021, 53.5% of people in Bromsgrove described themselves as Christian, down from 68.9%, while 5.6% did not state their religion, down from 6.9% the decade before. In 2021, 37.4% of Bromsgrove residents reported having "No religion", up from 22% in 2011.

4.4 In terms of disability, 9.5%, up from 9.1% of the population have a long-term health condition or disability that limits their day-to-day activities a little, and 6.1%, down from 7.6%, stated that their day-to-day activities were limited a lot.

4.5 In 2021 Bromsgrove residents described their health as followed:

- Very good was 52.2%, increasing from 50.0% in 2011.
- Good was 32.9%, decreasing from 33.2%
- Bad was 3.0%, decreasing from 3.5%
- Very bad was 0.9%, like 2011.

The 2021 Census was conducted during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. This may have influenced how people perceived and rated their health, and therefore may have affected how people chose to respond.

4.6 Of Bromsgrove residents aged 16 years and over, 30.0% said they had never been married or in a civil partnership in 2021, up from 26.8% in 2011.

4.7 The question about sexual orientation, which has not been asked in previous censuses, was voluntary and only asked of those aged 16 years and over.

- 92.0% identified as Straight or Heterosexual

- 1.1% identified as Gay or Lesbian
- 0.8% as Bisexual
- 0.1% as Pansexual
- 6.0% did not answer the question.

4.8 The question about gender identity, which has not been asked in previous censuses, was voluntary and only asked of those aged 16 years and over.

- 95.1% stated their gender identity as the same as sex registered at birth
- 0.1% stated their gender identity different from sex registered at birth but there was no specific identity given.
- 0.1% identified as Trans Woman
- 4.7% did not answer the question.

4.9 For more information from the 2021 Census including work, travel, housing, education and caring responsibility please go to [2021 Census Profile for Bromsgrove](#)

## 5 Our Equality Objectives

5.1 During 2022 the new Equality Strategy for 2022 to 2026 was adopted by the council. This report sets out the progress on key areas of equality work, during 2022, that underpin our revised objectives and building on what we have already achieved. Our objectives for the next 4 years are:

- Objective 1: Ensure we deliver inclusive and responsive services.
- Objective 2: Engage and communicate with the community in appropriate and accessible ways.
- Objective 3: Understand our communities and celebrate and respect diversity.
- Objective 4: Develop and support a diverse workforce.

The key achievements and progress in 2022 provide the evidence of how we are delivering against the objectives in our strategy.

## 6 Key Achievements and Progress in 2022

**The following sections evidence some of our achievements and progress against Objective 1: Ensure we deliver inclusive and responsive services.**

### 6.1 Covid-19

6.1.1 Going into 2022, the Redditch and Bromsgrove District Incident Management Team (DIMT), chaired by the Deputy Chief Executive, and supported by Public Health, continued to meet regularly, bringing together a range of local partner agencies focused on ensuring a collective approach to supporting local communities through providing guidance, information, advice and support.

6.1.2 Although in March 2022, DIMT was stood down, elements of the work, such as covid vaccinations clinics for instance, including pop ups and mobile van, continued throughout 2022 and into 2023, supported by partners including our Bromsgrove Social Prescribing team who made themselves available to help reach people in different communities and offer wider support and signposting to various services.

## 6.2 Cost-of-Living

6.2.1 Through the Government's Household Support Fund (HSF), all District Councils worked together with Worcestershire County Council to try and ensure funding was allocated in such a way that it reached those most in need, including working with Act on Energy to provide financial support with energy bills, whether that be current energy bills, energy debt or financial help to repair or replace heating systems. Originally HSF was only intended to last 6 months up to March 2022 but the Government continued it with a Phase 2 and Phase 3 throughout 2022/23 (and a HSF Phase 4 during 23/24 is planned). At a District level, working with partners such as Citizens Advice Bromsgrove and Redditch, BDHT, local foodbanks and white goods schemes, and our own Financial Inclusion Team, support has been provided such as food parcels, essential while goods, supermarket vouchers, post office cash vouchers and more. Working with other local organisations and groups has helped us to identify eligible households (whether that be families, pensioners, disabled for instance) who were in need and eligible to benefit from this support.

6.2.2 At the suggestion of the Chief Executive, a Bromsgrove and Redditch Cost of Living Partnership Group was set up during 2022 including partners such as Act on Energy, Citizens Advice Bromsgrove and Redditch, Age UK Bromsgrove, Redditch and Wyre Forest, Bromsgrove District Housing Trust (BDHT), Worcestershire County Council, local foodbanks, Primary Care Network (PCN) and more, in addition to District Council officers internally. The purpose was to facilitate partnership working between agencies with a shared commitment to minimise the depth of damage of the cost-of-living crisis and the length of its impact.

6.2.3 Through the Cost-of-Living Partnership Group, to help ensure residents were informed and knew who to contact for help, including those digitally excluded, an 'at a glance' Bromsgrove and Redditch cost of living leaflet containing brief advice and key contacts, was produced and printed copies were distributed by partner agencies during the latter part of 2022. This was alongside a wider digital campaign including dedicated [cost-of living-webpages](#). A draft poverty alleviation plan was also produced.

6.2.4 The Holiday Activities and Food programme (HAF) is a DfE funded programme to support children aged 4-16 years (reception -Year 11) who are in receipt of pupil premium (or benefits related) free school meals (FSM) to access enriching activities and food during Easter, summer, and Christmas school holidays. The Bromsgrove Children and Youth Provider Forum are used to support the project provision with information sharing and updates. During this year, free activities and food have been made available for young people to access across the main school holidays. By working with schools and local organisations we were able to target the young people in need to make this accessible for them. Activities were delivered by various providers under our umbrella who also provided either a breakfast, lunch box or hot meal to those eligible children participating.

## **6.3 Shopmobility**

6.3.1 Bromsgrove Shopmobility remains open on reduced hours as current demand is low. A survey was launched near the end of 2021 to understand the demand and the need for the service. There was a low response to the survey (19 in total) 9 people were aware of the service and 6 people had used it, only 2 regularly. The others had no need. 3 people use a similar service in other areas. There was nothing to suggest, from the responses, that the current provision didn't meet the needs of residents.

## **6.4 Community Transport**

6.4.1 BARN (Bromsgrove and Redditch Network) continue to run the 'BURT' community transport service on behalf of Bromsgrove District Council. BURT, which stands for Bromsgrove Urban and Rural Transport, has been Bromsgrove District's local community transport minibus service since 2009 (they won the latest tender in 2021). They average about 350 registered users.

6.4.2 The service helps residents of the district who are unable to make essential journeys by conventional transport, either because of personal mobility or disability difficulties, or because suitable public transport is not available. The BURT minibus is adapted for wheelchair users and helps people get to fitness classes, life-after-stroke sessions, dementia clubs, social activities, and friendship groups, and more, or sometimes just to the shops. In 2022 BURT provided 3,470 journeys to their customers across the district.

**The following sections evidence some of our achievements and progress against Objective 2: Engage and communicate with the community in appropriate and accessible way**

## **6.5 Community Engagement**

6.5.1 During 2022 the council continued to deliver a range of community engagement and consultations with the information gathered supporting service delivery and corporate decisions. The council continues to work hard to increase participation with responses encouraged from our diverse population to ensure a cross representation of responses.

6.5.2 The Bromsgrove Community Panel, a list of Bromsgrove District residents who have signed up to be kept informed about engagement and consultations carried out by the council, continues to grow. As of the end of 2022, there were 393 members with new members signing up regularly.

6.5.3 During the year, surveys have gone out to the public covering a range of topics including:

- Annual Community Survey
- Bromsgrove Centres' Business Survey
- BDC Draft Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy
- Stoke Heath Ward Community Governance Review

- Understanding Residents feelings and Views of the Covid-19 vaccination

6.5.4 The Bromsgrove Youth and Community Hub has coordinated a successful Youth Council since 2018. As part of a process to widen its engagement with young people across the district, the District Council funded an expansion of the youth council to include schools. This started with researching and identifying youth councils already established within the local schools and bringing them into the wider youth council. There were mixed responses from schools but the students of those that took part raised several issues they wanted to address both within school and in the local community. Some of the community issues included litter in the town centre, progress at the Birdbox, the provision of arts in the area and the Artrix building, accessibility and inclusion and crime rates. Work with the Youth Council will continue into 2023 to strengthen engagement with schools and the young people.

## **6.6 Interpreting and Translation**

6.6.1 The Council continues to provide interpreting and translation services and in nearly all cases interpreting has taken place via telephone or video call rather than face to face, which has enabled a cost saving for the council. Languages supported by interpreting and translation in Bromsgrove included Arabic and Polish. The service continues to be promoted internally across all services and managed within the Policy Team.

**The following sections evidence some of our achievements and progress against Objective 3: Understand our communities and celebrate and respect diversity**

## **6.7 Partnerships**

6.7.1 Partnership working has continued throughout 2022 in different forms, helping to ensure different agencies address local need collectively rather than separately in isolation. This has been shown through Partnership structures such as Bromsgrove Partnership.

6.7.2 The Bromsgrove Partnership Board, chaired by the Chief Executive of Bromsgrove District Housing Trust (BDHT), includes several different representatives from the statutory sector and voluntary and community sector, including the Chief Executive and Leader of Bromsgrove District Council. It met virtually on a regular basis during the pandemic but in May 2022, the Board met in person for the first time since January 2020. In person meetings have been the preference ever since, strengthening working relationships and improving understanding between agencies at a strategic level, with representatives keen to work together and collectively challenge systems, as appropriate, when its recognised change is needed.

6.7.3 Due to the strengths of the Bromsgrove Partnership, and the difficulties facing the Bromsgrove Primary Care Network (PCN) in trying to establish an effective Collaborative from scratch, the Bromsgrove Partnership Board was asked and agreed to take on the remit of Bromsgrove Collaborative in the summer of 2022. Following discussion on data presented by Public Health in November 2022, the Board agreed overarching collaborative priorities: Mental Health and Inequalities.

Being Well Funding from Public health was also allocated at the end of 2022 with agreement it be used to appoint a Wellbeing Lead to support the Bromsgrove Collaborative work.

6.7.4 The District of Bromsgrove received £2.8m over 2022-25 from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF). The UKSPF replaces EU structural funds and allows local communities to invest in local priorities from regenerating high streets, to tackling economic decline, and helps reverse geographical inequalities. Every place receives funding, with areas in greater need receiving more support. The Partnership Board oversee the funding and a separate Task Group, made up of a selection of Board members and business representatives, was set up at the end of 2022 to consider project proposals submitted and make recommendations.

6.7.5 The Bromsgrove Partnership Theme Groups continued to meet virtually, strengthening the links between agencies, and continuously striving towards more joined up local provision. The Community Wellbeing Theme Group and Ageing Well Group have enabled partner agencies to come together to share information updates on services and highlight challenges, which in turn help to identify partnership opportunities.

6.7.6 Through Bromsgrove Partnership Board discussions during 2022, it was decided a separate Cost of Living Partnership Group was required which could feed into the Board. Due to the partners involved and the majority working across Bromsgrove and Redditch, it was agreed between partners it would be a joint Bromsgrove and Redditch partnership group.

6.7.7 The Bromsgrove Partnership Board continues to oversee the Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) work, which is where original discussions took place on ABCD back in 2020. The Chief Executive of NewStarts, a local voluntary and community sector organisation that hosts of the community builders, joined the Board permanently in 2022 to provide a strategic link.

## **6.8 Asset Based Community Development (ABCD)**

6.8.1 Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) approaches show that connecting people and creating more resident-to-resident relationships builds interdependence and reliance on each other. Connecting people to their shared interests, and enabling them to exchange skills and resources, helps communities identify and act on the issues that are most important to them. This provides a brief update on the progress of ABCD work across Bromsgrove district and the county during 2022.

6.8.2 Following a successful joint bid for funding by Bromsgrove District Council and Redditch Borough Council to Public Health, two community builders for Bromsgrove District were appointed at the very end of 2021. Hosted by NewStarts, a voluntary and community sector organisation, the community builders started in their roles at the beginning of 2022, one community builder for Catshill and one for Rubery, as agreed by the Bromsgrove Partnership Board.

6.8.3 Despite recent changes within the Public Health ABCD team during 2022, the community builders were well supported through ABCD training and peer support meetings, specifically for the community builders. A joint Bromsgrove and Redditch

ABCD Learning Network also emerged during 2022, facilitated by Public Health, bringing together the community builders, their hosts, ABCD Guides trained officers from within the District Council, relevant portfolio holders and other relevant District Council officers.

6.8.4 Within 6 months there have been some successes including: Easter egg hunts; Jubilee celebrations; working with Rubery Honey who ran a sunflower challenge with seeds being distributed, growth tracked and reported on a worksheet; enabling mums to set up a market stall to recycle baby clothes (known as 'Octo-mom market'). Also, individual successes such as a widow, unknown to services, being introduced to a community coffee morning and other groups. However, it is recognised that this approach will take time to fully embed and a challenge to all agencies is to ensure they give the space and time needed for the communities to step forward and lead.

6.8.5 Countywide ABCD Workshops continue to be delivered and anyone with an interest in ABCD is encouraged to attend. All community builders, relevant portfolio holder, several District Council officers and the host of community builders have all attended but it's open to all.

## **6.9 Starting Well Partnership**

6.9.1 Our free service supports parents of children and young people 0 to 19 years and facilitates a variety of evidence-based groups for parents. The groups give the opportunity to learn new strategies build their confidence and strengthen their family relationships.

6.9.2 During 2022 our Community Team held several events across the district and reached 5,413 Bromsgrove residents (parents and children). The Parenting Team facilitated 27 parenting programmes with 398 parents completing them. We had 5 volunteers actively working as peer supporters in our parenting groups and breastfeeding support groups as well as recruiting and training new volunteers during 2022.

6.9.3 The Social Prescribing Service, a successful wellbeing service, celebrated one year of helping residents. The service is commissioned by Bromsgrove Primary Care Network (PCN), which is made up of nine GP surgeries across the Bromsgrove District. The contract between the PCN and Bromsgrove District Council is for five years.

The service, which is run in partnership with ONSIDE, connects residents with Social Prescribing Link Workers through a self-referral process. The link worker then provides them with a face-to-face conversation during which they can learn about activities in their communities and design their own personalised solutions to life struggles. In 2022, the service received 332 referrals and supported over 250 Bromsgrove patients to complete a programme of support.

Social prescribing can support a wide range of people, including (but not exclusively) people:

- with one or more long term conditions
- who need support with their mental health
- who are lonely or isolated

- who have complex social needs which affect their wellbeing.

## **6.10 Community Safety**

610.1 The North Worcestershire Community Safety Partnership (NWCSP) brings together Safer Bromsgrove, Safer Redditch, and Safer Wyre Forest. The NWCSP delivers a range of community safety initiatives and works with agencies and communities to achieve the Partnership's vision of keeping "North Worcestershire a safer place to live, work and visit".

6.10.2 In support of national Hate Crime Awareness Week 2022, North Worcestershire Hate Incident Partnership hosted its annual Hate Crime Awareness Conference, returning to a face-to-face event. This hugely successful event included three high-profile guest speakers who captivated the audience in discussing their own experiences of hate crime:

- Azeem Rafiq, inspiring anti-racism campaigner and former professional cricketer
- Rt. Hon. Stuart Lawrence, coach, motivational speaker, and younger brother of Stephen Lawrence
- Naughty Boy, award-winning music producer, songwriter, and musician Shahid Khan, better known nationally and internationally by his stage name Naughty Boy

6.10.3 The Respect Programme covering Redditch and Bromsgrove, provides crime prevention and community safety awareness workshops as part of schools personal, social, health and economic education (PHSE) lessons. Respect provides sessions on subjects such as recognising and reporting hate crime, understanding healthy relationships/recognising domestic abuse, the dangers of substance misuse and promoting respect and community responsibility. The programme also received 192 referrals for 1 to 1 support through its therapeutic mentoring programme. This academic year, the focus for the programme was to reintroduce face-to-face sessions following the end of Covid restrictions.

6.10.4 Residents learnt more about the work against anti-social behaviour as the North Worcestershire Community Safety Partnership marked Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) Awareness Week, in July. The Council joined West Mercia Police and other agencies, to speak to the public at an awareness raising event in Bromsgrove town centre. There was also a social media campaign throughout the week raising the profile of how ASB is tackled in local communities.

## **6.11 Community Events and Activities**

6.11.1 During 2022, we celebrated the diversity, culture, and heritage in our community and with our workforces. Many events returned, some for the first time since 2019, enabling people to gather. Important dates included Remembrance Sunday, Armed Forces Day, Holocaust Memorial Day, Polish Independence Day, Ukraine Independence Day, World Mental Health Day, LGBT+, Black History Month, International Women's Day and White Ribbon Day.

6.11.2 The Recovery Through Creativity projects were launched in late April to support the creative business sector across Bromsgrove's town centres, as a part of the work of the Northeast Worcestershire Cultural Compact. The purpose was to allow our local creative business sector to access funding to rebuild, to try out new ideas, to take risks and increase the number and diversity of the people engaging with their offer. From Creative Arts Showcase, Brenda Killigrew Sewing Studio, Bromsgrove Indie Club, and the Friends of St John's there were incredible ideas and offers for the town and community to be a part of and enjoy.

6.11.3 The Queen's Platinum Jubilee saw 4 days of great events in Bromsgrove Town, from the 20th Anniversary of the Jubilee Bandstand in Sanders Park and the lighting of the National Beacon, Bromsgrove Festival, and the Indie Club on the Birdbox, and the High Street take over by Bromsgrove's Royal Legion. The Town proudly showed how to celebrate the 70 years of the Queen's reign through diversity and inclusivity.

6.11.4 Bromsgrove hosted its second Pride Event, following the successful one from last year. Run by volunteers, the event received a grant from the BDC Equality Small Grants Scheme to support its delivery. This year it was held in July in the High Street with the family-friendly event featuring stalls, entertainment and promoting awareness of the LGBTQ+ community.

6.11.5 In 2022, we were successful with a Short Breaks funding application in Bromsgrove to support Rigby Hall School to deliver SEN Community football sessions. Three sessions are available for various ages each week where young people with Autism, Down Syndrome, ADHD, SLD and MLD can be supported.

6.11.6 Some other events and activities that supported people in our community included –

- The Green Fun Day, a family fun day with a green, sustainable, eco-friendly theme featuring free, family-friendly stalls, entertainment and displays for everyone to enjoy.
- A range of health and exercise sessions delivered across the district, many of which returned following Covid and are free.
- A range of summer free fun activities were delivered.
- A special ceremony in memory of those who died of Covid-19. Held in Sanders Park a memorial tree was planted, and a plaque unveiled in remembrance of all those who died from Covid-19, their families, and the incredible work carried out by key workers throughout the pandemic.
- The first walking football session was held in Hagley with seventeen attending. In partnership with Hagley Parish Council, the sessions see reduced physical contact and tackling which makes it perfect for people who have been out of the game for a while and want to make a comeback.
- The Council, alongside partners and community organisations commemorated the Queen's Platinum Jubilee in Sanders Park to bring together a celebratory event with food, street entertainment, and music. It finished with the ceremonial lighting of the beacons in the park with local choirs performing.

## 6.12 Equality Small Grants Scheme

6.12.1 Bromsgrove District Council Equality Small Grants Scheme is now in its 8th year of providing grants to small voluntary and community organisations. Following the last two years where we adapted the scheme to support the delivery of grants due to Covid those awarded since 2020 were able to be delivered.

6.12.2 The total budget of £10,000 was awarded to 12 organisations/groups with seven of these being new organisations/groups applying for the first time. Feedback on those who were successful is available on our [website](#).

**The following sections evidence some of our achievements and progress against Objective 4: *Develop and support a diverse workforce***

## 6.13 Employee Support

6.13.1 We have developed and begun implementing our new four-year Workforce Strategy, which “sets out the Council’s vision and aspirations for its workforce, both now and in the future. In doing so it recognises the importance of our staff as a resource central to our success in delivering our strategic purposes. The strategy comprises 3 strands:

- Workforce Planning & Talent Management
- Health, Safety and Wellbeing
- Engagement



6.13.2 The Council provides an employee benefits platform for staff. This includes access to an employee assistance programme (EAP) which is available to all staff and their immediate family members. The employee assistance programme covers everything from health and wellbeing, finances, caring for the elderly, concerns at work, bereavement support etc. Staff can use this to access advice and support on just about anything including counselling sessions. There is also more tailored support available on an individual basis through HR and Occupational Health and Phone a Friend.

The benefits platform provides staff with a range of benefits including access to discounts, our cycle to work scheme, lease car hire and purchased annual leave etc. We try to tailor the benefits platform to the needs of our staff and ensure we provide opportunities to make their salaries go further.

