



BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

MONDAY 16TH OCTOBER 2023

AT 6.00 P.M.

PARKSIDE SUITE - PARKSIDE

MEMBERS: Councillors P. M. McDonald (Chairman), S. T. Nock (Vice-Chairman), A. Bailes, R. Bailes, A. M. Dale, E. M. S. Gray, R. J. Hunter, B. Kumar, S. A. Robinson, H. D. N. Rone-Clarke and J. D. Stanley

AGENDA

- 1. Apologies for Absence and Named Substitutes**
- 2. Declarations of Interest and Whipping Arrangements**

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 meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Board held on 10th July 2023 and 11th September 2023 (Pages 5 - 26)**
- 4. Agile Working Presentation**

The presentation for this item will be published in a Supplementary Papers Pack.
- 5. Community Shop Provision in the District - Overview (Pages 27 - 38)**

6. **Governance Systems Review - Implementation Progress Update (Verbal Update)**
7. **Notice of Motion - Request to Investigate - Future of Libraries within the District (Pages 39 - 70)**
8. **Finance and Budget Working Group - Update**
9. **Worcestershire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee - Update**
10. **Cabinet Work Programme (Pages 71 - 82)**
11. **Overview and Scrutiny Board Work Programme (Pages 83 - 86)**

Sue Hanley
Chief Executive (Interim)

Parkside
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B61 8DA

6th October 2023

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BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

10TH JULY 2023, AT 6.00 P.M.

PRESENT: Councillors P. M. McDonald (Chairman), S. T. Nock (Vice-Chairman), A. Bailes, R. Bailes, A. M. Dale, E. M. S. Gray, R. J. Hunter, H. D. N. Rone-Clarke and J. D. Stanley and J. W. Robinson (substitute).

Observers:

Councillor S. Ammar, Councillor S. J. Baxter, Councillor S. R. Colella, Councillor S. M. Evans, Councillor C. A. Hotham, Councillor R. E. Lambert, Councillor M. Marshall, Councillor K. J. May, Councillor B. M. McEldowney, Councillor J.W. Robinson, Councillor D. G. Stewart, Councillor C. B. Taylor and Councillor S. A. Webb.

Mrs. C. Buckley – Centre for Governance and Scrutiny

Officers: Mrs. S. Hanley, Mr P. Carpenter, Mr O. Paparega, Mr. K. Hirons and Mrs. J. Bayley-Hill and Mrs. J. Gresham.

15/23

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors B. Kumar and S. Robinson. Councillor J. Robinson was in attendance as named substitute for Councillor S. Robinson.

16/23

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND WHIPPING ARRANGEMENTS

There were no declarations of interest nor of any party whip.

17/23

TO CONFIRM THE ACCURACY OF THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD HELD ON 6TH JUNE 2023

The minutes of the meeting that took place on 6th June 2023 were submitted for Members' consideration.

Councillor A. Bailes raised that the date of the first meeting of the Governance Task Group, which was reported as 10th August 2023 within the minutes was incorrect. However, during further discussion the Chairman confirmed that this date was indeed correct as he had been consulted on all potential dates for all meetings of the Task Group.

Councillor R. Bailes stated that there was a change made to the membership of the Finance and Budget Working Group following the meeting of Overview and Scrutiny Board on 6th June 2023 with Councillor R. Bailes replacing Councillor A. Bailes.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting that took place on 6th June 2023 be agreed as a true and accurate record.

18/23

GOVERNANCE SYSTEMS REVIEW - PRESENTATION FROM CENTRE FOR GOVERNANCE AND SCRUTINY

The Representative from the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) delivered a presentation on governance system options available to local authorities and in doing so highlighted that no governance system option was inherently better or worse than others. Instead, the right governance option for a given authority depended on the local area, local circumstances and culture that existed within the authority. Therefore, the advantages and disadvantages of each governance system depended on the local circumstances and there was no evidence that changing a governance system would lead to actual changes in terms of ensuring good governance.