6.13.3 We have a dedicated Wellbeing section on our intranet, signposting staff to wellbeing support and various wellbeing resources. We have implemented a Corporate Learning & Development Programme, which includes specific training to support our wellbeing agenda for staff and managers. This includes menopause awareness sessions, training for managers around how to build their team’s resilience & mental wellbeing, and coaching & mentoring opportunities.

All employees have access to an online training platform that provides various training sessions and resources (including videos podcasts, activity sheets and knowledge checks) which cover a range of soft skills, management, and wellbeing topics.

6.13.4 With the move to agile working we have introduced a mandatory eLearning platform for Display Screen Equipment (DSE) self-assessments (endorsed by the HSE). This takes staff through a DSE assessment process and provides personalised feedback around issues identified which then provides an individual action plan.

6.13.6 Following the success of remote working during the pandemic, we have launched a new Agile working policy. We recognise the positive impact that agile working can have on employee wellbeing. The policy ensures the customer is central to all our activities and service delivery, whilst providing a greater level of flexibility for employees, as deemed appropriate for each service area.

6.13.7 Chief Executive Q and A sessions have continued to be delivered via Teams, every month, providing an opportunity to hear the latest news from the Chief Executive and Heads of Service, and ask questions. The sessions are recorded to enable those to catch up. This continues to have a good attendance from staff across the council and provides a way of sharing information and keeping in contact. In addition we continue with formal staff surveys and short, snapshot surveys, as appropriate.

6.13.8 As an authority we continue to promote the use of one-to-one's and appraisals to support employee wellbeing and to encourage open, two-way communication between managers and employees, within teams and across the wider organisation.

## **7 Next Steps**

7.1 The Council will continue to monitor progress against the Equality Objectives set out in the Equality Strategy (2022-2026) and will report annually on overall progress.

7.2 The Council will explore options for senior officers to undertake Accelerating Inclusion through Allyship training via west Midlands Employers. This training covers allyship, belonging, bias, discrimination etc. Allyship is important because it is:

- A strategic mechanism to promote equity in the workplace
- A way to drive systemic improvements to workplace policies, practices, and culture
- Essential in creating inclusive workplaces that attract the best talent

7.3 The council will explore options for establishing a staff equality, diversity and inclusion group.

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### Quarter 1 2023-24 – Financial and Performance Report

Relevant Portfolio Holder	Councillor Hotham – Portfolio Holder for Finance and Governance	
Portfolio Holder Consulted	Yes	
Relevant Head of Service	Michelle Howell Deborah Poole	
Report Authors	Head of Finance and Customer Services <a href="mailto:michelle.howell@bromsgroveandredditch.gov.uk">michelle.howell@bromsgroveandredditch.gov.uk</a> Head of Business Transformation, Organisational Development and Digital Strategy <a href="mailto:d.poole@bromsgroveandredditch.gov.uk">d.poole@bromsgroveandredditch.gov.uk</a>	
Wards Affected	All Wards	
Ward consulted	Councillor(s)	No
Relevant Purpose(s)	Strategic	All
Key Decision		
If you have any questions about this report, please contact the report author in advance of the meeting.		
This report contains exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3 of Part I of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972, as amended		

## 1. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Cabinet is asked to **RESOLVE** that:

- 1) The current financial position in relation to Revenue and Capital Budgets for the period April to June and the full year overspend position following the application of reserves of £437k be noted;
- 2) Those procurements over £50k due to be delivered during 2023/24 be added to the forward plan;
- 3) The Q1 Performance data for the Period April to June 2023 be noted.

That Cabinet is asked to **RECOMMEND** to Council

- 4) Allocating £351k from the Utilities Reserve to part mitigate the overspend position in 2023/4.
- 5) Changes to the Capital Programme as set out in para 3.13 with an ongoing revenue cost of £40k, £17k fleet replacement, £13k Wheely Bins and £10k wild flowers equipment.
- 6) Approving the £11.0k increase to the Engineering Services base budget in 2023/4 from reserves and including this change in the 2024/25 Medium Term Financial Plan.
- 7) That the Key Decision Threshold is raised to £200k with the additional controls for expenditure between £50k and £200k as

set out in Paragraph 3.21. and that on a quarterly basis a “Approval to Spend Report” will be provided to Cabinet which sets out the Council’s Procurement Pipeline for approval

- This report will identify spending with suppliers over the £200k limit to ensure this spending is converted to properly contracted expenditure.
- The “Approval to Spend Report” report also provides a list of all procurement between £50k and £200k, which Cabinet can request further detail and subject to additional scrutiny where they see fit.
- That items from the initial pipeline report at the appropriate Key Decision level, as set out in Appendix E, are added to the forward plan.

## **2. BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 This report presents at Quarter 1 (April – June) 2023/24
- the Council’s forecast outturn revenue monitoring position for 2023/24 based on data to the end of Quarter 1
  - An update on progress on the 2023/24 budget process
  - Procurement pipeline projects (over £50k)
  - The organisations performance against the strategic priorities outlined in the Council Plan Addendum, including operational measures to demonstrate how the council is delivering its services to customers.
- 2.2 The 2022/23 Financial Outturn position is also being presented to Cabinet in September. Both reports will need to be read to give an overall view of the financial position as the 2022/23 Outturn Report
- Will directly affect reserve levels.
  - Will set out the final Capital budgets coming forward into 2023/24 by project.

## **3. DETAILED PERFORMANCE**

### **Financial Performance**

- 3.1 As part of the monitoring process a detailed review has been undertaken to ensure that issues are considered, and significant savings and cost pressures are addressed. This report sets out, based on the position at the end of Quarter 1, the projected revenue outturn position for the 2022/23 financial year and explains key variances against budget.
- 3.2 The £11.9m full year revenue budget included in the table below is the budget that was approved by Council in March 2023.

Service Description	2023-24 Approved Budget	2023-24 Approved Budget Q1	Payroll Assumptions	Utilities & Vehicle Hire Assumption	Q1 Adjusted Spend	Q1 Variance to Budget	Full Year Variance to Budget
Business Transformation and Organisational Development	1,813,586	453,397	12,800		466,197	12,801	51,202
Community and Housing GF Services	1,102,638	275,660	2,900		278,560	2,901	11,602
Corporate Services	1,446,605	361,651	3,300		364,951	3,300	13,199
Environmental Services	3,410,080	852,520	108,800	43,750	1,005,070	152,550	610,200
Finance and Customer Services	1,401,756	350,439	21,000		371,439	21,000	84,000
Legal, Democratic and Property Services	1,181,962	295,491	17,400	-26,250	286,640	-8,851	-35,402
Planning, Regeneration and Leisure Services	1,349,503	337,376	13,300		350,676	13,300	53,201
Regulatory Client	239,870	59,968	0		59,968	0	0
Starting Well	0	0	0		0	0	0
	<b>11,946,000</b>	<b>2,986,500</b>	<b>179,500</b>	<b>17,500</b>	<b>3,123,533</b>	<b>197,001</b>	<b>788,002</b>
Corporate Financing	-11,946,000	-2,986,500	0	0	-2,986,500	0	0
<b>Overall Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>179,500</b>	<b>17,500</b>	<b>137,033</b>	<b>197,001</b>	<b>788,002</b>

*Budget Variances*

- 3.3 The draft position is set out in the above table. As this is expenditure at Q1 it is important to note that, at this stage in the financial year there are a number of instances where annual expenditure or accruals may distort the profiling as reflected in the Q1 actual. The above profiles have assumed support services and grant are adjusted to budgetary levels and accruals are netted out of the figures.
- 3.4 In addition to this, it is also important to note that the Council is yet to close its accounts for the 2020/21, 2021/22 and 2022/23 financial years. This could therefore result in adjustments to the actual expenditure/income and forecast outturn positions as reported in the table above. Further updates will be provided to Members throughout the financial year (this work is being led by the Audit Standards and Governance Committee).
- 3.5 Overall, the Council is currently forecasting a revenue Overspend at Quarter 1 of £197k. This is due to the pay award yet to be ratified and additional fleet hire costs and projects to a full year overspend of £788k. This position will continue to be reviewed particularly given the impact of the increasing costs linked to inflation and further updates will be provided to Councillors throughout 2023/24.
- 3.6 Vehicle Hire is definitely going to put a pressure on the revenue budgets this year, as the refurbishment project on our Refuse fleet is requiring vehicles on hire to continue the work. There have also been issues with the fleet unrelated to the refurbishment project that has resulted in higher rental costs as well overall this has a £175k full year impact on the budget.

- 3.7 This in-year budget forecast reflects the best information available at the present time, however it is important to note that there are a number of key factors that may impact upon the financial position which are not yet reflected fully within the forecast, including:
- The present cost of living crisis and the impact that this may have upon demand for council services, including the impact of homelessness and the cost of bed and breakfast temporary accommodation costs.
  - Inflationary increases – general inflation is coming down but is still running at over 8% and will impact upon transport costs, utilities and contracts in particular.
  - Pay negotiations – a 2023/24 pay award similar to the 2022/23 £1,925 level per pay point plus on costs has been offered by the Employers. This is yet to be accepted by the Unions. The table at 3.2 gives the estimated impact of these changes.
  - It is estimated that utilities increases are running at 70%. In the 2023/24 budget we assumed a 100% increase in budget and also set up a reserve for the same amount. The table at 3.2 gives the estimated impact of these changes.
- 3.8 The full year effect of a £788k overspend will need to be mitigated. In our original MTFP assumptions for 2023-26 we set up a Utilities Reserve of £1,053k which we assume reduces by £351k a year to mitigate increased costs. Given that this increase has not happened to this magnitude it is proposed that the assumed yearly drawdown of £351k of this reserve is used to mitigate the overspend position. **This leaves a £437k overspend position.** The ongoing 2023/24 pay increases position, once it is finalised and ratified later this year would then need to be resolved as part of the 2024/25 MTFP process.

#### **Additional Funding Requirements**

- 3.9 There is a paper attached at **Appendix D** which sets out making permanent the temporary restructuring of the Environmental Services, Engineering and Design Team (EDT).

#### **Capital Monitoring**

- 3.10 A capital programme of £10.9m was approved in the Budget for 2023/24 in March 2023. Many of these schemes are already in partial delivery in the 2022/23 financial year. By approving this list, the Council also agreed sums not spent in 2022/23 (and 2021/22 by default if schemes originated earlier than 2022/23 as sums have been carried forward through to the 2021/22 MTFP Report) to be carried forward into

2023/4. The table also splits amounts by funding source; Council or third party.

<b>Financial Year</b>	<b>Total Budget £000</b>	<b>Council Funded £000</b>	<b>External Funded £000</b>
2021/22	16,511	12,146	4,366
2022/23	8,126	1,485	6,641
2023/24	10,852	1,694	9,158
2024/25	4,921	2,224	2,697
2025/26	3,156	1,558	1,598

3.11 Included in this funding the Council also have the following Grant Funded Schemes which are being delivered in 2023/24:

- The two Levelling Up schemes – Old Fire Station and Market which are funded via £14.5m of Government Funding, and the Council is funding £1.6m of works.
- UK Shared Prosperity Schemes totalling £2.8m (although it should be noted that these grant funded schemes are a mix of capital and revenue).
- The Burcot Lane development at £10.275m.

3.12 The spend at quarter 1 is £0.720m against the overall 2023/24 capital budget totalling £10.851m is detailed in Appendix A. It should be noted that as per the budget decision carry forwards of £2.843m will be added to this figure to take account of slippage from 2022/23.

3.13 The following changes are requested for approval (allowing for slippage as set out in 3.10 above):

- The update of Fleet Replacement costs. This is an increase of 94k in 22/23 and £15k in 25/26. Over a 10 year period the cost of this is £10.9k MRP plus interest at 5.63% of £6.1k is an additional cost of £17.0k per year.
- Increase in wheely bin budget. The estimated spend on wheeled bins is likely to be closer to £150k based on previous expenditure. We have recently changed to Plastic bins for commercial which should bring that down a bit, but the overspend is likely to be in the region of £85k. Over a 10 year period the cost of this is £8.5k MRP plus interest at 5.63% of £4.8k is an additional cost of £13.3k per year.
- New Capital budget for wildflowers equipment is added - £62,100 in 23/24. If this capital cost is reduced over a 10 year period the additional MRP is £6.2k per year and interest costs are £3.5k giving a total additional cost of £9.7k per year.

- 3.14 The detailed Capital Programmes (2021/22 to 2025/26) are set out in **Appendix A**.

**Earmarked Reserves and their application**

- 3.15 The position as reported to Council in February 2023 as per the 2023/24 – 2025/26 Medium Term Financial Plan is shown in **Appendix B**. This is linked to the Outturn Report which is also coming to this Cabinet.
- 3.16 As was noted in paragraph 3.7 above, £351k of the utilities reserve was planned to be utilised in 2023/24 for increased costs. At the moment the increased costs are around 70% - not the 200% expected. However, the proposed pay award is significantly more than expected. Therefore it is requested that £351k of the utilities reserve is repurposed for this requirement in 2023/24. This still leaves £437k to be funded from the general fund to bring the overall position back to break even.

**Procurement**

- 3.17 A report came to Cabinet in June, which was debated at the Finance and Budget working Group on the 7<sup>th</sup> July requesting that:
- The Key Decision threshold is raised to £200k.
  - On a quarterly basis a report “the Approval to Spend Report” will be provided to Cabinet which sets out the Council’s Procurement Pipeline for approval to be included on the forward plan and an analysis of spending over the past 4 years to identify spending with suppliers over the £200k limit to ensure this spending is converted to properly contracted expenditure and rogue expenditure is dealt with.
  - That items from the initial pipeline report at the appropriate Key Decision level, as set out in **Appendix E**, are added to the forward plan.
- 3.18 Following debate at Council on the 19<sup>th</sup> July it was decided that more justification was required to increase Key Decision Limits from £50k to £200k and this will be presented to Cabinet and the next cycle of Council meetings in September.
- 3.19 The table in **Appendix E** sets out those procurements (Capital and Revenue) over £50k which are delegated for approval to Cabinet or Officers over the next year. It is proposed that these are added to the forward plan. There are 8 contracts over £50k in value that will be

entered onto the forward plan. For full transparency, 4 contracts under the £50k value are also shown as are 6 contracts where the full value is still being evaluated.

- 3.20 As the Council runs a shared service, a number of procurements that impact on Bromsgrove will be procured through Redditch. For reference these are also included in **Appendix F**.
- 3.21 In order to mitigate the issues set out in 3.18 above it is proposed that the following process is adopted in that the Key Decision Threshold is raised to £200k:
- The logic of this is for revenue expenditure using GCloud, contract lengths can be up to 4 years. As such this is the existing £50k limit expanded to the full term of revenue contracts. This new threshold will apply to all classes of delegated decision.
  - On a quarterly basis a report “the approval to spend report” will be provided to Executive which sets out from the Procurement Pipeline those procurements that should be taking place over the next year. This report will be refreshed every quarter and can be included once approved by Cabinet onto the ongoing forward plan.
  - That as part of this report an analysis of spending will be made of the past 3 years to identify spends with suppliers over the £200k limit to ensure this spending is converted to properly contracted expenditure.
  - The “Approval to Spend” report includes a list of all procurement between £50k-£200k. Members then have a listing of all procurements above the existing £50k limit up to the new limit of £200k coming up over the next year and are able to scrutinise any of those contracts if required.

### **Performance Report**

- 3.22 The first section of this report shows the organisations performance against the strategic priorities outlined in the Council Plan Addendum. Additional comments and updates have been provided for the success measures to explain progress/activity. The final section of the report includes some operational measures to demonstrate how the council is delivering its services to customers.
- 3.23 The process of performance reporting will develop iteratively, however this document is a snapshot in time and very much a temperature check of the organisation, the layout comprises:

- Strategic Priorities – success measures
- Operational Measures – by service area
- Financial Data (separate report on this occasion)
- Corporate Projects (by exception)

3.24 The Council has an approved Council Plan in place that was completed before the Covid-19 outbreak, the Council then developed the Council Plan Addendum to take the potential shift in priorities brought about by the pandemic into consideration. The current key priorities are:

1. Economic Development and Regeneration
2. Housing Growth
3. Work and Financial Independence
4. Improved Health and Wellbeing
5. Community Safety and Anti-Social Behaviour
6. Green Thread
7. Financial Stability
8. Organisational Sustainability
9. High Quality Services

3.25 **Appendix C** sets out the Strategic Priorities and Performance Measures in detail. For the 9 priorities there is data contained in the Appendix on:

- The Performance Measure being used.
- An update on how it is being used.
- Where relevant, contextual information.

3.26 In addition, Appendix C also sets out Operational Service Measures.

#### **4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 The financial implications are set out within this report.

#### **5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 There are no direct legal implications arising as a result of this report.

#### **6. STRATEGIC PURPOSES - IMPLICATIONS**

##### **Relevant Strategic Purpose**

6.1 The Strategic purposes are included in the Council's corporate plan and guides the Council's approach to budget making ensuring we focus on the issues and what are most important for the district and our communities. Our Financial monitoring and strategies are integrated within all of our Strategic Purposes

**Climate Change Implications**

- 6.2 The green thread runs through the Council plan. The Financial monitoring report has implications on climate change and these will be addressed and reviewed when relevant by climate change officers to ensure the correct procedures have been followed to ensure any impacts on climate change are fully understood.

**7. OTHER IMPLICATIONS**

**Equalities and Diversity Implications**

- 7.1 There are no direct equalities implications arising as a result of this report.

**Operational Implications**

- 7.2 Managers meet with finance officers to consider the current financial position and to ensure actions are in place to mitigate any overspends.

**8. RISK MANAGEMENT**

- 8.1 The financial monitoring is included in the corporate risk register for the authority.

**9. APPENDICES and BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- Appendix A – Capital Programme
- Appendix B – Reserves Position
- Appendix C - Strategic and Operational Performance Measures
- Appendix D – Engineering Services Restructure Report
- Appendix E – Procurement Pipeline (over £50K)
- Appendix F – Procurement Pipeline (procured in Redditch for Shared Services with Bromsgrove)

**10. REPORT SIGN OFF**

<b>Department</b>	<b>Name and Job Title</b>	<b>Date</b>
Portfolio Holder	Councillor Charlie Hotham,	
	Peter Carpenter,	

Lead Director / Head of Service	Interim Director of Finance	
Financial Services	Michelle Howell, Head of Finance and Customer Services	
Legal Services		
Policy Team (if equalities implications apply)		
Climate Change Officer (if climate change implications apply)		



**BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**13 September 2023**

**CABINET**

Description	Approved budget date	Original approved Budget £	duration (years)	Department	Funding detail	21/22 Spend £	2022/23 Total £	22/23 Spend £	c/f	2023/24 Total £	22/23 Spend Q1 £	2024/25 Total £	2025/26 Total £
Replacement Parking machines	2020/21	120,000		Environmental Services	Capital Receipts/Borrowing	196,000	253,000	123,985	129,015	96,000	9,287	421,000	0
Wheelie Bin Purchase	2018/19	ongoing		Environmental Services	Capital Receipts/Borrowing	102,000	144,000	169,034	-25,034	55,000	105,103	60,000	60,000
Footpaths		ongoing		Environmental Services	Borrowing				0	75,000		75,000	75,000
Buildings		Ongoing		Legal and Property	Borrowing				0	100,000		100,000	100,000
Bittell road recreation ground	2020/21	62,000		Planning, Regeneration & Leisure Services	S106 B/2011/0741 Land at Fiery Hill, Barnt Green / 18k balances	17,000	0		0	0		0	0
Salix	2020/21	615,000		Legal, Democratic and property services	Grants & Contributions	65,000	0	533,193	-533,193	0		0	0
Greener Homes	2020/21	180,000	1	Community & Housing GF Services	Grants & Contributions	-227,000	0	192,053	-192,053	0	0	0	0
Hagley Scouts				Planning, Regeneration & Leisure Services	Capital Receipts/Borrowing	35,000	0		0	0		0	0
Bromsgrove Sporting Car Park Improvements - Oakalls					Loan	4,000		46,133	-46,133				
Woodrush High Schools						8,000			0				
Rubery Redevelopment Works				Planning, Regeneration & Leisure Services		134,000			0				
Sanders Park dda play provision	2017/18	56,080		Planning, Regeneration & Leisure Services	Capital Receipts/Borrowing S106 14/0755 Kidderminster Road and S106 13/0422 Meadows first school	0	0	9,550	-9,550	0	1,900	0	0
New Digital Service	2020/21	57,400	1	Community & Housing GF Services	Borrowing	0	33,668		33,668	33,668		0	0
Bus Shelters	2020/21	18,000		Environmental Services	Borrowing	0	18,000		18,000	0		0	0

**BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**13 September 2023**

**CABINET**

Description	Approved budget date	Original approved Budget £	duration (years)	Department	Funding detail	21/22 Spend £	2022/23 Total £	22/23 Spend £	c/f	2023/24 Total £	22/23 Spend Q1 £	2024/25 Total £	2025/26 Total £
Fleet Management Computer System	2020/21	17,000		Environmental Services	Borrowing	0	0		0	0		0	0
Environmental Services Computer System	2020/21	38,200		Environmental Services	Borrowing	0	0		0	0		0	0
Cisco Network Update	22/23		3	Business transformation & Organisational Development	Borrowing	0	5,717	18,573	-12,856	11,574		0	34,877
Server Replacement Est(Exact known Q2 2022)	22/23		4	Business transformation & Organisational Development	Borrowing	0	83,250	0	83,250	2,000	78,451	177,500	18,500
Laptop Refresh	22/23		4	Business transformation & Organisational Development	Borrowing	0	5,000	4,961	39	25,000	3,693	150,000	5,000
Town Deal - Innovation Centre	22/23			Business transformation & Organisational Development	Town Deal	0			0				
Town Deal - Public Realm	22/23			Business transformation & Organisational Development	Town Deal	0			0				
Town Deal - Library	22/23			Business transformation & Organisational Development	Town Deal	0			0				
Market Hall (LUF)	22/23			Business transformation & Organisational Development	Levelling Up Fund	0			0				
Sanders Park	22/23			Planning, Regeneration & Leisure Services	S106	0		24,511	-24,511				
Play Area, POS and Sport improvements at Lickey End Recreation Ground in accordance with the S106 Agreement	22/23	37,956	1	Planning, Regeneration & Leisure Services	S106 19/0137/FUL	0	37,956	6,488	31,468	0		0	0
BDC Combined F/Path & Cycle	2018/19	390,000		Environmental Services	Grants & Contributions	0	0		0	0		0	0
Barnt Green Millenium Park - Toilet				Planning, Regeneration & Leisure Services	S106 B/2011/0741 - Land at Fiery Hill, Barnt Green / 18k balances	0	0		0	0		0	1,597,377
<b>Total</b>		<b>424,000</b>				<b>4,675,000</b>	<b>13,099,616</b>	<b>10,256,330</b>	<b>2,843,286</b>	<b>10,851,723</b>	<b>720,218</b>	<b>4,920,715</b>	<b>3,155,755</b>

**BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

13 September 2023

**CABINET**

**Appendix B – Reserves Position**

	Balance at 31/3/22	Transf In 2022/23	Transf out 2022/23	Re-baseline 2022/23	Balance at 31/3/23	Transf in 2023/24	Transf out 2023/24	Balance at 31/3/24	Transf in 2024/25	Transf out 2024/25	Balance at 31/3/25	Transf in 2025/26	Transf out 2025/26	Balance at 31/3/26
<b>General Fund Reserve</b>	<b>4,485</b>		(1,367)	2,682	<b>5,800</b>	100	(250)	<b>5,650</b>	244	0	<b>5,894</b>	200	(431)	<b>5,663</b>
<b>General Fund Earmarked</b>														
Building Control Other	7			(7)	0			0			0			0
Building Control Partnerships	82				82			82			82			82
Business Transformation	0				0			0			0			0
Commercialism	0				0			0			0			0
Community Safety	0				0			0			0			0
Community Services	271				271		(125)	146		(125)	21			21
Economic Regeneration	998			(600)	398			398			398			398
Election Services	51				51			51			51			51
Environmental Services	49				49			49			49			49
Financial Services	4,345		0	(1,000)	3,345	638	(150)	3,833			3,833			3,833
Housing Schemes	346				346			346			346			346
ICT/Systems	197				197			197			197			197
Leisure/Community Safety	330				330			330			330			330
Litigation Reserve	0				0			0			0			0
Local Development Framework	0				0			0			0			0
Local Neighbourhood Partnerships	16				16			16			16			16
Other	64			(64)	0			0			0			0
Planning & Regeneration	133				133			133			133			133
Regulatory Services (Partner Share)	46				46			46			46			46
Replacement Reserve (Inc. Recycling)	0				0			0			0			0
Shared Services (Severance Costs)	311			(311)	0			0			0			0
Utilities Reserve	0			1,053	1,053		(351)	702		(351)	351		(351)	0
Covid-19 (General Covid Grant)	1,177			(1,177)	0			0			0			0
Covid-19 Sales Fees and Charges	576			(576)	0			0			0			0
Covid-19 (Collection Fund)	3,094		(1,547)		1,547		(1,547)	0			0			0
<b>Total General Fund</b>	<b>12,093</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>(1,547)</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>7,864</b>	<b>638</b>	<b>(2,173)</b>	<b>6,329</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>(476)</b>	<b>5,853</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>(351)</b>	<b>5,502</b>

**Appendix C - Strategic and Operational Performance Measures**

**1. Introduction**

The process of performance reporting will develop iteratively, however this document is a snapshot in time and very much a temperature check of the organisation.

**2. Background**

The performance measures for the current key priorities are shown in the next section.

**3. Strategic Priorities and Performance Measures**

**3.1. Economic Development and Regeneration**

**3.1.1 Supporting Businesses to Start and Grow**

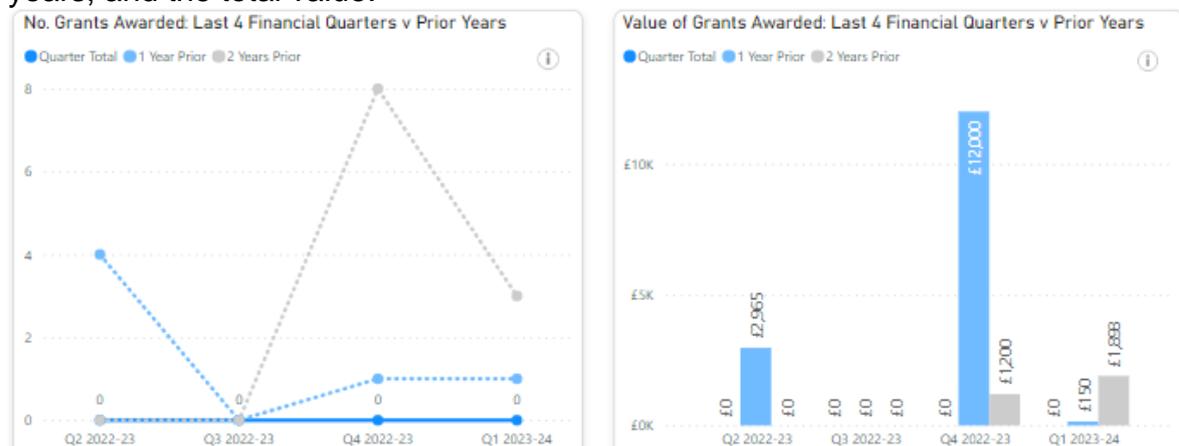
Opportunities in the digital technology sector and green industries are key to the future of Bromsgrove. Local businesses demonstrated their resilience and flexibility during the Covid-19 pandemic. The council supported businesses started during the pandemic as well as existing businesses, that identified growth opportunities. This was achieved via existing business support packages, including sectoral support, as well as helping businesses access new business grants where available.

**Performance measure:**

- Take-up of start-up business grants and creativity grants programme.

**Update**

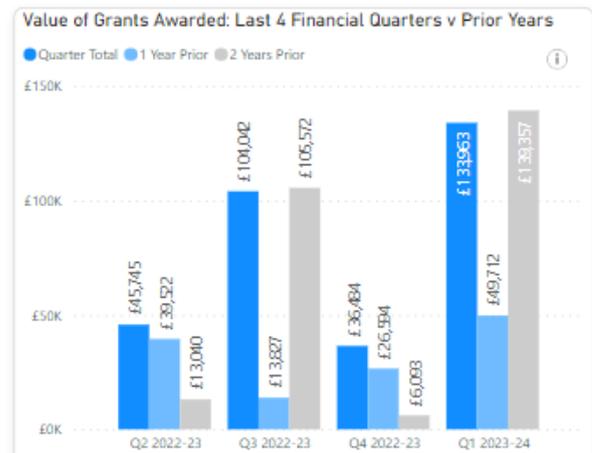
Detailed below are the grants which have been awarded including two prior years, and the total value.



**Update**

No start-up grants were awarded this quarter as the ERDF programmes have closed and the Council is moving to UKSPF funded programmes. The new start-up programme is scheduled to open in Q2 (soft launch August, formal launch September) so it is unlikely that there will be any grants paid until Q3.

**Growth Grants**



**Update**

This quarter, grants were awarded for investment in technology, growth projects and product / process development. The businesses receiving grants were a training company, a manufacturer, and a digital marketing company.

**3.1.2 Regenerating our Town and Local Centres**

The pandemic has emphasised both the economic and wellbeing importance of local centres to our residents. Funding has been secured to support the development of sites in Bromsgrove town centre and a strategy has been prepared to ensure all of the centres in Bromsgrove District will be as vibrant and viable as possible.

**Performance Measure:**

Former Market Hall Project

- o Design reviewed following FRA recommendations.
- o RIBA Stage 3 due to complete July 2023.
- o Planning application - Target date is August 2023

**Update**

Worcester based architects One Creative Ltd were appointed as the multi-disciplinary design team, bringing with them the disciplines of Lead/Principal designer, Landscape Architecture, Structural Engineering, Civil Engineering, MEP Design, Principal Designer, Fire Engineering and Sustainability.

**Performance measure:**

Windsor Street Project

Project consists of the acquisition, demolition, decontamination and remediation of this key abandoned/ brownfield site, which has been vacant for 5 years.

- o Key risk is cost being higher than previous estimates and budget allocation – due to presence of asbestos, and extent of PFAS contamination.
- o Existing building surveys are now complete.
- o Survey results are due early August.

**Update**

Currently pending the appointment of a consultant Project Management team to take forward the delivery of the project, from August 2023

**3.1.3 Improved Integrated Transport (Bromsgrove)**

New innovations can help provide new and more sustainable methods of getting around. Improved transport can help to increase user satisfaction and increase efficiency whilst also helping to reduce the impact on the environment. Working with Worcestershire County Council (WCC) and other partners will enable new, better integrated and more sustainable modes of transport across the district.

**Performance measure:**

- Increased number of sustainable transport projects being progressed or implemented across the district.

**Update**

Officers are working with Worcestershire County Council to establish a full pipeline of sustainable schemes. To better inform the list of schemes funding has been secured by WCC for a Local Cycling and Walking infrastructure Plan (LCWIP), planning officers have reviewed the brief for this work and discussed with WCC.

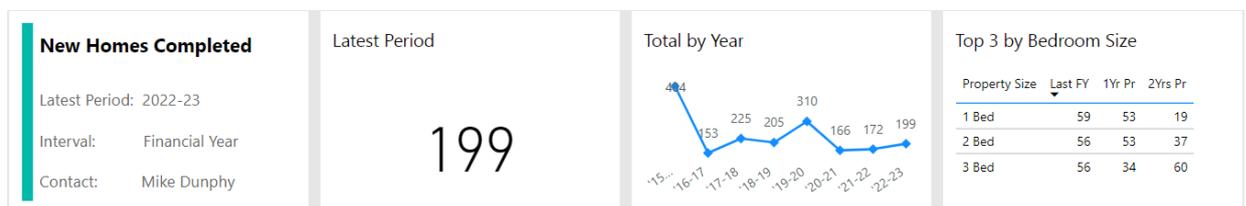
Actions: Will be liaising with WCC appointed consultants.

**3.2 Housing Growth**

During 2023/24 we will accelerate the pace of affordable housing development, wherever possible. We will work to enable the building of market value housing and the creation of additional income for the Council.

**Performance measure:**

- Number of new homes built - total and affordable.

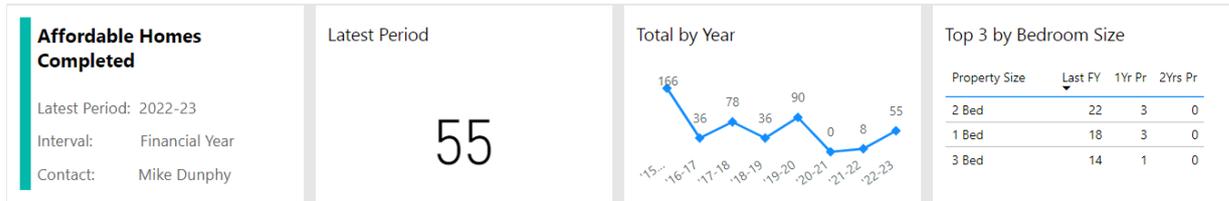


The final data for the 2022/23 is:

- Total Homes Built (including affordable) -199 (net)
- Total affordable homes built - 55 (net)

**Performance measure:**

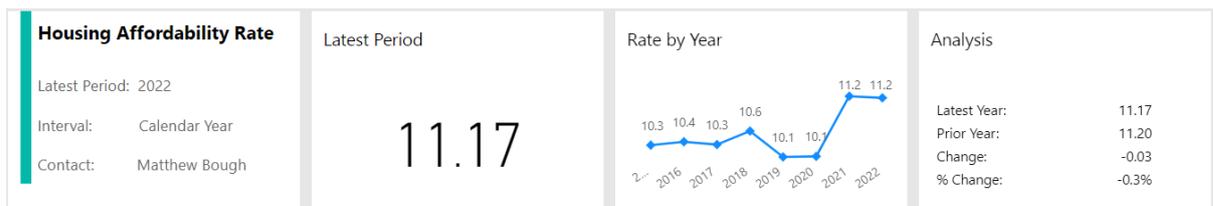
- Affordable Homes Completed



There are 498 affordable housing commitments as of 1 April 2023, reflecting the number of strategic sites which have gained consent but not started construction.

**Performance measure:**

- Local housing affordability rate (annual, calendar year, 1 year lag)



**Update**

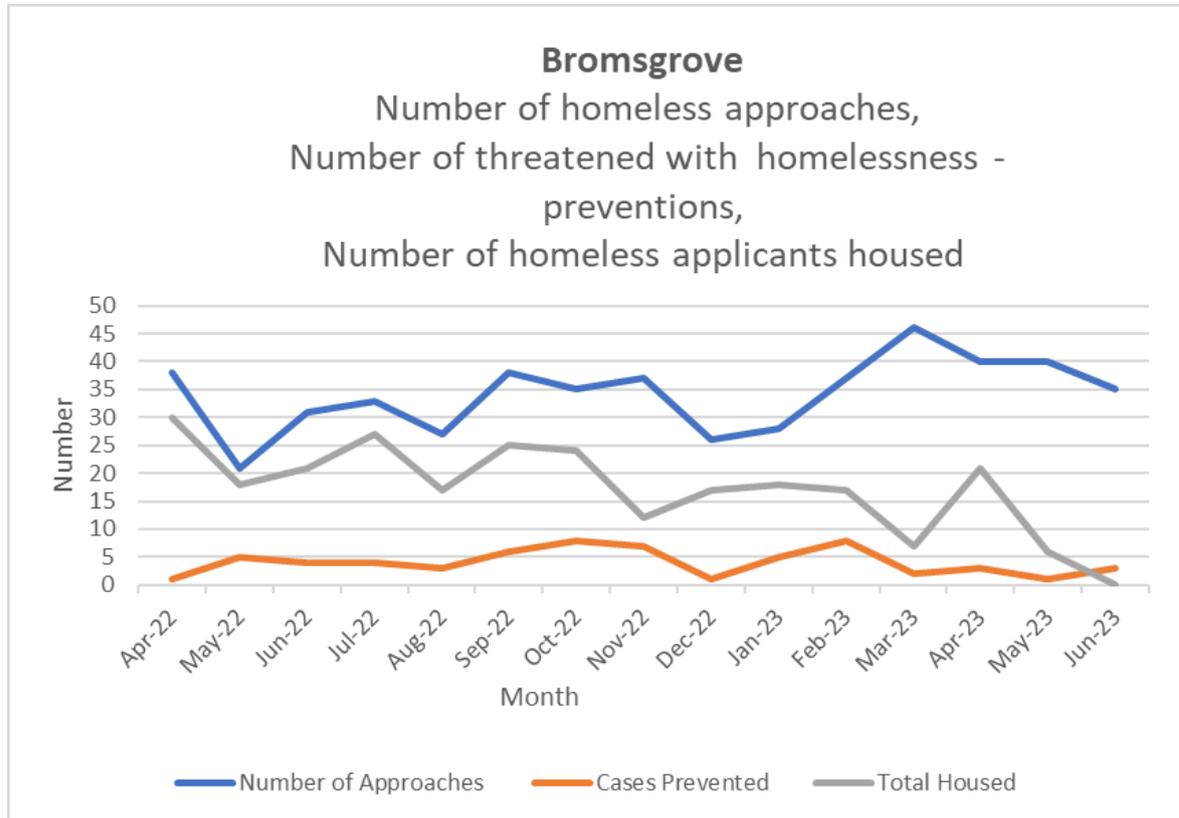
The data in the table below has been extracted from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) house price statistics for small areas, annual survey of hours, and earnings.

The affordability measure, using this data, indicated that the ratio in England is currently 9.05. The affordability ratio relates to workplace-based income which uses the median earnings of those employed in Bromsgrove. When looking at the data (year ending Sept 2022) Bromsgrove has a work based median at £29,285. The median house price in Bromsgrove is relatively high at £327,000. This causes a significant difference in the affordability ratio in Bromsgrove.

House prices over the last year have also risen well above the normal expected rate. This will push more households into needing affordable housing. The council is working with developers to secure the maximum provision of affordable housing on developments and RPs to bring forward affordable housing. A “First Homes” policy with a local connection criteria was approved by Council in October 2022 to ensure these discounted homes are provided for local applicants in the first instance.

**Performance measure**

- Number of homeless approaches
- Number of threatened with homelessness preventions.
- Number of homeless applicants housed.



**Update**

Homelessness pressures have remained similar to the last quarter of 22/23. The ability to prevent homelessness and obtain housing in the PRS still remains an area that is impacting on homelessness in line with the national picture due to the cost of living and mortgage costs causing landlords to increase rents or evict tenants.

**3.3. Work and Financial Independence**

In 2023/24, we will continue to find ways to further support, engage, and empower our residents to maintain / achieve financial independence.

We will provide quality services that help to empower residents through good financial advice, the effective coordination and signposting of services, and partnership working.

**Performance measure**

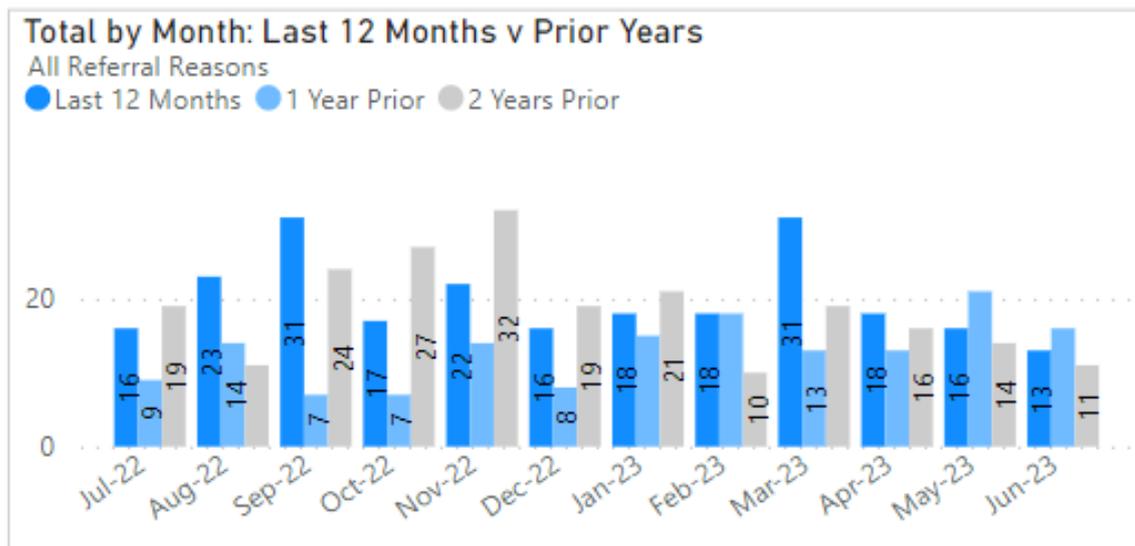
- Number of Financial Independence Team client contacts.

This measure records the number of FI Team cases opened.