The main features of governance system models that were available to local authorities in England were introduced as follows:

- Leader and cabinet – This was the model currently operated at Bromsgrove District Council. In this model the council appointed a leader who in turn would appoint his/her cabinet. The cabinet was responsible for making decisions within the policy framework (including ‘key decisions’). With this model, there was a requirement for scheme of delegation to officers, which defined decision-making powers delegated to officers. Under this model, there needed to be at least one overview and scrutiny committee to act as a check and balance to cabinet.
- Directly elected mayor – Almost identical to leader and cabinet, the only difference being that the directly elected mayor appointed his/her cabinet, which was then also the body responsible for decision-making.
- Committee system – In this model, councillors made decisions through politically balanced committees with no option for decisions to be taken by individual councillors. Scheme of delegation to officers would still need to be in place to define the decision-making powers given to officers. There was no requirement for an overview and scrutiny committee under this option but some authorities operating the committee system still chose to retain scrutiny arrangements through standalone scrutiny committee. Generally, committee systems could be seen as more collaborative because more members would be directly

Agenda Item 3

Overview and Scrutiny Board
10th July 2023

involved in committees when decisions were made, however, under the model it would take longer to make decisions as greater degree of work planning and programming was involved.

- Hybrid model – This involved modifying one of the above governance models to suit the specific circumstances of a given authority. For example, the leader and cabinet model might be adapted so that scrutiny committees would be carrying out detailed debate on every single cabinet decision. Other adaptations might to the models might be made.
- Writing to the Secretary of State to request a different governance model of choice – This was an option provided for in legislation but had not been used to date.

Regarding the hybrid models, it was highlighted that councils might decide to modify an existing model to their specific needs. For instance, the full committee system might be modified into a hybrid model so that the overview and scrutiny arrangement would be retained, or the leader and cabinet might be modified to include features of a committee system.

The CfGS Representative explained that all the models could be placed on a spectrum in terms of councillor representation, from the mayoral system where decisions were concentrated in the hands of a single individual to the full committee system where politically balanced committees were responsible for making decisions.

The legal process of implementing changes to the governance arrangements of a local authority was discussed. The ability for local authorities to change their governance arrangements had been available since 2012 and there were two ways through which local authorities could make the change.

The most common way that councils could make the change to their governance system arrangements was through a resolution at a full Council meeting. A majority of councillors voting in favour of the resolution would be required in order for governance model to be changed and, once agreed, the actual change to the governance system model would only take effect from the next annual general meeting (at the start of a new municipal year). If the decision to change the governance system had been taken, the arrangements could not then be changed again for a five-year period.

The second way to change the local authority's governance system was through holding a referendum, either triggered by councillors themselves or if at least 5 per cent of the local government electors in the local authority area petition the local council to do so. If the referendum was to result in a change to the governance system, the arrangements could not be changed again for a period of ten years. In addition, any subsequent change after the ten-year period could only come as a result of another referendum.

Agenda Item 3

Overview and Scrutiny Board
10th July 2023

It was stressed that any change to governance arrangements would necessitate redrafting of the Council's Constitution as well as modifications to a range of services and processes such as procurement. It was predicted, based on the experience of the work that Centre for Governance and Scrutiny undertook with other councils, that the process of finding and testing an appropriate governance model for the Council would take at least six months.

Following the presentation, Members asked a number of questions of the Representative from the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny and Officers present, and the following answers were provided:

- Implications of changing governance system at one council in a shared service arrangement environment – It was noted that if two councils under shared service arrangements had different governance systems, this would create additional difficulties for Officers as they would need to streamline their processes to service both authorities. It was noted that consequently, given current resources within the Council, it was highly likely that additional officers would need to be recruited if a new governance system was adopted.
- Possibility of reverting back to the previous governance system – This was possible, as highlighted in the pre-amble above. However, a period of five years would need to elapse before a change back could be made, if the original decision was made through a full council resolution, and a period of ten years would need to pass if the original change was decided through a referendum. In the second case, any decision to revert back to previous governance arrangements could only be made via a referendum.
- Making adjustments within an existing governance system option – It was noted that legislative requirements regarding governance system changes would not be relevant if the authority opted to retain a governance model but adapted some processes and constitutional arrangements within an existing system. Therefore, the authority would not need to wait for the five year (or ten year in case of referendum option) period to elapse before making a different set of adaptations. This applied as long as no change was made to the governance system option itself.
- It was commented that speaking to other local authorities which had undergone changes to their governance system would be helpful when the Governance Systems Review Task Group was undertaking the review into this. It was also highlighted that because of the nature of this matter it was imperative that all Members were involved throughout the review process.
- Case studies of different hybrid governance arrangements would be provided to Members.