**Update**

The top five referral reasons (where a value has been provided) for the last 12 months are:

- 'Under occupancy charge' (38)
- 'Ukraine Sponsor' (26)
- 'Other' (25)
- 'Debt' (23)
- 'No value' (22) - excluded from top 5 reasons.
- 'Budgeting issues' (17)



For Q1 2023/24, the top referral reasons were:

- 'Debt' (8)
- 'No value' (8) - excluded from top 3 reasons.
- 'Other' (6)
- 'Under occupancy charge' (6)

The Assistant Financial Support Manager is currently consulting with the communications team to promote the Financial Inclusion Team where possible, so those in need are aware of the service.

**Performance measure**

- Number of eligible children accessing nursery funding across the district.

**Update**

Although data is shared termly (with a lag) from Worcestershire County Council, this has been inconsistent. Work is ongoing to improve the regularity of the supply of data. There is no additional data for the current quarter.

<b>Term</b>	<b>% 2-year-olds accessing funding</b>
Summer 2019/20	76%
Summer 2020/21	71%
Summer 2021/22	74%
Spring 2022/23	62%

The take up of nursery places supports parents in taking up work and the two-year-old funding considers vulnerable families to try and support reducing the early years attainment gap. In respect of the above, Bromsgrove performance has decreased. The County average was 77.3% for Spring Term 2023. The overall national average for 2022 was 72%.

Previously we received a list from Worcestershire Children First so we could contact families who had applied for 2-year-old funding but had not processed their application. Unfortunately, there is an ongoing issue between our commissioners (WCC Public Health/ H&W Health and Care Trust) and Worcestershire Children's First WCF) Early Years. The DWP created an information sharing agreement which currently prevents WCF sharing the DWP list with us, this is yet to be resolved.

We continue to promote childcare funding at all our community events with a particular focus on 2-year-old funding and school readiness to encourage those eligible to take up the funding. We promote on our website and social media pages and with any families we encounter who may be eligible.

### **3.4. Improved Health and Wellbeing**

In 2023/24 we will continue to work with communities to help them identify and develop their strengths. We will look at ways to encourage physical movement into part of people's normal routines. We will look to catalyse an integrated approach to care.

#### **Performance measure**

- Deliver improved outcomes by implementing the Leisure Strategy

#### **Update**

The short-term recommendations in the Leisure Strategy run to October 2026. Most are underway. Further Leisure Reports will be presented to members this municipal year.

#### **Performance measure**

- Number of Community Builders in post.

#### **Update**

- There are currently two in post:
  - Catshill
  - Rubery

Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) is an approach built on tried and tested methods from sustainable community development practice. The aim of ABCD approaches is to create the conditions that will enable both place and people to flourish, reduce inequalities, improve quality of life that supports communities to thrive and to reduce or delay the need for long term care and support.

The Bromsgrove and Redditch Shared Learning Network continues to meet, supported by Public Health at Worcestershire County Council, which includes community builders, the voluntary and community sector hosts, relevant BDC and RBC officers and the relevant portfolio holders. The purpose of the Network is to provide a forum to support and encourage the development of ABCD good practice locally. The most recent meeting fed back on very successful Christmas events, which included community meals and targeted work at the cemeteries in Catshill.

Community Builders are on fixed term contracts, but funding has been confirmed to extend the posts until end of March 2025. The longer-term aim remains that other areas will be covered if funding becomes available for additional Community Builders.

**3.5. Community Safety and Anti-Social Behaviour**

Working with Community Safety partners we will implement crime prevention projects and promote community safety services to reduce the hazards and threats that result from the crime, violence, and anti-social behaviour. We will also promote and support victim services that are in place to help and encourage recovery from the effects of crime.

**Performance measure**

- Number of young people engaged through Detached/Outreach youth work.



**Update**

During Q1 2023/24 (Apr-Jun) a total of 131 young people were engaged via the Outreach Youth Work.

Apr - Routine patrols carried out in known areas of concern in Bromsgrove Central, Sanders Park, Sidemoor and Charford. Young people were engaged, and informal social education was provided on-street around issues such as school attendance, drugs and alcohol. Young people were signposted to local youth provision and support services.

May - Routine patrols were carried out in Sanders Park with advice and signposting to local support services provided.

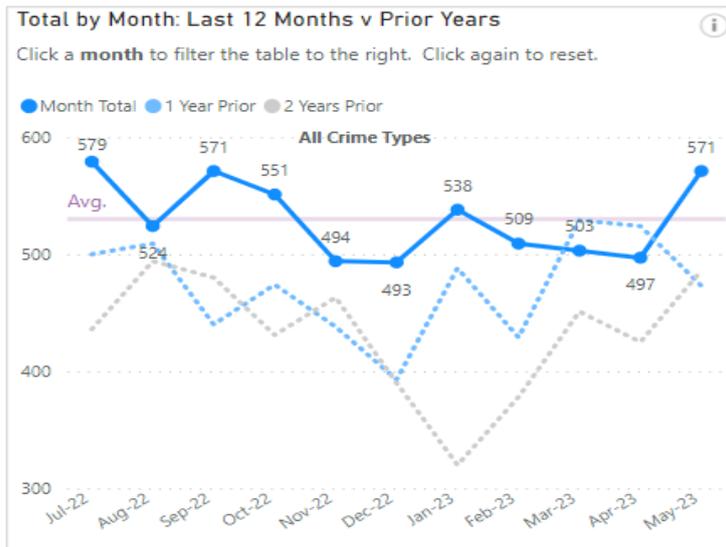
Jun - Young people were engaged during routine patrols in Bromsgrove Central and Sanders Park. Youth workers provided on-street informal social education on various subjects raised by the young people. Youth workers continued to provide support to the Street Pastors night-time economy patrols on Friday nights/early Saturday mornings. All patrols in June were very quiet with reduced numbers of all age groups in the Town Centre and surrounding areas.

**Performance measure**

- Levels of crime. (Up to and including May 2023)

**Update**

Data extracted from 'data.police.uk' below – there is a lag in data reporting.



Crime Type	Total	% of Total	v 1 Mth Prior	v 1 Yr Prior	12 Mth. Avg.
Violence and sexual off...	2,484	39.1%	35 ↑	17 ↑	207.0
Other theft	680	10.7%	0 —	127 ↑	56.7
Shoplifting	625	9.8%	18 ↑	269 ↑	52.1
Criminal damage and a...	602	9.5%	2 ↑	105 ↑	50.2
Public order	581	9.1%	-3 ↓	81 ↑	48.4
Vehicle crime	499	7.9%	-3 ↓	19 ↑	41.6
Burglary	431	6.8%	21 ↑	38 ↑	35.9
Drugs	126	2.0%	-4 ↓	-2 ↓	10.5
Other crime	123	1.9%	-2 ↓	17 ↑	10.3
Possession of weapons	80	1.3%	0 —	12 ↑	6.7
Robbery	70	1.1%	3 ↑	28 ↑	5.8
Bicycle theft	32	0.5%	4 ↑	9 ↑	2.7
Theft from the person	21	0.3%	3 ↑	-4 ↓	1.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>6,354</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>716</b>	<b>529.5</b>

On average there has been a predicted increase in crime trends in 2022/23 compared to 2021/22 where multiple months had varied stages of COVID lockdowns in place. North Worcestershire saw increases (8%) across all crime types up to April 2023. This quarter (April – June 2023) has seen slight increases in ‘violence with injury’, ‘shoplifting’ and ‘criminal damage’ when compared to Qtr4 (Jan – March 2023). Increases were also seen in public order offences although this was a predicted rise following recording changes to ASB reporting. In Bromsgrove the Ward with the highest number of offences in 2023 was Sanders Park which contains Bromsgrove Town Centre. Other areas with increases were Belbroughton, Romsley and Catshill North.

**ASB (up to and including May 2023)**



**Update**

Data extracted from 'data.police.uk' below – there is a lag in data reporting ASB reports have been decreasing, almost certainly due to a recording change in Feb 2022 which reclassified some ASB incidents to Public Order offences. Since the change there has been little impact on ASB trends with predicted seasonal increases in the summer months. In Bromsgrove in 2023 increased numbers of reports were seen in Sanders Park Ward, Bromsgrove Central, Sidemoor and Charford.

**Performance measure**

- Number of crime risk surveys carried out.  
(New measure from April 2022)

	<b>No. Surveys 2022/23</b>	<b>No. Surveys 2023/24</b>
<b>Q1</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Q2</b>	<b>8</b>	
<b>Q3</b>	<b>5</b>	
<b>Q4</b>	<b>8</b>	

**Update**

A total of 12 surveys were undertaken in the first quarter of 2023/24:  
Apr - Detailed written crime prevention recommendations were provided for a planning application in Alvechurch. Crime risk advice and recommendations were provided to a multi-agency meeting regarding defending against illegal land incursions following an incursion in Bromsgrove Central. Crime prevention advice was also provided for the specific incident.

May - Detailed written crime prevention recommendations were provided for planning applications in Belbroughton and Romsley and Bromsgrove Central. Crime prevention advice was provided following ASB reports in Rock Hill, Rubery North, Catshill North and Sidemoor. Issues included cannabis smells, inconsiderate parking and youth ASB and relevant signposting and security advice was provided.

Jun - Detailed written crime prevention recommendations were provided for planning applications in Sanders Park and Rubery South. Crime Risk advice was provided to a multi-agency meeting regarding an insecure location in Wythall West. Further liaison was carried out with relevant service areas and the resident affected, who advised that they were satisfied with the information provided.

**3.6 SLM Leisure (Everyone Active)**

**Update**

For SLM Leisure there is a lag in the data; as a result, quarter 4 data and comments can be found below; Q1 information will be available for the Q2 report.

Q4 saw another gain in gym memberships and the brand continues to grow. There was the expected influx of members from the Christmas and new year period which help increase the overall gains in memberships. The emphasis now is to maintain our membership base and reduce attrition. New Gym Introduction sessions have been introduced in an attempt to engage more with customers.

The Swim Scheme as expected took the major impact of the pool closure. The numbers show a slight decrease this quarter but do not show the freezes and cancellations that took place.

<b>Category</b>	<b>Quarter Total</b>	<b>Same quarter previous year</b>	<b>+/-</b>
Total no. of visits including EA cards and non-card holders	114,271	113,610	661
EA Cards added in this period	1,738	2,092	-354
Total EA Cards to date	67,043	60,284	6,759
No. of Gym members	2,859	2,729	130
Swimming Lessons – children enrolled on scheme	1,572	1,602	-30
Swim Lesson Occupancy	85%	88%	-3%
RIDDOR Reportable Events			0

<b>Bromsgrove LC</b>	<b>2021/22</b>		<b>+/- %</b>		<b>2022/23</b>	
	Fitness	Swim	Fitness	Swim	Fitness	Swim
1st Quarter April- June	2,172	1,454	1%	44%	2,536	1,625
2nd Quarter July-September	2,339	1,752	14%	46%	2,762	1,749
3rd Quarter October - December	2,294	1,587	16%	34%	2,669	1,523
4th Quarter January - March	2,729	1,602	0%	0%	2,859	1,572
<b>Yearly Average</b>	<b>2,384</b>	<b>1,599</b>	<b>54%</b>	<b>89%</b>	<b>2,707</b>	<b>1,617</b>

**3.7. Green Thread**

There continues to be a focus on innovation as we play our part in the response to climate change and biodiversity challenges. Working with partners across the region, including the LEPs and the Waste Partnership, we will explore the possibilities of modern technologies to our fleet but also how innovative technology can help us deliver greener and more efficient systems internally. We also need to maintain work around waste minimisation and maximising recycling, particularly around recycling quality and the implications of the new Environment Act.

**Performance Measure:**

- Have an agreed and funded plan and capital replacement programme for the Council's fleet subject to any budget constraints.

**Update**

Nottingham City Council, through their government funding grant to undertake a review of its fleet, is providing an external consultancy service to the council. Officers have been working with Nottingham City Council and have now received a copy of their report which will be used to create the basis of the fleet replacement programme report that will go to CMT in readiness for Cabinet in the Autumn.

**Performance Measure:**

- Introduce vegetable derived diesel into the councils' vehicles to reduce carbon emissions subject to any budget constraints.

**Update**

Hydrogenated Vegetable Oil (HVO) has seen a severe increase in cost due to external influences such as the war in Ukraine. Due to this large increase in costs, and the wider financial pressures on the Council, Environmental Services have reverted back to using diesel for the vehicle fleet and will continue to monitor costs until they stabilise and settle down. Prices for HVO fuel remain high until prices reduce we will continue to use standard diesel.

**Performance measure**

- Households supported by the Council's energy advice service

<b>Period</b>	<b>Households</b>
2019/20 (09/19-03/20 only)	31
2020/21	41
2021/22	90
2022/23 (part year)	385

<b>Period</b>	<b>Households</b>
<b>Q1 2023/24</b>	<b>137</b>

**Update**

Due to issues with data gathering, the data for 2022/23 only covers part of the year. In the first quarter of 2023/24 a total of 137 households received energy advice and guidance from Act on Energy. Of these, 4 received home visits due to vulnerability and 6 were provided with support through Warm Home Discount and Severn Trent Big Difference Scheme.

**3.8. Financial Stability**

Council resources will continue to be constrained. We will continue to work on ensuring our people, assets and financial resources are focused on the priorities and activities that most effectively deliver wellbeing and progress for our population.

**Performance measure (included as an earlier section of this Report)**

- Financial performance – actuals consistent with budget (overspend mitigated)
- Levelling Up Fund Project delivered within budget.

**3.9. Organisational Sustainability**

The Council will work to maximise the use of digital infrastructures, including cloud technologies, to enhance its support for customers. Ensuring the Councils infrastructure can securely process the increased demand placed on it by the expanding use of Internet of Things devices will be key to its digital success.

**Performance measure**

- Number of corporate measures accessible through the dashboard.

**Update**

The organisation is moving from the current legacy dashboard to a new Power BI dashboard. Power BI is an interactive data visualisation software product with a primary focus on business intelligence. There are currently 33 strategic measures available via the dashboards. Work is also being undertaken on a number of operational measures.

**Performance measure**

- % of staff able to work in an agile way.

**Update**

This new measure is aligned with the ongoing agile project; we are continuing to work to devise an effective method of data capture. The Agile Policy has now been launched across the organisation.

**3.10. High Quality Services**

Council people are key to its success. We need to recruit, retain, and motivate the right employees, with the right knowledge, skills, and attitude to deliver excellent services and customer care.

**Performance measure**

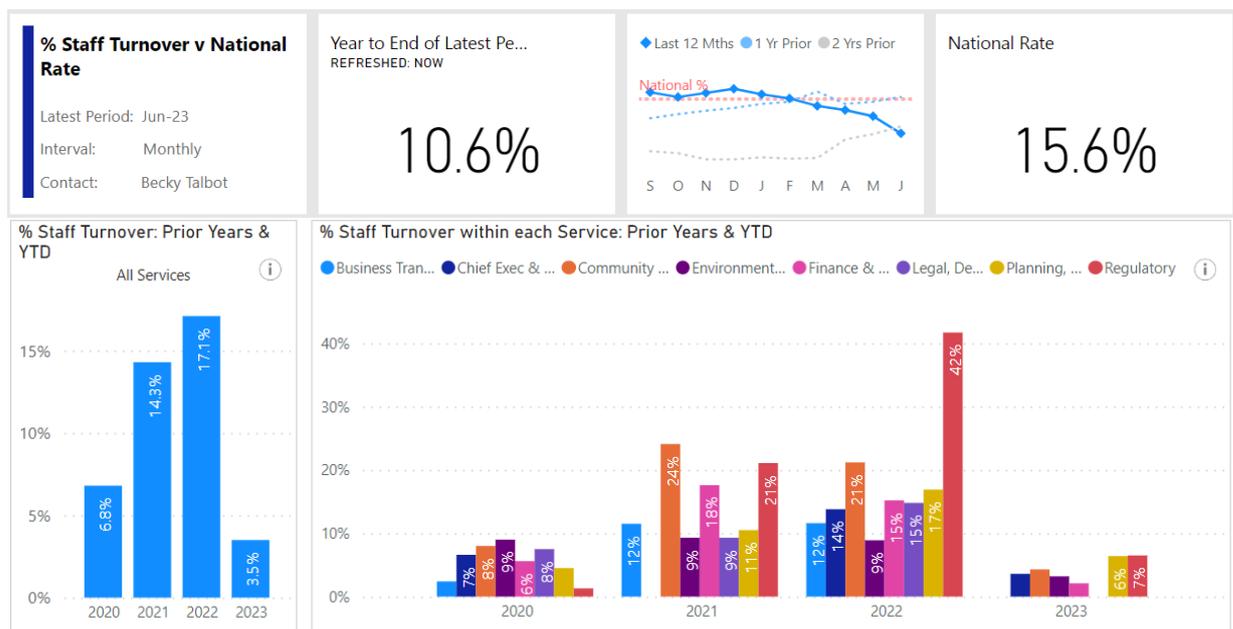
- % Of employees who undertake management training.

**Update**

The management training was launched for the first time in Summer 2022. It is an annual measure; the first data will be reported in late 2023.

**Performance measure**

- **Staff turnover rates in relation to national rates**



**Update**

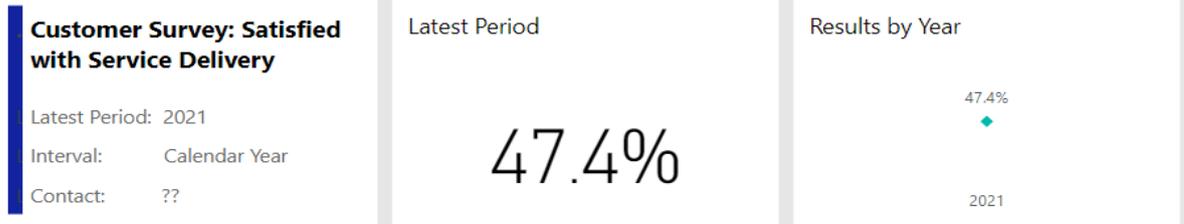
Since January 2023, it can be seen there has been a continued improvement in turnover rates which brings the authority under the national average. We will be launching a process for exit interviews before the next quarterly report cycle. We will utilise this data to further understand context and undertake necessary actions.

**Performance measure**

- Customer satisfaction with service delivery, measured through the Community Survey.

**Update**

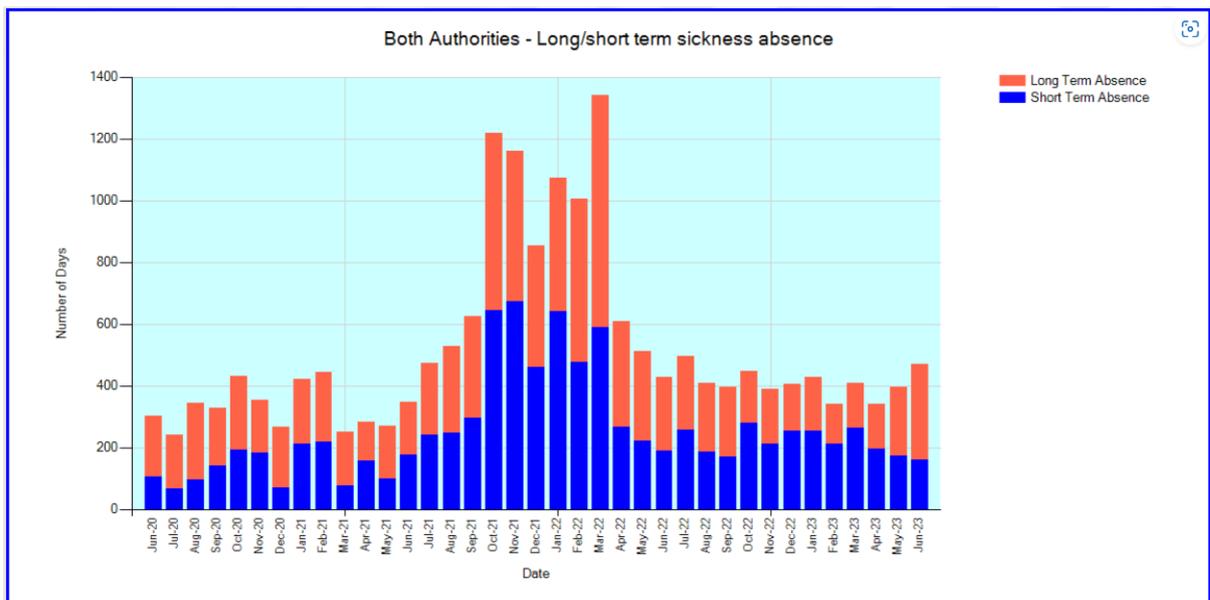
This is an annual measure. Data is extracted from the annual community survey. 2021 was the first year the public were asked about their level of satisfaction with the way the council delivers its services. National satisfaction with LA's, according to the Local Government Chronicle is currently at 40%. The 2022 survey was carried out in October/November 2022. The top lines have been reported to CMT and will be reported to members in due course; they will also be published on the Council's webpages.