RESOLVED that the presentation on Governance System options for the Council be noted.

19/23

SCRUTINY INVESTIGATION PROPOSAL - BLUE BADGE HOLDERS PARKING ON COUNCIL CAR PARKS (INTRODUCTORY PRESENTATION)

A presentation was delivered by the Environmental Services Manager on the scrutiny investigation proposal relating to the Council's policy regarding parking for Blue Badge holders on council parks.

Information was provided on the current system for Blue Badge holders parking and the projections for possible loss of income if the Council offered free parking to Blue Badge holders. It was stated that currently Blue Badge holders paid for their car parking but received an additional hour of free parking on the Council's pay and display car parks. The process was that Blue Badge holders would purchase a ticket from the ticket machine in the usual way and display the ticket alongside their Blue Badge on the dashboard. The parking attendants would then allow an additional hour to the expiry time of the ticket. The same principle applied when parking was purchased via the 'my permit' app.

Members were informed that in all council car parks in the District there was a mix of disabled and normal parking bays and in all car parks the Council tried to accommodate at least six per cent of all bays as disabled bays. In total, there were 65 disabled spaces out of 975 parking spaces in Bromsgrove's off-street car parks, which equated to 6.7 per cent of all spaces.

It was reported that information about the number of Blue Badge holders using the pay and display car parks was limited because the pay and display machines did not record the difference between the blue badge holder and the general user when the parking ticket was being bought. Alternative methods were therefore used to estimate the current income derived from Blue Badge holders' use of council car parks.

A survey was undertaken for one hour period every day for 616 days, recording the customers parking in the disabled bays and displaying Blue Badge, noting the ticket value per purchase to provide an indication of how long they stayed. An income figure was provided for the vehicles parked in disabled bays during survey times and after extrapolating this data to be based on 8 hour days for 365 days a year an annual income figure of £19,939 per year was derived.

A second method of assessing the income was to look at the number of available display disabled bays expressed as a percentage of the total number of spaces (which was 6.7 per cent of the total bays available) Taking the total budgeted income from all the car parks in Bromsgrove (£1,136,402) and calculating 6.7 per cent of this figure provided a possible income in the region of £76,000 per year from Blue Badge holders. It was highlighted, however, that this was also only an estimate.

It was stated that based on these two estimates to offer free disabled parking could cost Bromsgrove District Council anything between

Agenda Item 3

Overview and Scrutiny Board
10th July 2023

£20,000 and £76,000 per year. For budgeting purposes, a realistic figure was more likely to be between an average of those two figures meaning a potential loss of at least £48,000 per year to be planned within the budget. It was highlighted that this was just an estimate as Officers were unable to count every single car entering or exiting the car parks.

Following the presentation, Members were invited to ask questions and raise comments. Councillor R. Hunter addressed the Committee and in doing so thanked Officers for collating a more up-to-date set of data on Blue Badge holders parking. It was commented that given the total annual income derived from council car parks was around £1.1 million, the costs associated with offering free Blue Badge parking, if taking into account the average figure provided in the presentation above, only amounted to roughly 5 per cent of the total annual income from council car parks. Additionally, it was noted that presently Blue Badge holders were allowed to park on double yellow lines for free. Given this, it was commented that people would likely be choosing to park on double yellow lines instead of council car parks. It was also observed that all the neighbouring local authorities offered free parking to Blue Badge holders and Bromsgrove was an outlier in this regard. A question was raised regarding whether any estimates could be provided as to the average occupancy rates of disabled bays across Bromsgrove's council car parks, especially any indication of whether these bays were used to capacity.

The Leader of the Council was invited to respond to the observations and questions above and in doing so stated that the main reason people chose to park on double yellow lines was that it was the closest place to park to locations that people with reduced mobility or in a wheelchair needed to access – it was highlighted that it was a great challenge to transfer someone in a wheelchair, for example, the significant distance from the end of the car park in Bromsgrove to the Town Centre.

The Leader commented that there was a need for the review of this issue to take place but highlighted that the funds obtained from Blue Badge holders parking, and parking charges more generally, were used directly to re-invest and refurbish the Council's car parks, for example to install and repair lighting and carry out line painting and other work. It was noted that maintenance of Council car parks represented a significant cost. From the strategic point of view it was commented that the Council's strategic document, the 2040 Vision, should contain assessments of the locations of council car parks as a lot more could be done to enhance the parking offer.

It was also highlighted that income derived from Blue Badge holder parking was used to finance the shopmobility provision in the Bromsgrove Town Centre. As such Members were asked that any review of the Blue Badge holder parking was tied into the query regarding how shopmobility provision was financed.

Agenda Item 3

Overview and Scrutiny Board
10th July 2023

It was noted that the provision of 6 per cent of parking spaces as disabled bays was a best practice figure set by the Government. Officers further noted that the usage of disabled parking bays would be difficult to monitor as the only way it could potentially be undertaken was through an in-depth continuous survey of every car park in the District on a daily basis, which was not feasible.

It was noted that when the issue of Blue Badge parking was investigated previously 11-12 years ago, the local authority itself issued the Blue Badges. The Blue Badges were now issued by Worcestershire County Council, and only County-wide statistics on the number of Blue Badges issued were kept rather than breakdown of figures for each District within the County.

Following a question about survey duration and process, it was confirmed that the surveys which were carried to arrive at estimates presented before Members took place over 16 days, and these surveys were carried out at different times on each day. The surveys were undertaken by Enforcement Officers who took note of the number of cars parked in Blue Badge bays at the time they were present at each car park.

During the discussion, it was highlighted that the surveys also provided detail on the duration of stay for cars during the survey period. However, to provide a breakdown of annual income to the Council in terms of tickets issued for 1 hour, 2 hours, 3 hours and other duration would necessitate a full review to be agreed by Members, to enable Officers to investigate the topic in-depth.

Regarding the parking meter machines, it was noted that the machines were now more sophisticated than in the past, however, there was no facility currently to programme the machines, so they provided an indication of whether it was a Blue Badger holder who was buying the ticket. This could be added as an option to the machines in the future.

It was reiterated by some Members that often people made decisions about parking based on cost and currently, some Members reported, the Council differed from almost all local authorities investigated in that it did not offer free parking up front to Blue Badge holders. It was acknowledged that there were historic reasons for the Council's decision, however, in the context of most other authorities offering free Blue Badge parking there should be questions as to why the Council still charged Blue Badge holders for parking.

It was also noted that the rationale behind the system of allowing an extra hour to Blue Badge holder parking that was adopted by the Council 11 or 12 years ago was that Blue Badge holders would be treated in the same way as other users but the extra hour was an accessibility and mobility point.

Councillor R. Hunter put forward a recommendation to the effect that a business case be produced by Cabinet to allow for a provision in the 2024-25 Budget for the Council to move to offering a free Blue Badge holder parking. It was clarified that this would mean the Council would continue to fund shopmobility provision but no longer through Blue Badge parking fees. In proposing this recommendation, Councillor R. Hunter commented that there was currently a reputational risk to the Council as it did not treat Blue Badge holders as favourably as other local authorities did. The recommendation was seconded by Councillor J. Robinson.

Councillor H. Rone-Clarke proposed an amendment to the recommendation made by Councillor R. Hunter to the effect that the scrutiny proposal for free Blue Badge holder parking be referred for consideration by the Finance and Budget Working Group (a sub-committee of the Overview and Scrutiny Board) in the first instance, and any potential business case proposal considered at that forum before proposals were submitted to Cabinet. This amendment was seconded by E. Gray.

Councillor R. Hunter responded that the issue of Blue Badge holder parking had already been considered by the Finance and Budget Working Group (sub-committee of the Overview and Scrutiny Board) in previous years on a number of occasions already with no significant actions taken. As such, decision on this issue should now be made.

The amendment as proposed by Councillor H. Rone-Clarke was put to the vote and it was carried.

RESOLVED that the proposal for free Blue Badge holders parking be referred to the Finance and Budget Working Group for consideration.

20/23

CORPORATE PEER CHALLENGE ACTION PLAN - PRE-SCRUTINY

The Deputy Chief Executive Officer provided an overview of the report on Corporate Peer Challenge – Action Plan and in doing so explained that the report before the Committee was due to be considered by Cabinet on 12th July 2023 and then be considered by the full Council, and the report and the appendices specifically contained the Local Government Association (LGA) Corporate Peer Review Challenge feedback and six key recommendations, and the Council's written response to those recommendations.