**4. Operational Measures**

**4.1 Corporate Performance measure**

- Sickness absence



**Update**

The year end (2022-23) days lost per FTE is 7.04, lower than the previous year of 12.02 (national average in 2022 was 5.7 days per FTE); the national average date for year-end 2023 is not yet available. We are currently undertaking a fundamental review of the data source, data capture and data calculation, in order to utilise the increased functionality of PowerBI which will enhance both the overview and more in-depth analysis for this measure and in turn enable actions from the understanding gained.

**Actions:**

- Review of the data source, to include training where needed.

- Review of the absence reasons reported under in comparison to national data.
- Review of how the data is analysed and presented to managers.

**4.2 Environmental Services**

**Domestic Waste Collection**

**Performance Measure:**

- Percentage of Household Waste sent for re-use, recycling & composting.

	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
2021/22	44.4	49.24	59.99	57.58	49.75	48.45	36.71	50.72	50.87	39.59	33.89	42.89
2022/23	46.69	55.59	57.51	55.97	45.18	46.41	49.69	50.63	46.41	33.7	37.34	43.16
2023/24	50.74	57.4	54.66									

This is a National Indicator measuring the percentage of household waste arisings which have been sent by the Authority for reuse, recycling, and composting, and is used in the national league tables ranking Local Authority performance. In 2021/22 Bromsgrove was ranked 173<sup>rd</sup>, increasing from 175<sup>th</sup> in 2020/21 (2022/23 rankings not yet published).

Dry recycling tonnages actually dropped slightly, but there was a noticeable drop in Residual Waste Tonnages during the first quarter of 2023/24 as well, and this is believed to be related to the cost of living on households which has changed spending habits as households try to avoid unnecessary waste due to the cost of food and goods.

Garden waste also saw higher tonnages as the start of the growing season saw higher volumes collected.

**Actions:**

Discussions are being had with our neighbouring Worcestershire Authorities about how we can increase our resources collectively to support more proactive engagement with residents to educate on waste reduction and effective use of our services, as we still have regular contamination of our recycling with non-recyclable items. Work is also on-going to consider the future of waste collection services alongside new legislative requirements that will see the introduction of a weekly food waste collection and potential changes to how we manage both residual waste and dry recycling. We are also fitting new banners to the side of our refuse collection fleet during July/August to highlight the issue of food waste as part of a joint campaign with Worcestershire County Council, and have resources available via our website to support households in using our services and reducing waste: <https://www.worcestershire.gov.uk/lets-waste-less> .

**Performance Measure:**

- **Residual Waste per household (kg)**

	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
2021/22	50.01	38.81	39.35	38.16	40.89	45.06	41.5	39.36	35.86	39.86	35.58	49.26
2022/23	42.43	37.22	37.28	31.36	41.03	42.83	34.2	39.64	32.76	41.78	32.59	42.08
2023/24	33.19	35.75	34.51									

This measures non-recyclable waste thrown away per household and shows a marked reduction per household when compared with the previous two years, which is a positive trend for sustainability but may be due to financial pressures on households as much as greater awareness of the environmental benefits of reducing our waste.

Waste Composition Analysis was carried out across the district to sample waste during 2022 and identify what is being thrown away in our residual waste to support discussions on the future of our services, and any communication/education campaigns we may need to implement to support further recycling. In the samples taken, up to 18% of the residual waste put out for collection could have been collected as recycling, and up to 35% of the residual waste was food waste (45% of that was still in its packaging unused). This information is being considered as part of the wider Task and Finish project to consider future options for how we collect our residents waste in the future.

**Actions:**

As per comment on percentage of household waste sent for recycling and reuse.

**Performance Measure:**

- Fly Tipping

This overview reflects the number of fly tips identified across the district requiring resources to remove and indicates the scale of the problem and any trends resulting from enforcement and education actions. The detailed data is used to identify patterns of behaviour and geographic locations that can be targeted with signage and cameras to identify those responsible and deter behaviour or support further enforcement action against those who continue to illegally dump their waste.

	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Total
2021/22	182	113	131	104	147	103	56	76	84	75	85	125	1281
2022/23	102	85	119	96	98	109	94	89	66	105	111	119	1193
2023/24	110	124	131										365

**Actions:**

Our Enforcement Officer is currently updating our signage to support the work to deter this across the district, and cameras are still being deployed in hotspot areas to identify those responsible. We are currently unable to issue additional FPN's as we are unable to confirm if payment has been received, which is limiting our ability to escalate issues where appropriate. This is being resolved with the Finance team currently and we are expecting to issue them again where appropriate from August, using an invoice reference linked to the FPN to support payments.

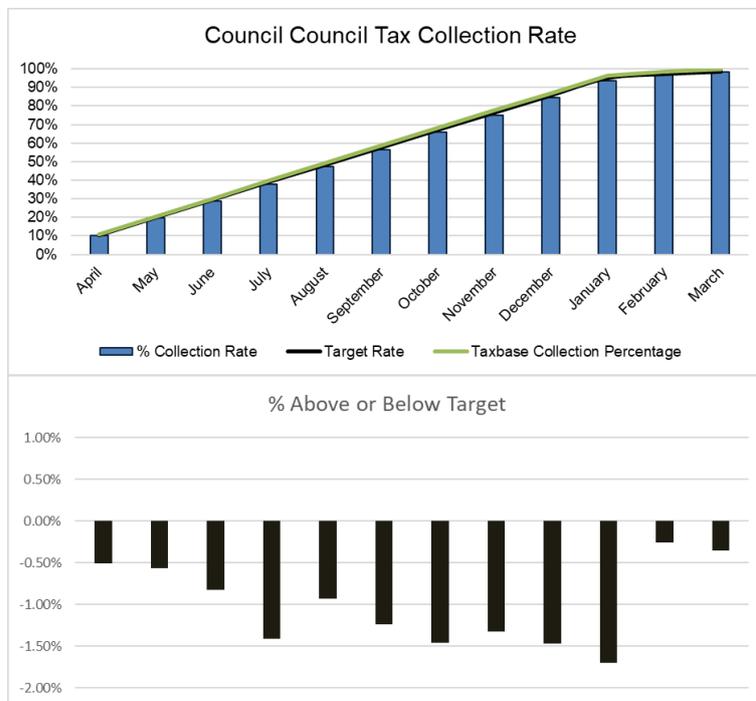
**4.3 Finance and Customer Services (inc Revenues & Benefits)**

**Performance measure**

- Council Tax Collection Rate

The data remains as Quarter 4 2022/23 data. Revenues cannot accurately produce the updated information due to batch scheduling having stopped working within Civica-OpenRevenues; this issue is waiting to be addressed and is currently within the escalation process.

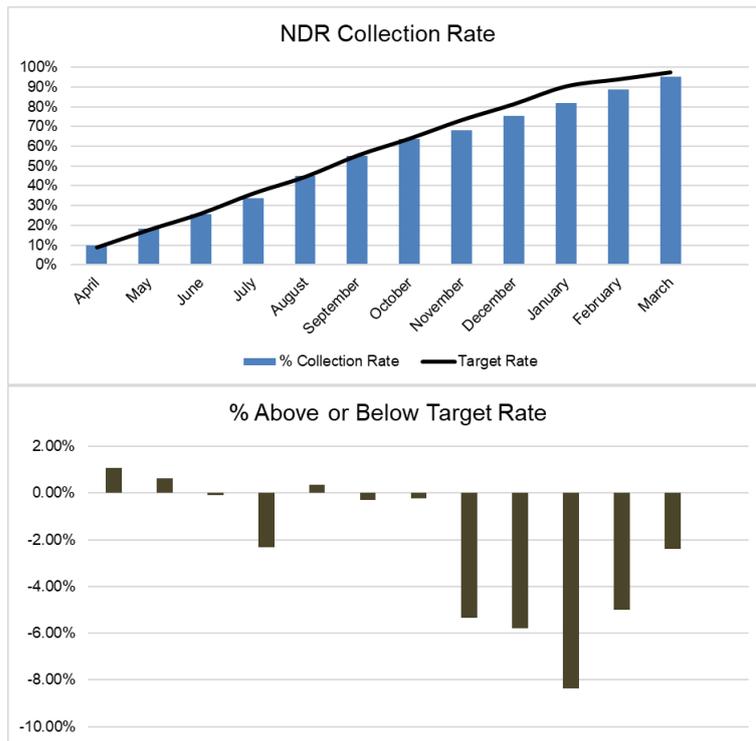
The OpenRevenue system includes software titled "Civica Automation" - which is batch scheduling tool that is able to automate linear tasks. There was an issue with one of the process maps in April and the process maps have been switched off.



**Performance measure**

- NDR Collection Rate

The data remains as Quarter 4 2022/23 data. Revenues cannot accurately produce the updated information due to batch scheduling having stopped working within Civica-OpenRevenues; this issue is waiting to be addressed and is currently within the escalation process.



**Performance measure**

- Revenues Processing

Month	Completed Items	Completed < 7 Days	Completed < 14 Days	Completed < 21 days	Completed < 28 Days	Completed > 28 days	Outstanding Documents
Apr-22	2082	588	301	308	517	368	1869
May-22	1659	409	230	138	75	807	2044
Jun-22	2115	442	239	152	201	1081	2031
Jul-22	2107	393	253	202	293	966	1605
Aug-22	1340	325	182	148	429	256	1421
Sep-22	2408	692	402	222	445	647	1430
Oct-22	3324	1070	675	338	537	704	1402
Nov-22	2778	1052	546	232	192	756	1399
Dec-22	2150	879	350	135	114	672	1270
Jan-23	3231	1391	361	234	215	1030	928
Feb-23	3376	1848	289	202	273	764	895
Mar-23	4357	2611	635	435	209	467	862
Apr-23	2764	1346	459	284	359	316	651
May-23	2368	1451	254	133	175	355	769
Jun-23	2321	1393	190	120	86	532	891

**Update**

The Covid-19 Business Support Grants, Council Tax Energy Rebates, and Energy Bill Support Scheme – Alternative Funding schemes is no longer impacting on the workload for the Revenue Service. Some reconciliation work remains to be completed for these schemes, but there is no longer any day-to-day processing impact. This has enabled a reduction to the outstanding work items.

It is anticipated that the impact of inflation and rising interest rates will cause an increase in customer contact with regards to the payment of their council tax.

**Actions**

Available resources will be reviewed to ensure that they are sufficient to meet the ongoing demand on the service.

**Performance measure**

- Online Customer Interactions

On-Line Service				
Month	Requests	Auto Processed	Referenced	Rejected
Apr-22	1097	270	350	477
May-22	1602	559	474	569
Jun-22	4297	3462	331	504
Jul-22	2233	1277	450	506
Aug-22	1341	341	466	534
Sep-22	2263	1271	446	546
Oct-22	1370	422	431	517
Nov-22	1100	220	379	501
Dec-22	977	140	326	511
Jan-23	1013	162	283	568
Feb-23	759	93	230	436
Mar-23	1220	343	316	561
Apr-23	1021	258	316	447
May-23	956	243	268	445
Jun-23	1011	189	336	486

**Update**

Customers are continuing to utilise the on-line portal to carry out service requests and transactional enquiries for Council Tax, Non-Domestic Rates and Welfare Benefits. The on-line forms include an element of automatic processing, at present, approximately 20% of enquires are processed automatically.

**Actions**

Lay-out of forms and systems parameters will be reviewed during quarters 2 and 3 to ensure that the full benefits of automation are being utilised.

**Customer Services**

**Performance measure**

- Revenues Calls (shared service)

Date	Calls Answered	Avg in Queue	Avg Wait (mm:ss)	Avg Logged in	Avg call length (mm:ss)
Apr 2023	2712	1.06	05:19	5.22	08:27
May 2023	2601	0.98	05:47	4.51	08:32
Jun 2023	2708	0.56	05:04	5.72	08:49

**Update**

The service met expectations with regards to answering calls during the quarter. The spike in calls is due to the annual council tax billing which occurs in March and April. Where demand exceeds supply, particularly during March and April, then officers from the revenues team are requested to assist. Following the annual billing, then reminder letters are sent which explains the longer times resolving customer queries (e.g. payment arrangements / explanation of outstanding balances)

**Performance measure**

- Number of Web Payments

**Update**

Date	Number of payments
Apr 2023	1222
May 2023	1771
Jun 2023	1310

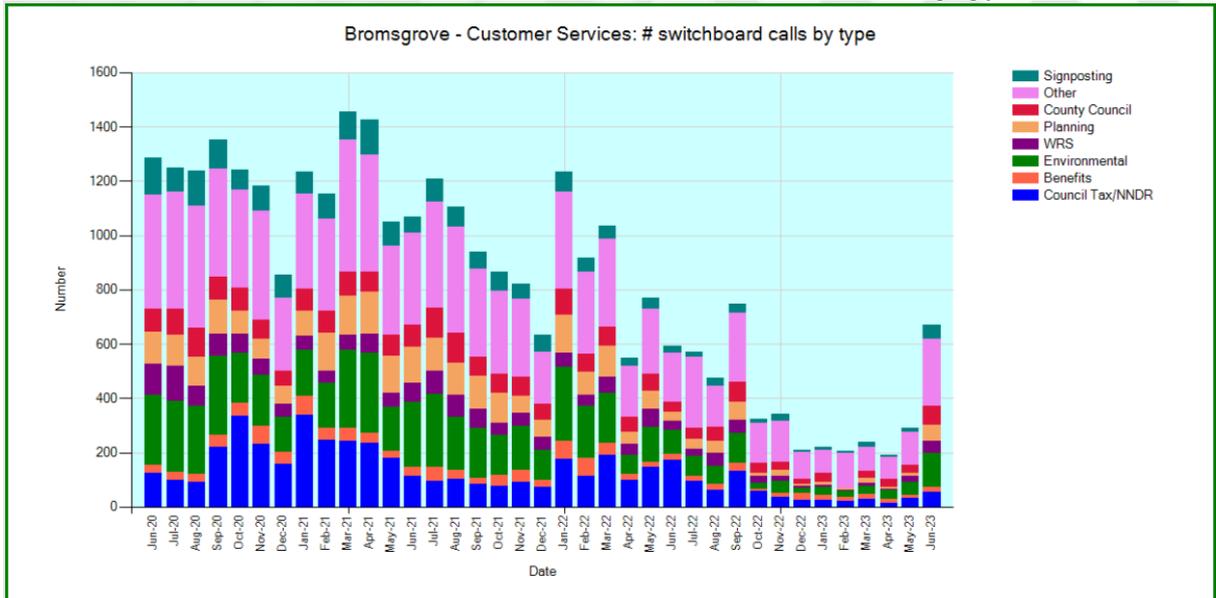
**Performance measure**

- Customer Service calls (Switchboard)

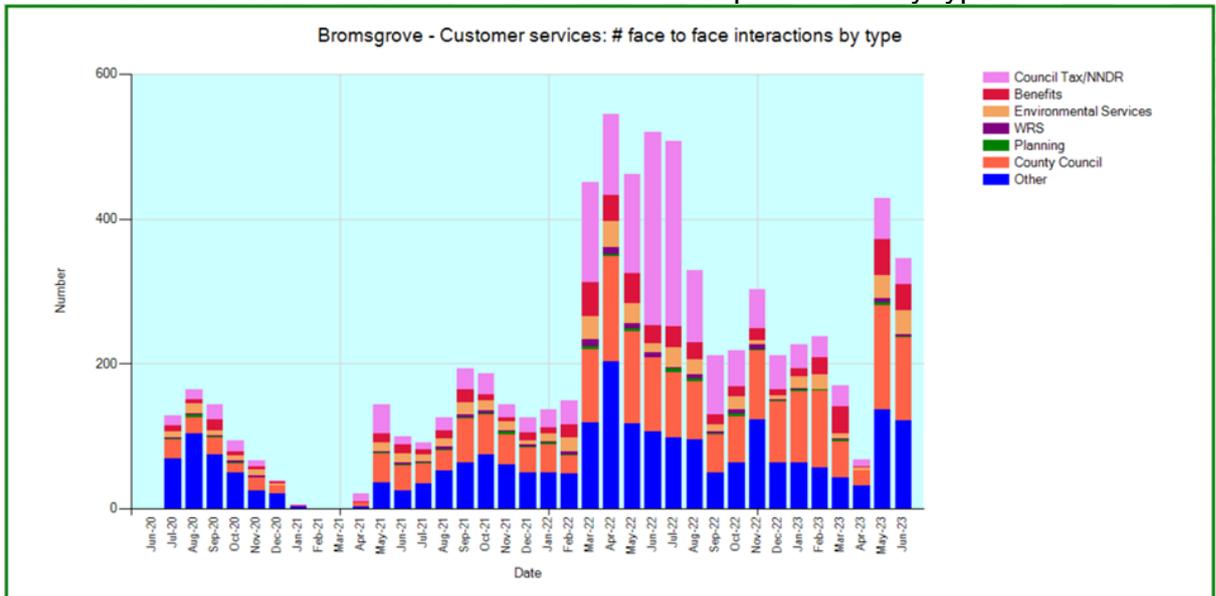
Date	Calls Answered	Avg in Queue	Avg Wait (mm:ss)	Avg Logged in	Avg call length (mm:ss)
Apr 23	786	0.02	00:44	1.92	00:57
May 23	889	0.02	00:41	1.90	00:54
Jun 23	850	0.02	00:48	1.56	00:58

**Switchboard** - The service met expectations with regards to answering calls during the quarter, despite an increase in calls across all areas, particularly the 'other' category which a highlighted area of enquiry was customers telephoning regarding road closures for the Coronation. There are 2 FTE officers that provide switchboard service across both Bromsgrove and Redditch Switchboard.

**Measures Dashboard - Customer Services - Switchboard calls by type**



**Measures Dashboard - Customer Services - Reception visits by type**

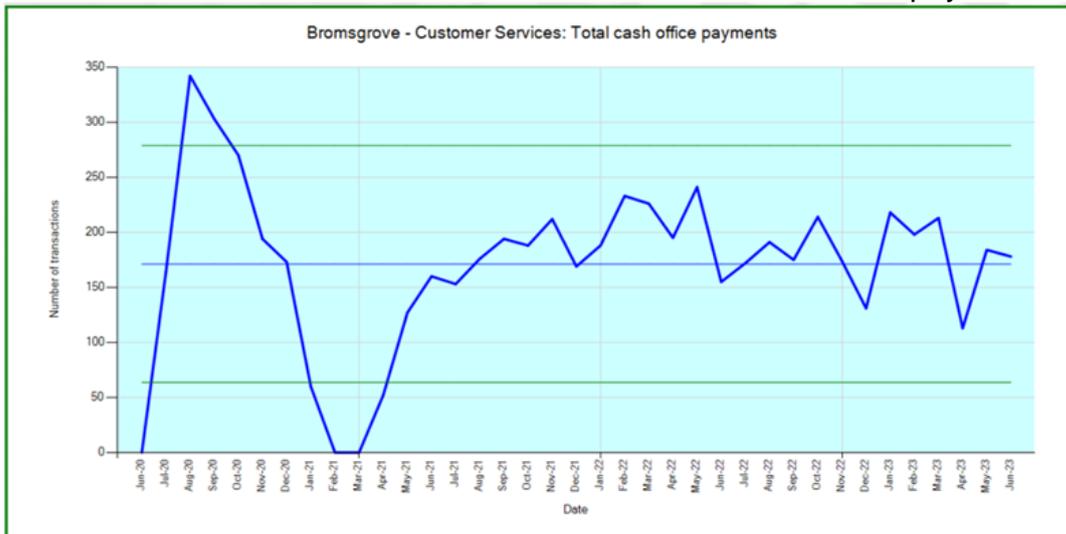


Visitor numbers remain low with an average of 350 enquiries per month (88/week, 18/day) at Parkside. The highest demand is for 'other' which is for non-BDC services (signposting) followed by county council run services (registrar, library, social care). The highest demand at the Parkside for council-run services is split between benefits, council tax and environmental

services. BDC-run services only account for 30% of customer enquiries to Parkside.

There was an ICT database error in April so these figures should be disregarded.

**Measures Dashboard - Customer Services – Total cash office payments**



Cash and card transactions at Bromsgrove Cashiers remain low with an average of between 8 and 10 transactions per working day. 38% cash, 62% pay by card.

**4.4 Planning, Regeneration and Leisure Services**

The Leisure and Cultural Strategy has been formally endorsed. Its recommendations have been prioritised for delivery and delivery has commenced.

**Performance measure**

- Total number of planning applications determined in quarter (all types)

**Update**

Period	Number Determined
Quarter 1, 2022/23	191
Quarter 2, 2022/23	137
Quarter 3, 2022/23	138
Quarter 4, 2022/23	165
Quarter 1, 2023/24	See comment

Due to an issue with Uniform (system holding the data) we have been unable to extract any information for quarter 1, 2023/24

**Performance measure**

- Speed of decision making for ‘major applications’ (over a rolling 2-year period) (Governmental targets for determining applications in time (or within an agreed extension of time) on major applications is 60%)

<b>Period</b>	<b>% Determined ‘on time’</b>
Quarter 1, 2022/23	82.1%
Quarter 2, 2022/23	81.5%
Quarter 3, 2022/23	81.8%
Quarter 4, 2022/23	86.1
Quarter 1, 2023/24	See comment

**Update**

Due to an issue with Uniform (system holding the data) we have been unable to extract any information for quarter 1, 2023/24

**Performance measure**

- Speed of decision making for ‘non-major applications’ (over a rolling 2-year period) (Governmental targets for determining applications in time (or within an agreed extension of time) on non-major applications is 70%)

<b>Period</b>	<b>% Determined ‘on time’</b>
Quarter 1, 2022/23	77.7%
Quarter 2, 2022/23	78.6%
Quarter 3, 2022/23	78.9%
Quarter 4, 2022/23	81.3%
Quarter 1, 2023/24	See comment

**Update**

Due to an issue with Uniform (system holding the data) we have been unable to extract any information for quarter 1, 2023/24

**5. Corporate Project Oversight & Monitoring**

Currently twenty projects are being monitored. The table below provide a summary as of 19th July 2023. As can be seen over 50% (54.5%) have been rated as green for overall status.

All Projects (Number)	Overall Status RAG		Time Status RAG		Scope Status RAG		Budget Status RAG	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
<b>Red</b>	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
<b>Amber</b>	8	36.4%	9	40.9%	7	31.8%	8	36.4%
<b>Green</b>	12	54.5%	11	50.0%	13	59.1%	9	40.9%

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### UPGRADING OF SEWAGE TREATMENT PLANTS AND INTRODUCTION OF SERVICE CHARGING TO CONTRIBUTING PROPERTIES

- 1) FRANKLEY GREEN LANE, FRANKLEY GREEN
- 2) FOCKBURY ROAD, DODFORD
- 3) DUSTHOUSE LANE, TUTNALL

Relevant Portfolio Holder	Councillor P J Whittaker
Portfolio Holder Consulted	Yes
Relevant Head of Service	Simon Parry - Head of Environmental and Housing Property Services (Interim)
Report Author	Job Title: Engineering Team Leader Contact email: <a href="mailto:pete.liddington@bromsgroveandredditch.gov.uk">pete.liddington@bromsgroveandredditch.gov.uk</a> Contact Tel: 534108
Wards Affected	Belbroughton and Romsley, Perryfields and Tardebigge Ward
Ward Councillor(s) consulted	No
Relevant Strategic Purpose(s)	Communities which are safe, well maintained and green
Non-Key Decision	
This report contains exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3 of Part I of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972, as amended	

#### 1. RECOMMENDATIONS

##### 1.1 The Cabinet is asked to RECOMMEND that: -

- i) A budget of £72k be added to the 2023/2024 Capital Programme, for the agreed contribution for upgrading of the 1) Frankley Green Sewage Treatment Plant, to be funded from borrowing or balances following consideration as part of the medium-term financial plan review;
- ii) A budget of £69k be added to the 2024/2025 Capital Programme, for the agreed contribution for upgrading of the 2) Dodford Sewage Treatment Plant, to be funded from borrowing or balances following consideration as part of the medium-term financial plan review;
- iii) A budget of £57k be added to the 2025/2026 Capital Programme, for the agreed contribution for upgrading of the 3) Tutnall Sewage Treatment Plant, to be funded from borrowing or balances following consideration as part of the medium-term financial plan review;

- iv) **An annual service charge be introduced, subject to agreement with Bromsgrove and District Housing Trust (BDHT), for all contributing properties to the three Sewage Treatment Plants from 1st April 2024, equivalent to the annual sum payable to Severn Trent Water Ltd for sewage treatment, if the property was connected to the public foul water sewerage system.**

## **2. BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 The three existing Sewage Treatment Plants (STPs) (refer to Appendix 1) serve three individual rural area communities. In the main, these communities consist of properties that were originally owned as housing stock by this Authority, although presumably a number of private dwellings are also connected to these facilities, without prior consent. The STPs were obviously installed many years ago and have probably been 'marginally improved' to some extent over the years. With the transfer of the Council's housing stock to BDHT, informal arrangements were implemented whereby this Council would maintain these assets, with BDHT contributing towards such maintenance costs.
- 2.2 However, over recent years it has become apparent that these facilities do not function consistently, and on a number of occasions this Council has dealt with incidents whereby our speedy remedial action has fortunately prevented pollution of the receiving watercourses. Any failure to react, may have resulted in serious conflict with the Environment Agency (EA), as of course each STP obviously must operate within the terms of a valid consent, issued by the EA.
- 2.3 As a consequence of concerns with these STPs, a detailed inspection has been undertaken of these facilities, the results of which give cause for concern, particularly Frankley Green STP. Unlike the other two STPs which are both a more acceptable format, that being a 'Rotating Biological Contactor' (RBC), although very dated versions, Frankley Green comprises a 'rotating arm over a trickling filter,' circa 1960s. An extract from the detailed report on this latter facility highlights its operational inefficiency, as it states, *'at point of discharge into the watercourse there is a notable change in the watercourse bed due to the deposition of dark solids. This may be due to the poor general performance of the treatment through the filter bed.'*
- 2.4 Whilst investigating the operational frailties of the STPs themselves, Officers also arranged for a CCTV survey to be undertaken to the contributing foul sewers serving each plant, as the age of such assets usually warrant some form of maintenance work to be undertaken.

Again, the results of these CCTV surveys give cause for concern. The diameter of the majority of the foul water systems is 150mm, but each length between manholes shows signs of a combination of pipe deformation, root infestation, severe longitudinal pipe cracking etc. There is a possibility that in some locations a pipe collapse may occur in the near future due to its deteriorating condition. It is therefore recommended that these sewers are relined, which will preserve the pipelines integrity for future years, and more importantly avoid the need for open trench replacement, which is particularly costly where reinstatement is concerned through private land/gardens.

- 2.5 In view of the condition of all of these assets, and the need to bring them up to an acceptable standard and to be fully operational on a day-to-day basis, without the need for irregular attendance to try and rectify the failures of aging systems, such assets need to be upgraded. All three STPs need to be replaced with new 'Rotating Biological Contactors' (RBCs) (Klargesters), with all contributing sewers being relined, where deemed necessary. The design and works can be spread over this and the next two financial years, with Frankley Green being undertaken this year due to its unacceptable condition.
- 2.6 In accordance with the formal agreement between BDHT and the Council, BDHT have full responsibility for these assets.

### **3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 3.1 Preliminary consultations have of course been held between officers from the Council and BDHT on these upgrading works. The agreement states that the Council contributes 60% towards the cost of maintenance works and those works necessary to upgrade the plants to ensure their compliance with the current EA licences.
- 3.2 The contributing properties to these STPs currently do not pay for the treatment of their foul waste, unlike, if they were connected to a public foul water sewer, where Severn Trent Water Ltd would automatically instigate a sewage treatment charge. There is absolutely no reason why such a charge should not be implemented, and such monies can be used to finance an approved maintenance plan. Prior consultation has already taken place with householders to determine if they are connected to the STPs, or use other means of treatment/disposal, such as cesspits/septic tanks.
- 3.3 Borrowing costs will be addressed going forward into future years in the Authority's budget process.

**4. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 The agreement between the Council and BDHT states the following:

- a) **BDHT holds, and will continue to hold the Environmental Permits for these Pumping Stations** (the agreement has used incorrect terminology referencing both pumping stations and filtration plants, when they actually mean sewage treatment plants);
- b) **The Parties agree and BDHT accepts, that from the date of this Agreement it has full responsibility for the maintenance of the Pumping Stations;**
- c) **BDHT acknowledges that the Pumping Stations need to be properly maintained and their condition improved to allow their transfer to the Appropriate Authority** (when the agreement was formulated it was envisaged that at some time in the future the STPs could be transferred to Severn Trent Water Ltd (STW), providing the standard of each STP was upgraded to an acceptable condition. However, this course of action has been discussed with STW, and they have no desire or legal justification to accept these assets).

4.2 For disposal of treated effluent to a watercourse, a valid Permit is required to be issued by the EA. Currently these are:

- a) Permit MI/S/06/04580/S/001 – held by BDHT – 23.09.1960  
Frankley Green PSP  
(Note. refers to this facility as a Pumping Station, which is incorrect)
- b) Permit MI/S/07/05651/S/002 – held by BDC – 18.03.1992  
Dodford STP  
(Note. Permit was revoked 28.11.2004)
- c) Permit MI/S/07/05653/S/001 – held by BDHT – 02.10.1970  
Curtis Close SDW  
(Note. refers to this facility as a Sewage Disposal Works, which is acceptable)

As a consequence of these irregularities with the Permits, it is inevitable that the EA will require up to date submissions to be made.

**5. STRATEGIC PURPOSES - IMPLICATIONS**

**Relevant Strategic Purpose**

- 5.1 *Communities which are Safe, Well Maintained and Green* – with the upgrading of these sewerage assets, the instances where pollution to receiving watercourses will be practically eliminated, particularly with the provision of a proven maintenance regime being instigated.

**Climate Change Implications**

- 5.2 There are no Climate Change implications.

**6. OTHER IMPLICATIONS**

**Equalities and Diversity Implications**

- 6.1 There are no Equalities and Diversity Implications

**Operational Implications**

- 6.2 Referring to 5.1, the need for the Council's Minor Works Team to regularly inspect the STPs and undertake necessary emergency remedial works to the current dated installations will be curtailed.

**7. RISK MANAGEMENT**

- 7.1 The risk of enforcement action by the EA for the illegal discharge of untreated effluent to a watercourse is practically removed. In addition, the provision of new security fencing to these sites will prevent unauthorised entry, thereby reducing possible vandalism.

**8. APPENDICES and BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- i) Appendix 1 - Sewage Treatment Plants - Location Details

**Background papers**

(The following Background Papers contain exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3 of Part I of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972, as amended)

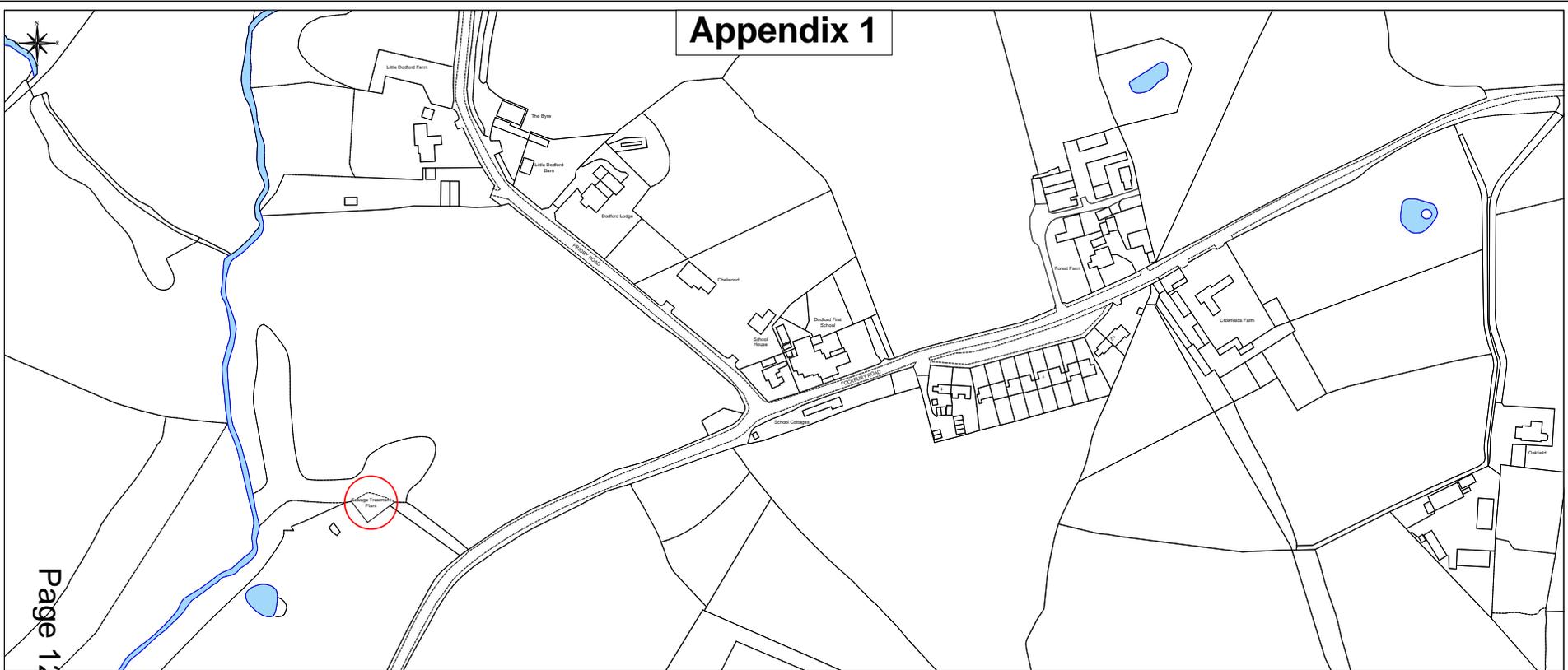
- ii) Agreement –
- iii) Detailed Inspection Reports of Sewage Treatment Plants

- iv) CCTV Reports of associated Foul water sewers

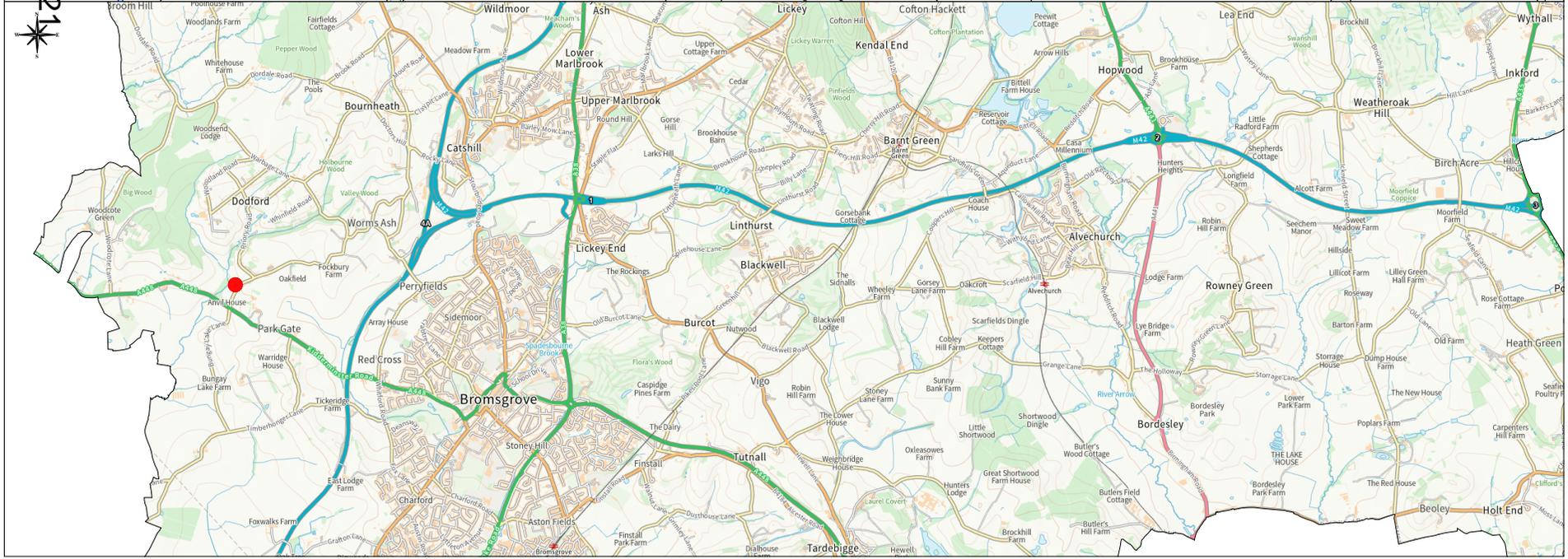
**9. REPORT SIGN OFF**

<b>Department</b>	<b>Name and Job Title</b>	<b>Date</b>
Portfolio Holder	Councillor P J Whittaker	27 Sept 2023
Lead Director/Head of Service	Simon Parry - Head of Environmental and Housing Property Services (Interim)	20 Sept 2023
Financial Services	Peter Carpenter Director of Finance	20 Sept 2023
Legal Services	Claire Green Principal Solicitor	26 Sept 2023
Policy Team	Emily Payne Engagement and Equalities Advisor	20 Sept 2023
Climate Change	Matthew Eccles Climate Change Manager	18 Sept 2023

# Appendix 1



Page 12/11



Date	Rev	Details

Project:  
**Dodford Sewage Treatment Plant  
 Fockbury Road  
 Bromsgrove**

Drawing:  
**Location and Site Plan**

Drawn:	PTL	Scale:	1/1250 and 1/25,000 @ A1
Surveyed:	OS	Date:	Mar 2022

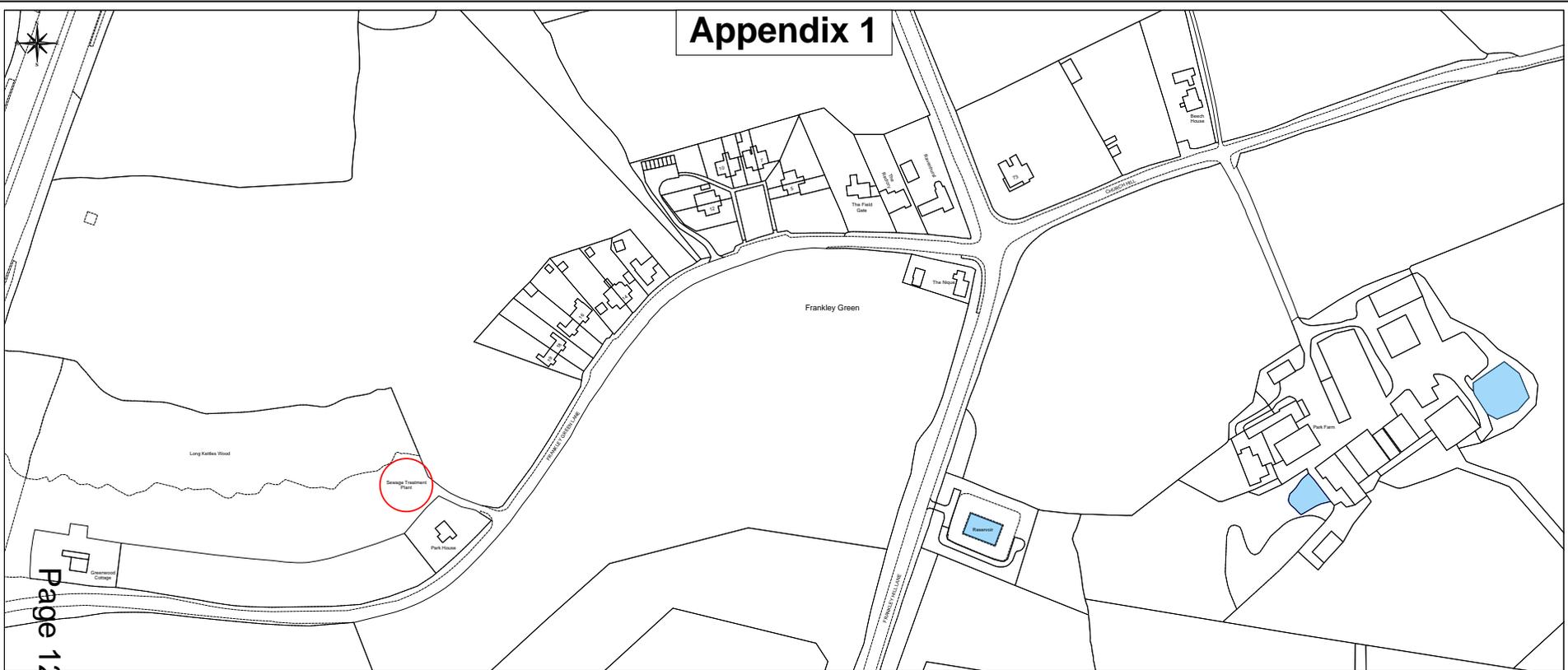
Drawing No: **P2240/2**

**Engineering and Design Services**  
 Town Hall  
 Walter Strang Square  
 Redditch  
 Worcs B98 8AH

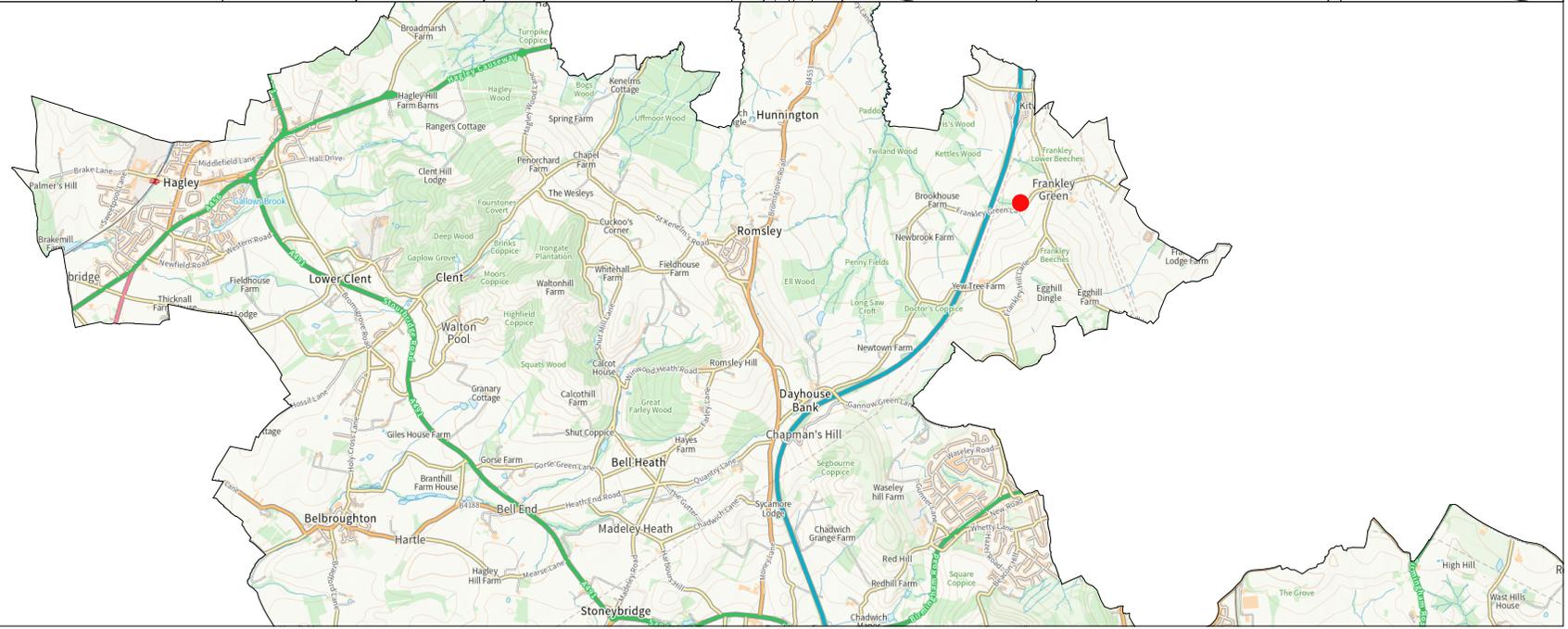
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# Appendix 1