It was highlighted that the Corporate Peer Challenge Review was not an inspection but provided an opportunity and forward-looking overview to consider and reflect on areas of improvement and for both the shared service authorities, Bromsgrove and Redditch Councils, the background to calling for the peer challenge was as a direct result of the respective Councils being issued with a separate Section 24 notices. The Corporate Peer Challenge was requested by Bromsgrove District

Agenda Item 3

Overview and Scrutiny Board
10th July 2023

Council at its full Council meeting in December 2022, primarily in response to the Section 24 notice.

The review covered five high-level themes which were:

1. Local priorities and outcomes - Are the council's priorities clear and informed by the local context? Is the council delivering effectively on its priorities?
2. Organisational and place leadership - Does the council provide effective local leadership? Are there good relationships with partner organisations and local communities?
3. Governance and culture - Are there clear and robust governance arrangements? Is there a culture of challenge and scrutiny?
4. Financial planning and management - Does the council have a grip on its current financial position? Does the council have a strategy and a plan to address its financial challenges?
5. Capacity for improvement – Is the organisation able to support delivery of local priorities? Does the council have the capacity to improve?

The Bromsgrove District Council's Peer Challenge Review had a specific focus on corporate governance. It was also highlighted that a separate piece of work was undertaken by the Bromsgrove Audit Standards and Governance Committee (through the Audit Task Group) which concerned learning points from the Section 24 Notice and which was an area the Corporate Peer Challenge Review did not investigate. The Peer Review did consider the issues of clarity, transparency and speed of decision making within the Council's governance arrangements and this did include the examination of the role and impact of overview and scrutiny.

It was noted that appendix 2.6 to the report set out the process for the peer review, and it was reiterated that residents, elected members, local partners from public and private sectors, and members of staff all had the opportunity to take part in the Peer Review. There were resident, elected member, and staff focus groups to facilitate participation from these groups. In total, the Peer Review team gathered information and views from around 55 meetings and spoke to over 130 people over the course of the review in Bromsgrove and Redditch.

The Corporate Peer Review team's formal feedback was enclosed at Appendix A. The Council's response to that feedback was included at Appendix B, with response to the 6 key recommendations provided in that Appendix B. Supporting action plans that addressed the 6 recommendations were included in Appendices C to G, including the programme for the review of the Council Plan at Appendix C, Governance Action Plan at Appendix D, and the Workforce Strategy and Agile Working Action Plans at Appendices E and F respectively. Appendix G included the Section 24 notice and interim annual audit report.

Agenda Item 3

Overview and Scrutiny Board
10th July 2023

The Interim Director of Finance highlighted in relation to the Section 24 notice and the recommendation 5 of the Peer Review Challenge and the External Auditors Section 24 Statement Statutory Recommendations that the progress in addressing those recommendations was reviewed through the Finance Recovery Plan which was reviewed at each meeting of the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee and at each Cabinet meeting.

It was noted that the key question raised by the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee concerned the possibility of the Council receiving another Section 24 Notice. It was answered that as long as the Council was fulfilling and progressing on the recommendations of the Interim Annual Audit Report for 2020-21 this was highly unlikely. It was stressed that there were delays in the auditing of Statements of Accounts across the local authority many councils still without their 2020-21 Accounts signed off by their external auditors.

It was reported in relation to the 2020-21 Accounts that the data take-on balances remained to be approved by the Council's External Auditor. It was stated that the external audit of 2020-21 financial statements was predicted to be finalised by November 2023, the audit of 2021-22 financial statements in June 2024, and the 2022-23 financial statements in November 2024. However, it was highlighted that these timescales were challenging and could be subject to further change.

The Leader of the Council addressed the Board and placed on record her sincere thanks to the Officers and team at Bromsgrove District Council for the work undertaken in support of the Corporate Peer Review Challenge. It was reiterated that many of the recommendations contained in the Corporate Peer Review report had already been actioned and the Council had already progressed significantly in terms of addressing the points raised.