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Date	Rev	Details

**Project:**  
**Frankley Green Sewage Treatment Plant**  
 Frankley Green Lane, Birmingham

**Drawing:**  
**Location and Site Plan**

Drawn:	PTL	Scale:	1/1250 and 1/25,000 @ A1
Surveyed:	OS	Date:	Mar 2022

**Drawing No:** P2240/1

**Engineering and Design Services**  
 Town Hall  
 Walter Strang Square  
 Redditch  
 Worcs B98 8AH

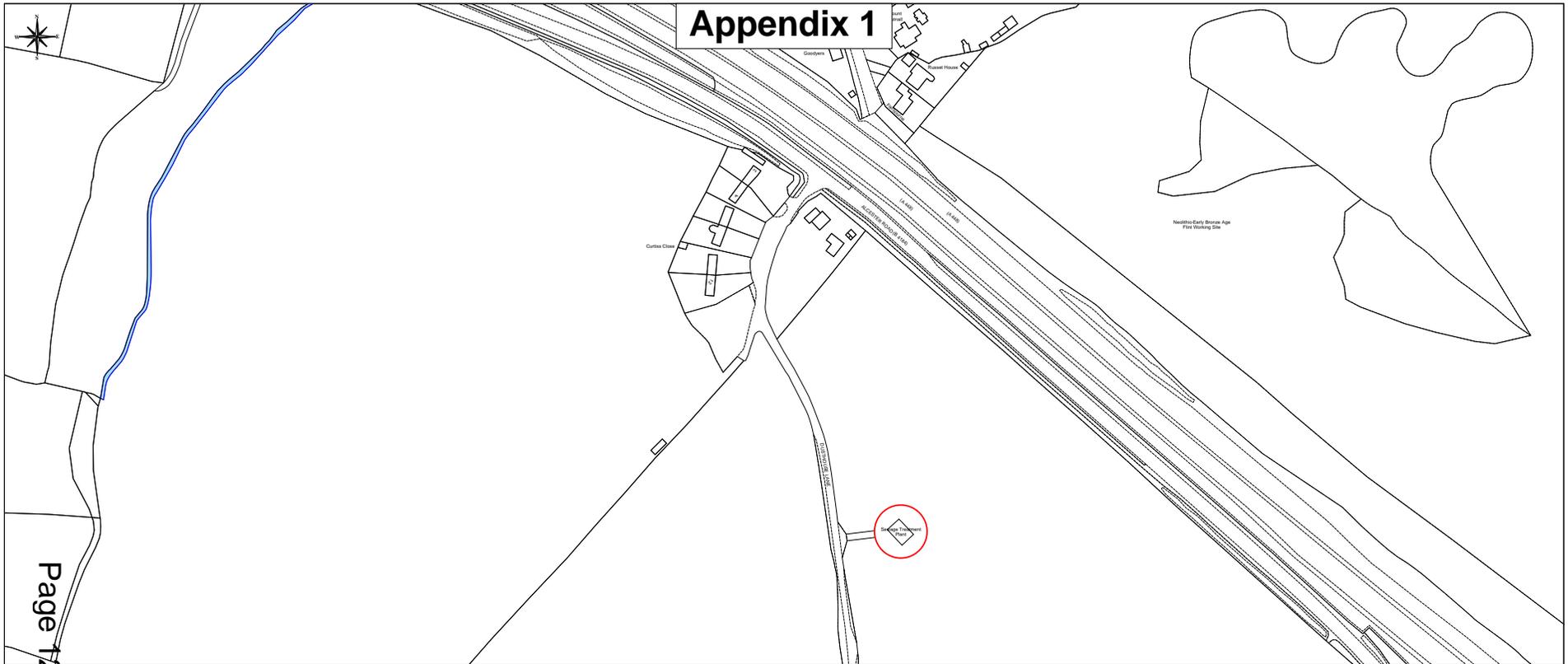
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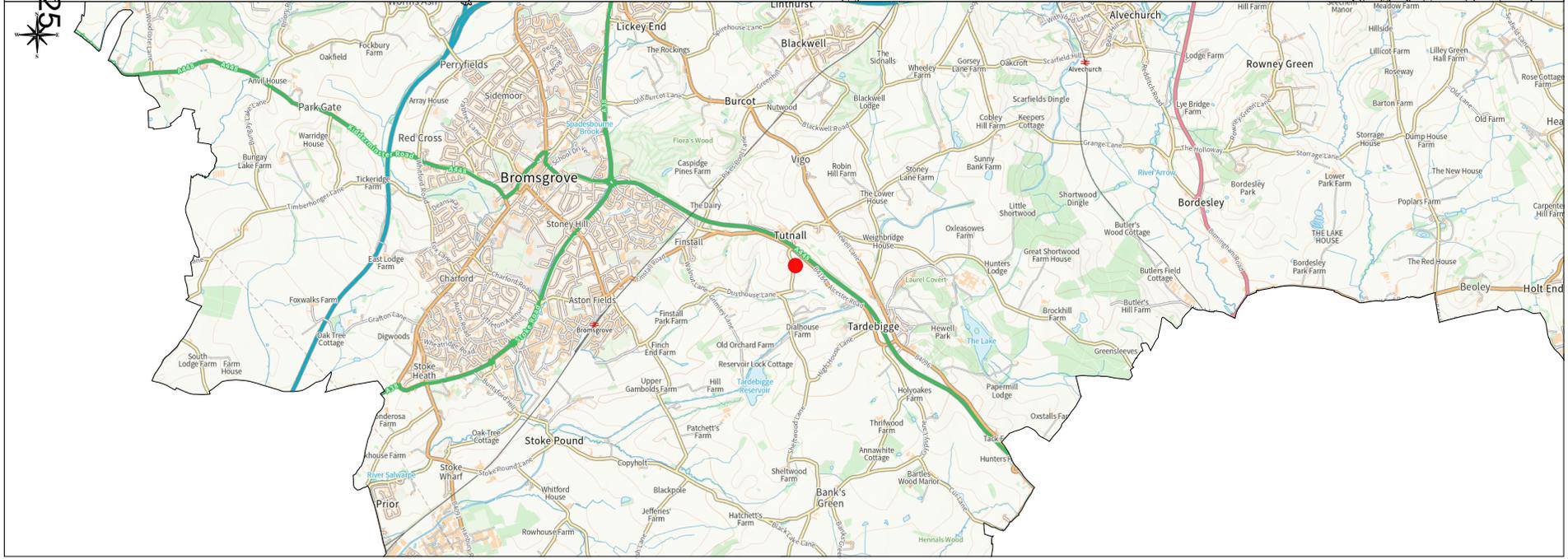
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# Appendix 1



Page 1251



Project:		
Tutnall Sewage Treatment Plant Dusthouse Lane Bromsgrove		
Drawing:		
Location and Site Plan		
Drawn:	PTL	Scale: 1/1250 and 1/25,000 @ A1
Surveyed:	OS	Date: Mar 2022
Drawing No: P2240/3		
Engineering and Design Services		
Town Hall Walter Stranz Square Redditch Worcestershire B98 8AH		

Date	Rev	Details

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**Bromsgrove District Council**  
  
[www.bromsgrove.gov.uk](http://www.bromsgrove.gov.uk)

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## **BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

### **MEETING OF THE CABINET**

**WEDNESDAY, 13TH SEPTEMBER 2023, AT 6.00 P.M.**

PRESENT: Councillors K.J. May (Leader), S. J. Baxter, S. R. Colella,  
C. B. Taylor, S. A. Webb and P. J. Whittaker

Also in attendance: Councillor P. M. McDonald (via Microsoft  
Teams) and Councillor R. J. Hunter

Observers: Councillor S. T. Nock

Officers: Mrs. S. Hanley, Mrs. C. Felton, Mr P. Carpenter,  
Mrs. J. Bayley-Hill, Mrs. H. Mole, Mr M. Austin and Mrs. P. Ross

[It was noted that prior to the meeting there had been a request that a change be made to the running order of the agenda. The Housing Company – Shareholders Committee – Reserved Matters would now be considered directly following the consideration of the Governance Systems Task Group report.]

24/23

### **APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor C. A. Hotham.

25/23

### **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

26/23

### **MINUTES**

It was noted that there were no Recommendations in the minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting held on 10<sup>th</sup> July 2023.

**RESOLVED** that the minutes from the Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting held on 10<sup>th</sup> July 2023, be noted.

27/23

### **GOVERNANCE SYSTEMS TASK GROUP REPORT**

At the invitation of the Leader, Councillor P. M. McDonald, Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Board, addressed the Cabinet with regard to the Governance Systems Task Group Report and the Recommendation

from the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board held on Monday 11<sup>th</sup> September 2023; as detailed on Supplementary Documentation 3 agenda pack.

Councillor McDonald informed the Cabinet that the Governance Systems Task Group had kept to their allotted timescale and had delivered their report.

The Task Group had received presentations from Councillor Craig Browne, Deputy Leader, Cheshire East Council, who's authority had changed over to the Committee System from the Leader Cabinet; and Mr. Ian Parry, Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS).

Councillor McDonald stated that following on from a Comparative Analysis being carried out between the Committee System and a Hybrid System based on the present governance system in operation at the Council; the Task Group had concluded that we were very lucky to have achieved the current Hybrid System. The best bespoke system which enabled everyone, including opposition Members to be involved.

It was estimated that the cost to the Council, including the design principles, to move to a Committee System would be circa £200k, and it was felt that it would be ridiculous to spend this amount of money. Hence the Recommendation from the Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting held on 11<sup>th</sup> September 2023.

The Leader took the opportunity to express her thanks to Councillor McDonald and Task Group Members for their thorough investigation and the time they had invested over the summer months.

In response to questions from Cabinet Members, Councillor McDonald explained that with regard to the Cabinet Advisory Panels being introduced, this would provide all Members, including Back Benchers, with an opportunity to get involved and to put recommendations forward to the Cabinet and Portfolio Holders.

The Head of Legal, Democratic and Property Services explained that any Sub-Committee could be created in an advisory capacity and would be able to look at the Forward Plan and any other items. Including items that existed on the Cabinet Working Group Work Programme or items they considered should be included on the Cabinet Working Group Work Programme. An advisory panel would help shape the Cabinet Working Group Work Programme and would be able to put forward any recommendations to the Cabinet.

Councillor S. J. Baxter suggested that a review of Cabinet Advisory Panels should be included in the Recommendation from the Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting held on 11<sup>th</sup> September 2023.

In response Councillor McDonald stated that the Task Group had considered this and had suggested that it would be reviewed by the Overview and Scrutiny Board after a six month period.

Councillor McDonald responded to further questions and clarified that Cabinet Advisory Panels would not be talking strategically. It would be up to Portfolio Holders to look at topics and then circulate those topics to all Council Members, who could then decide if they were specifically interested in a particular topic and would like to sit on a Cabinet Advisory Panel.

The Head of Legal, Democratic and Property Services commented that it was important that the work undertaken by the Task Group and the model they saw, would need Members to be involved.

At the invitation of the Leader, Councillor R. J. Hunter addressed the Cabinet.

Councillor Hunter gave his thanks to the Leader for inviting him to attend the meeting, in order to make a last appeal to the Cabinet before Full Council on 20<sup>th</sup> September 2023.

Councillor Hunter continued and in doing so stated that both he and his Group were sympathetic to the Committee System being adopted. He was unable to agree with the Recommendations of the Task Group as they did not represent a significant improvement.

Councillor Hunter questioned Recommendations a) and b) and highlighted that this did not represent a step forward it was just the status quo. He had been disappointed where decisions have been made with his Group not being consulted with.

In response the Leader stated that whilst it was good practice to have an Opposition Group Leader as Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Board; there was nothing currently in the Constitution that required this.

The Head of Legal, Democratic and Property Services explained that the Constitution was pinned to 'fetter' to determine the administrative arrangements, but the Council could introduce a 'Memorandum of

Understanding' where working practices were clearly defined for Council to agree. Changes had been necessary to date due to the results of the recent Elections and there was Cross Party dissatisfaction with the working arrangements in place previously.

Councillor Hunter then referred to Recommendation c) and stated that there were already specific groups – Strategic Planning and Climate Change, therefore he did not understand the point of introducing Cabinet Advisory Panels and could not see how this moved us forward.

The Leader took the opportunity to respond and highlighted that Cabinet Advisory Panels provided an opportunity for all Members to commit. The culture at Council meetings had changed and it was about Members all working together, to take things on board and to listen with interest. Breaking down barriers and instigating involvement and change.

Councillor Hunter further stated that there was no binding vote, nothing that shared power and it was a 'Gentleman's Agreement'. It was a missed opportunity as it was fundamentally a Cabinet Model and to reinforce a model that was not fit for purpose and did not move us on. Hiding behind costs of £200k, yet the Task Group report showed costs of £80k and £40k if we stayed with the status quo. Cheshire East Council talked about the improvements that the Committee System had brought to the authority and that it had been cost neutral, so he did not accept the cost implications of £200k. No-one had asked about reducing the number of meetings and there was an assumption that Members would ask for higher allowances to attend additional meetings under a Committee System. Members were being pushed into making a decision with the September deadline given. He was very disappointed with the process and outcome, as there was evidence from only one authority. He had put forward two other Local Authorities but they were never considered, so he considered that it was not a thorough review as not enough evidence was heard from other authorities who had gone through this process. Therefore, his Group would not back down, they may be a small Group, but there was also a significant number of Members that were not happy, so he would suggest looking again. The Recommendations would not fundamentally change things at this Council.

In response the Leader stated that we had had significant change at the Council. Councillor McDonald informed the Cabinet that at the Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting on 11<sup>th</sup> September, Board Members had discussed Councillor Hunter's motion and reasons and tonight the Task Group did not accept what he was saying. The ballot box had decided

who had the largest control of the Council. The bespoke Hybrid system would be included and embedded in the Constitution, to the benefit of opposition groups, and would not just be a 'Gentleman's Agreement'.

Councillor McDonald continued and explained that where the Constitution could not be changed, working practices were looked at; and we would have had to delegate more power to officers. Given the potential increase in meetings under a Committee System, all Members would need to be prepared to attend meetings during the day and not everyone could attend or lose income having to attend daytime meetings. He did not think that Members were being railroaded into making a decision. The Task Group had ensured that meetings were positive, rational and well attended by Task Group Members; hence keeping to the timelines, as all Task Group Members turned up for meetings. The Hybrid System was a bespoke system that suited Bromsgrove District Council and Chairman would be supported by it being embedded into the Council's Constitution.

Councillor Baxter commented that previously if she wanted to achieve anything she would talk to the Cabinet and Portfolio Holders. We were now embedding a process enabling all Members to influence decisions. At the first Full Council meeting we were all finding our feet with the new administration and some Members knew the failings of the previous system.

Members further commented that the £200k costs had been explained and were the set up costs. Members agreed that decisions should be made to the benefit of residents which the Task Group report stipulated 'Putting the Residents at the Centre of all Decisions'. The Task Group report highlighted the best model and pragmatic model for the Council; and was not considered in a 'mad rush', but in a considered timeframe. The results of the Task Group would be considered at Full Council, and the Overview and Scrutiny Board had done exactly what Council had asked.

For clarity the Leader read out the Overview and Scrutiny Board Recommendations on the subject of the Governance Systems Task Group's report, as agreed at the Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting on 11<sup>th</sup> September 2023.

**RECOMMENDED** that Bromsgrove District Council should have a hybrid Leader and Cabinet governance model from May 2024 onwards, and as detailed in the preamble above, to be monitored by the Overview and

Scrutiny Board after 6 months. To achieve this model, the Council should do the following:

- a) Agree changes to the Council's constitution during the 2023/24 municipal year, as detailed in the Task Group report;
- b) Introduce working protocols designed to embed more collegiate working in the Council's governance culture;
- c) Introduce Cabinet Advisory Panels;
- d) Take action to improve communication with Members;
- e) Introduce a Memorandum of Understanding between all political group leaders to maintain these working arrangements for at least the next four years; and
- f) A review to take place after 6 months by the Overview and Scrutiny Board.

Prior to the next agenda item being introduced, Councillor McDonald asked for it to be noted that at the Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting held on 11<sup>th</sup> September 2023 it was agreed that all Senior Officers would attend the Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting on 16<sup>th</sup> October 2023. All Council Members would also be invited to attend for the Agile Working Policy to be explained.

28/23

### **HOUSING COMPANY - SHAREHOLDERS COMMITTEE - RESERVED MATTERS**

The Head of Legal, Democratic and Property Services presented that Setting up a Shareholders Committee report for Members consideration.

Cabinet was informed that in July 2023 the Council had approved the setting up of a Housing Company to manage the Burcot development.

There was a requirement for Member oversight of the Company and paragraph 3.2 and 3.3, on page 30 of the main agenda pack provided details.

In response to a question as to why the Shareholders Committee would be a Cabinet and not Council function, the Head of Legal, Democratic and Property Services clarified that; it was exercising an executive function and that Local Government Association (LGA) rules were that it

should be a Sub-Committee of the Cabinet, but you could have cross party Members. The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Enabling would sit on the Committee and Cabinet would monitor performance.

Members asked if Councillor C. A. Hotham had been made fully aware. The Head of Legal, Democratic and Property Services could not confirm this but did think that Councillor Hotham was consulted with.

It was agreed that subject to Councillor Hotham being fully informed that it be

**RESOLVED** that

- 1) a committee of the Cabinet, to be known as the Cabinet Shareholder Committee, which would provide oversight over the Housing Company set up in July 2023 (and other Companies that the Council might set up in due course), be established;
- 2) the Shareholder Committee meet on a biannual basis or as otherwise necessary;
- 3) the Shareholder Committee be responsible for the recommendation to the Cabinet of reserved matters; and
- 4) authority be delegated to the Head of Legal, Democratic and Property Services to make necessary amendments to the Council's constitution for the Cabinet Shareholder Committee, including the introduction of terms of reference for the Cabinet Shareholder Committee.

29/23

**EQUALITIES ANNUAL REPORT**

The Business Improvement Manager (undertaking an extended management remit to cover Policy & Performance) presented the Equality Strategy Annual Report 2022 for Members consideration.

Members were informed that the Annual Report informed the progress on the Council's equality objectives covering the period January 2022 to December 2022. Building on the last report and work carried out since 2021, this progress report provided a detailed insight into our ongoing commitment to equality.

The Council adopted its new Equality Strategy 2022 to 2026, and this provided a detailed insight into our ongoing commitment to equality.

As we continued to recover from COVID-19, the Cost of Living crisis struck and this impacted greatly the work being undertaken by the Council and its partners, generating new activity to help support disadvantaged groups and to promote equality during this challenging period.

It should be noted that the examples included in this report were not a complete list of everything the Council had done or would do to achieve in terms of equality objectives.

Members' attention was drawn to 'Community Engagement' and 'Community Safety' as detailed in the report.

Members expressed their thanks for the report, which had stimulated a lot of questions; as follows:-

- The demographics of the Bromsgrove Community Panel. The Leader explained that the next Community Panel was in October 2023, whereby it was our opportunity to engage and ensure that residents were aware of the Community Panel and were used to prioritise our priorities. It needed to be promoted so as there were more than 393 members, with just over 99,200 population; it might not be representative. The Business Improvement Manager further added that earlier this year the annual community survey was to go big, in an effort to increase the Community Panel. It may be a wide representation of Bromsgrove, but only those who opted to respond, and it was optional as to whether they divulged their area in the District.
- The Bromsgrove Partnership Board – could all Members have copies of the minutes, as the minutes were distributed to all Parish Councillors. The Business Improvement Manager agreed to action this.
- The Social Prescribing Service – with a population of 99,200 we needed to get the bigger picture. The Leader highlighted that she chairs the district collaborative and was looking at how this could be included. Members agreed that Hagley, Wythall and Alvechurch needed to be brought back into Bromsgrove's Social Prescribing Service. The Leader explained that the social prescribing service was commissioned by Bromsgrove Primary

Care Network, hence some slight anomalies. The Leader and Deputy Leader agreed to continue to raise these anomalies at the next meeting of the Primary Care Network.

- Employee Support – Staff Q & A sessions were referred to and the possibility of Cabinet Members and Group Leaders being invited to attend. It was agreed that the Chief Executive (Interim) would liaise with the Communications Team with regard to Cabinet Members and Group Leaders being invited to attend a future Staff Q & A session, (where a Senior Officer was in attendance); with staff being given the opportunity to submit any questions prior to the Q & A session.
- Theme Groups – how knowledgeable were Back Benchers? Engagement, how did new Councillors know / find out, via Democratic Services / Groups Leaders? The Leader informed Members that she was looking at producing a Members Bulletin in order to cascade information to all Members. The Portfolio Holder for Health and Wellbeing further informed Cabinet Members that all of this information was included in the Partnerships emails which were sent to all Members and was also included in the Portfolio Holders reports to Full Council.

At the invitation of the Leader, Councillor Hunter addressed Members. Councillor Hunter said it was an interesting report and the first year that the 2021 census results were available to look at. The point was made at a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board to look at our staff and user groups, with 10% having a disability. Were our staff representative of our communities, going forward look at this information, how representative were they of the communities we supported. The Leader added that we advertise in the appropriate places and that we are an equal opportunities employer and strived to be an employer of first choice.

In response Councillor Whittaker commented that he did not agree and it should be the best person for the job and with equal opportunities to attain the job.

- Community Builders – how did they enable the community, and how could Councillors and residents get involved? The Leader highlighted that as Councillors you were Community Champions and should be familiar with the links provided on the Council's website. The Leader asked the Business Improvement Manager to ensure that once the report had been ratified at Full Council

that a link to the Equality Annual Report 2021 be placed on the Council's website.

**RECOMMENDED** to COUNCIL

- that the Equality Annual Report 2022, as attached at Appendix 1 to the report, be endorsed.

30/23

**GRASS VERGE MAINTENANCE**

The Portfolio Holder for Environmental Services presented a report on Grass Verge Maintenance for Members consideration.

The report highlighted the Motion proposed at Full Council on 20<sup>th</sup> July 2022 to manage verges differently during 2022, the Motion was detailed as follows: -

*“This Council changes its grass verge grass cutting and mowing regime to allow wildflowers to remain in bloom during the height of the season when bees, butterflies and general small wildlife rely on the pollen from wildflowers to flourish. This will not be a one size fits all approach. Council will work with local residents and Councillors to find an approach that worked for each community.”*

The problem during the grass cutting season was being totally dependent on the weather. Regular mowing on the perimeters ensured that growth did not infringe on highway safety or inhibit drivers and pedestrian's line of sight.

A number of grass verges across the District were identified in 2020 and 2021 that could be left uncut to support wildlife and pollinators without causing concern for highway safety.

This had mixed responses from the public, with a strong public perception that grass should be maintained for aesthetics in residential areas, and this resulted in a number of these sites reverting to aesthetic maintenance rather than to support local habitat and plant life during 2021 and 2022.

Following discussions between the Portfolio Holder and the Environmental Services Manager, an addendum to the report was agreed. The addendum detailed the potential to reduce the Capital funding requirement in the 2023/24 financial year. This was by deferring

a final decision on the purchase of a second flail mower until the end of the 2024/25 grass cutting season.

The Environmental Services Manager further explained that wildflower verges and natural verges were different. There was a lot of benefit to the habitat for wildlife. An interim measure to support what we already had was decided after an Ecologist was engaged to inform any future decisions to manage our biodiversity and to engage with our residents and Parish Council's with regards to future grass cutting maintenance. A further decision was then taken, as explained by the Portfolio Holder not to purchase a second flail mower.

Members were fully supportive of the addendum and commented that the challenge we had was in getting the message to residents who thought we were not maintaining grass verges in order to save money. The Council needed to get the right message out to Members and residents.

The Leader stated that she fully agreed, we were trying to meet the Council's environmental responsibilities.

Councillor S. R. Colella commented that he very much supported this and the Council's responsibilities to the environment. This was one step to the bigger picture, having adopted a Carbon Reduction Strategy. With the new Environmental Bill UK, the Council would be required to carry out more initiatives. The Council needed the support of Members of the Council and residents and to tighten the Council Plan. Councillor Colella took the opportunity to thank the Environmental Services Manager.

Members expressed their support of this approach and reiterated that it was important to educate and have an engagement process to involve all Members.

Members further agreed with Councillor Colella that we needed a biodiversity action plan/strategy. Members highlighted that officers needed to be careful of ragwort and Himalayan balsam, which were highly invasive.

It was further noted that a biodiversity action plan/strategy might say to leave certain hedges / grass verges that residents wanted cut.

Members further reiterated that the depot should identify the areas and determine which areas would be left and inform local Members. Local Members could also provide the depot with a list of areas to cut / leave.

This would help to reduce the number of complaints received from residents who thought that the Council were not maintaining some areas. It was also suggested that signage could be erected on the areas that were being left explaining why, and that this could also help alleviate complaints.

The Environmental Services Manager informed Members that they had carried out various ad hoc trials and this had identified communication issues, but they had erected some signage for areas left uncut. The new admin post would help support communications with local residents and officers worked closely with Worcestershire County Council Highways Team in maintaining visibility splays on the highway. Officers recognised the issues in supporting wildlife with some residents agreeing to the principles but not wanting grass verges left outside their homes not being maintained.

**RESOLVED** that

- 1) Cabinet accepts the proposal; and
- 2) agrees for the Capital and Revenue Budgets to be adjusted for the identified financial years, as set out in the Grass Verge Maintenance – Addendum, as detailed below:-

<b>Capital Investment Required</b>		
<b>2023/24</b>	Flail Deck Mower	£30,000
	Three Brush Cutter Strimmers	£2,100
<b>2024/25</b>	Flail Deck Mower	£30,000
<b>2025/26</b>	<p style="text-align: center;">The Capital Funding for 2023/24 and 2024/25 would support a reduction in the existing mowing fleet of two rotary mowers at an estimated saving of £34,000 on the Capital replacement budget over the following three years for existing rotary mowers.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">The Capital Replacement budget will be updated to support the replacement costs of the new specification of mower as part of the fleet replacement programme.</p>	-£34,000.00
<b>2026/27</b>		
<b>2027/28</b>		

31/23

**DRAFT OUTTURN REPORT 2022/23**

The Interim Deputy S151 officer presented the Provisional Financial Outturn Report 2022/23.

Members' attention was drawn to the Financial Implications as detailed on page 34 of the report, as follows: -

The report sets out the Council's provisional revenue and capital outturn positions for 2022/23 against budget.

The £12.068m full year revenue budget was the budget that was approved by Council in March 2022.

At Quarter 1 of 2022/23, it was noted that the budget included £478k of organisational cross-cutting efficiency targets which had not been allocated to services. This target was offset in the main by forecast underspends across other service areas predominantly due to vacancies. The 2022/23 budget had therefore, been revised to reflect the allocation of £424k operational efficiency target to those areas.

Whilst the Council had been on a finance recovery programme since April 2022, following the implementation of a new financial system in February 2021 which led to a deterioration of the Council's financial position, it was important to note that at the time of writing the Council was yet to formally close its accounts for the 2020/21 and 2021/22 financial years. This could therefore result in adjustments to the actual expenditure and income in those years and could have a consequential impact on the 2022/23 accounts.

The Finance team had undertaken a detailed review of the 2022/23 accounts since year end. There were a number of assumptions and manual adjustments that had been made to arrive at the provisional revenue outturn position, mainly as a result of transactions still being cleared from suspense. Those assumptions and manual adjustments included:

- Anticipated accruals and prepayments,
- Grants are applied to known expenditure and remaining balances are carried forward,
- Reserves are applied to known expenditure,
- Shared service recharges between Bromsgrove District and Redditch Borough councils where a shared service arrangement exists, and

- Transfers between the Collection Fund and the General Fund.

Work continued to refine the position including addressing the backlog of entries that were in suspense and any miscoding. Therefore, the provisional position detailed in this report was subject to change, and a further update would be presented to Members in due course. Taking this into account, the provisional revenue outturn position was anticipated to be a £956k overspend; a £54k increase over the forecast Q3 £902k overspend position. These figures were after the “absorption” of the £424k of non-allocated savings and efficiency targets.

The variances for each service area against the 2022/23 revenue budget were as set out on pages 36 to 37 of the main agenda report.

Members’ attention was further drawn to the Earmarked Reserves and General Fund Position.

Appendix B – to the report detailed the Reserves Position.

Members were informed that the Council had no long term borrowing.

Questions followed from Members on the following: -

- Efficiency savings being predominantly linked to vacancies, as shown on page 37 of the main agenda pack, was this an efficiency saving? It was explained that this was lined to efficiency targets by taking out staff vacancies where we did not need staff in order to set out a balanced budget by taking out staffing numbers. At Quarter 1 of 2022/23, officers looked at cross-cutting efficiency targets that had not been allocated to services and were re-allocated to where budgets should have been in previous years; and areas that were holding a significant amount in finances, which would be looked at again. A fuel reserve for 3 years was also created.
- The Council being understaffed due to sick leave or maternity leave – The Council were understaffed with agency staff currently covering vacancies. It was explained that this was a national problem with difficulties in trying to recruit and fill vacancies across the industry. Where budgets had been taken away those areas would not be able to employ staff.
- Pay Awards – It was highlighted that the pay award for 2 years running had had an impact, it had been fully counted for 2022/23,

but the expected pay award of 6.8% for 2023/24 had not, as it was expected to be around 2%. With an increase in pension and national insurance contributions, the pay award would total 8/9%.

Further discussions followed around service areas overspend and underspend, whereby the Interim Deputy S151 officer responded and provided brief explanations.

The Interim Deputy S151 officer responded to questions from some Members with regards to Council Tax and NDR Collection Rates, who had commented that linear lines had been profiled on page 40 of the main agenda pack; which made predicting outcomes difficult. It was explained that the figures for Quarter 1 had not been received in order to reflect actual collection; and that there was usually a dip in collection during December, however there was a catch up during January to March.

The Leader asked if the Provisional Financial Outturn Report 2022/23 had been presented to a meeting of the Finance and Budget Working Group.

The Interim Deputy S151 officer explained that due to the tight report and meeting deadlines there had not been time, so the report had not been presented.

With this in mind and following a brief discussion, Members agreed to defer this item to the next Cabinet meeting. Officers were tasked to arrange for the Provisional Financial Outturn Report 2022/23 to be presented to a meeting of the Finance and Budget Working Group, prior to the next meeting of the Cabinet.

**RESOLVED** that

- 1) prior to the next Cabinet meeting to be held on 18<sup>th</sup> October 2023, that Officers arrange for the Provisional Financial Outturn Report 2022/23 report to be presented to a meeting of the Finance and Budget Working Group; and
- 2) following on from this, that the findings of the Finance and Budget Working Group; and the Provisional Financial Outturn Report 2022/23, be presented at the Cabinet meeting on 18<sup>th</sup> October 2023.

32/23

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

There was no urgent business on this occasion.

33/23

**MINUTES**

The minutes from the Cabinet meeting that took place on 12<sup>th</sup> July 2023 were submitted for Members' consideration.

**RESOLVED** that the minutes from the Cabinet meeting held on 12<sup>th</sup> July 2023 be approved as a true and accurate record.

34/23

**FINANCE AND PERFORMANCE QUARTER 1 MONITORING 2023/24**

Following on from the outcome of the discussions held during Minute Number 31/23 (Agenda Item No. 8, Provisional Financial Outturn Report 2022/23; Members agreed to defer the Quarter 1 2023/24 Financial and Performance Report, to the next meeting of the Cabinet.

Therefore, this item was not presented or discussed.

**RESOLVED** that the Quarter 1 2023/24 Financial and Performance Report, be deferred and brought back to the Cabinet meeting on 18<sup>th</sup> October 2023.

The meeting closed at 7.59 p.m.

Chairman

## Bromsgrove District Council – 25<sup>th</sup> October 2023 Member Questions

### 1. From Councillor H. Rone-Clarke

#### Question for the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Licensing and WRS:

“In April 2021, in response to a petition with 5000 signatures and a motion submitted by then Cllr Mallett, calling for an urgent feasibility study R.E. a potential Western Relief Road, then portfolio holder for planning Cllr Kent told this council he had commissioned a Strategic Transport Assessment (STA) to be released to the public by 'the end of the summer (2022)'.

In September 2022, 17 months after the STA was first promised, I made an FOI request in response to the lack of communication on this from BDC...it returned nothing of substance, not even a draft overview of findings...

At a subsequent meeting in late 2022, I asked Cllr Thomas, my 2<sup>nd</sup> planning portfolio holder, to comment on the status of the STA...he informed me that the STA didn't really exist and was merely a small extension of the local plan; despite the fact that in March 2021, Bromsgrove District Council went out to tender for a contractor to carry out a strategic transport assessment, advertising this on their website and social media!

Then, on April 9<sup>th</sup> 2023, two years after this issue was first raised in this chamber, The Bromsgrove Conservatives tweeted 'pledge #4 for Bromsgrove: we have commissioned a strategic transport assessment for the district...' My question, put simply: what on earth is going on?"

### 2. From Councillor D. Nicholl

#### Question for the Leader

“To ask the leader, following information from the Royal British Legion, why are benefits assessments for veterans in Bromsgrove being means-tested more harshly compared to other Councils?

In councils such as Walsall Metropolitan Council, Cannock Chase DC or Warwick DC, there is no means testing of veterans over a range of benefits (ie Council Tax Support, Housing Benefit, Discretionary Housing Payment and Disabled Facilities Grants), whereas in Bromsgrove, Discretionary Housing Payments in both the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme and the War Pension Scheme are means tested for armed forces veterans.

As we head towards Remembrance Sunday, do not those who have been in service of the defence of our country and Bromsgrove deserve to be fairly treated compared to military veterans in other areas?

I agree with the Royal British Legion that this is fundamentally unfair to the veterans of Bromsgrove.”

**3. From Councillor R. Hunter**  
**Question for the Cabinet Member for Environmental Services and Community Safety**

“I am continuing to find it very difficult to get firm commitments from this Council about repairing broken bus shelters. Please could you confirm that residents can expect broken bus shelters to be repaired or replaced and the timescale within which they can expect this work to be completed?”

**4. From Councillor J. Robinson**  
**Question for the Cabinet Member for Environmental Services and Community Safety**

“I understand the Council is working on a solution where a forward look of intended road sweeping rounds can be published, although there will be no guarantee as to exact dates due to the responsive nature of the service. Do you have a timescale for when this is likely to go live please and could you confirm if the council is also intending to publish backdated information of roads that have already been swept.”

**NOTICE OF MOTION**

The following Notice of Motion has been submitted in accordance with Procedure Rule 10 by Councillor E. Gray:

“This Council calls upon the Bromsgrove MP to lobby Government to call a halt to American-style candy and vape stores opening up on high streets. These entice young people to take up dangerous habits which cause significant risk to young people/children’s health and well-being.”

**NOTICE OF MOTION**

The following Notice of Motion has been submitted in accordance with Procedure Rule 10 by Councillor J. Elledge:

"We call upon officers to immediately meet with all members of the council who want council staff to submit bids for funds to develop Bromsgrove's parks and recreation grounds."

**NOTICE OF MOTION**

The following Notice of Motion has been submitted in accordance with Procedure Rule 10 by Councillor D. Hopkins:

“The Council calls upon the leader of the Council to lobby the County Council to ensure that the full route previously covered by the 144 bus is restored as whilst the 20 bus route has been in place for some time it is currently failing to meet the needs of residents”

**NOTICE OF MOTION**

The following Notice of Motion has been submitted in accordance with Procedure Rule 10 by Councillor D. Nicholl:

“Bromsgrove District Council notes with concern planned cuts in government support from 2027 to our local canals.

1. The Canal and River Trust is warning that a reduction in grant funding of over £300 million in real terms from 2027 will threaten the future of the nation’s historic canals, leading to their decline and to the eventual closure of some parts of the network.
2. This will almost halve the value of public funding for canals in real terms compared with recent years. This comes despite a Government Review, shared with the Canal & River Trust, confirming that its funding is ‘clear value for money’, with canals shown to deliver substantial benefits to the economy, to people and communities, and to nature and biodiversity.

BDC calls on the Leader to write to the Secretary of State for the Environment urging them to put in place a fairer funding settlement to help protect Bromsgrove’s many beautiful and historic canals.”

**NOTICE OF MOTION**

The following Notice of Motion has been submitted in accordance with Procedure Rule 10 by Councillor H. Jones:

“After hearing the devastating news, that two innocent, healthy puppies had been killed and dumped within our district, I call upon this council to commit to prioritise the promotion to support a publicity campaign to reminding dog owners and breeders of their responsibilities, in the hope we can stop anymore uncalled-for deaths of an animal. Within this campaign we also need to remind residents that they should only buy animals from a reputable source and the steps they should take to ensure the animals they buy are healthy and have been well cared for. The campaign should also emphasise the need for the public to report any situations they identify where people may be breeding dogs illegally, or in circumstances that put the health of animals in jeopardy. WRS has “dog related issues” as one of its key priorities and, whilst they do their best to proactively identify illegal breeders and sales, more help from the public would not go amiss.”

**NOTICE OF MOTION**

The following Notice of Motion has been submitted in accordance with Procedure Rule 10 by Councillor S. Evans:

“This Council supports improving connectivity for rail users travelling from Bromsgrove Train Station so that they can travel to destinations such as Cheltenham, Bristol and Cardiff with ease.

This Council therefore resolves to support the campaign for greater connectivity from Bromsgrove Train Station, as campaigned for by organisations such as BARRUP, and calls on the Leader of the Council to write to CrossCountry Trains to request that their service, which currently runs between Nottingham and Cardiff, stops at Bromsgrove train station to improve connectivity between our area and popular destinations, putting Bromsgrove on the map and increasing tourism to our town whilst allowing residents to travel with ease.”

**NOTICE OF MOTION**

The following Notice of Motion has been submitted in accordance with Procedure Rule 10 by Councillor R. Hunter:

**“Protecting historic buildings through a local heritage list**

This Council condemns the callous destruction of the Crooked House pub in Himley and is committed to protecting Bromsgrove’s heritage assets wherever possible. Council will therefore expedite its work to produce a local heritage list so that historic buildings can be afforded a greater level of protection as soon as possible.”

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By virtue of paragraph(s) 3, 4 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A  
of the Local Government Act 1972.

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