Following the main presentation, Members had the opportunity to make comments and question the Officers in attendance. The following comments and suggestions were made by Members, and responses provided by Officers:

- A theme in the Corporate Peer Review Challenge report concerning a lack of capacity within senior management – Members asked why this issue was not recognised before the Peer Review Challenge was undertaken. It was responded that the capacity issues existed in certain areas throughout the Council and there was a challenge whereby the Council was over-ambitious in terms of the number of priorities that it had. If the number of priorities could be reduced, there would be more capacity for officers and management team to deliver on the priorities decided by Members. A review of the Council Plan was currently being undertaken which looked at making sure there were fewer priorities that had more potential of being fully

Agenda Item 3

Overview and Scrutiny Board
10th July 2023

delivered. It was also highlighted that there were financial constraints which needed to be acknowledged in the Plan.

- Scrutiny of the Council's Performance reports – It was noted that performance monitoring reports were being considered by the Cabinet on an ongoing basis and were also being regularly scrutinised by the Finance and Budget Working Group.
- Vacancies – It was noted that the Council had 1 per cent fewer vacancies than the national average for local authorities. However, it was acknowledged that there were significant challenges in recruiting to Planning, Finance and Housing departments at the Council. This was a national problem for local government sector and this issue further brought to light the need for the Council to have a more focused set of priorities in certain areas.
- A reference in the Corporate Peer Review Report to the considerable slippage in the Council's capital programme – It was reported that it was rare for capital programmes at local authority to fulfil more than 65 to 70 per cent of expected delivery. The issue the Council faced at the moment was a lack of workforce and / or contractors available to complete the major schemes. It had been reported through to the Government, including through various lobby groups such as the Local Government Association (LGA) because this issue had been becoming more and more acute.
- Corporate Priorities – It was highlighted that within the Council Plan review it was first imperative to work out the high level strategic priorities and understand how they were going to be delivered and resourced before working on the more detailed level. It was also highlighted that there was a focus on reporting to Members through the performance reports and developing more key performance indicators to ensure they were tailored to monitoring how the Council was delivering its priorities.
- Digitalisation and the Covid-19 Pandemic – It was noted that the pandemic slowed the delivery of most objectives and the capital programme in various ways. It was also noted that the Government was pushing for the digitisation across the sector and the Plans covered some detail regarding how digitisation would be implemented, ensuring that residents who struggled to use digital tools continued to be provided for.
- Selection process for the Community Panel – It was explained that the Community Panel was composed of residents who were volunteers and agreed to be contacted by the Council at any time for taking part in surveys and similar engagement activity on the matters relating to the Council. Officers undertook to provide details of the application page for joining the Community Panel on the Council's website.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

Agenda Item 3

Overview and Scrutiny Board
10th July 2023

The Chairman reported that the last meeting of Finance and Budget Working Group took place on 7th July 2023. At the meeting, Members discussed the Council's procurement processes in light of the Government's New Procurement Bill, which was currently progressing through Parliament, and what the Council needed to do to ensure it complied with the Bill.

The Chairman reported that the main issue in terms of the Council's compliance was in relation to the production of reports for all key decisions that the Council was taking. The authority's current key decision threshold was £50,000 and for any procurement above this value a full report needed to be made to Cabinet so that the decision could be made by Cabinet. The Chairman reported that at the current £50,000 threshold level, there was a serious issue whereby a report was not produced for some procurements above the threshold value, which meant that the Council was in breach of its own constitution in those instances. The Chairman commented that this was a serious issue.

It was noted that this issue occurred in many authorities with low key decision thresholds as there were a large number of procurements that crossed the threshold and not enough resources, for example, in terms of officer time, to ensure that reports were prepared for all procurements above the key decision threshold. It was therefore proposed in the Approval to Spend report going to Cabinet that the key decision threshold be raised to £200,000 as this would ensure the level was compatible with that of most local authorities across the country and would enable the Council to have the necessary resource to ensure that reports were produced for all key decisions.

The Chairman reported that the Finance and Budget Working Group also looked at the Burcot Lane Housing Development. The Working Group came to the conclusion that the sale to a housing company owned by this District Council was the best way forward in relation to the 37 private rented units in the development that would be rented at market value. The specific arrangements associated with the housing company meant that the right to buy would not apply to these units which enabled the Council to retain ownership of these properties through the company in the longer term and thereby fill the gap in the Bromsgrove private rental market.

It was reported that the future plan was to develop additional sites including and add units from these sites to the housing company's stock once these developments had been completed. It was reported that some of the added units could then be rented at affordable rent because, as noted by the Chairman, the plan in the long-term was to address the imbalance between market and social housing, which was currently at an 8 to 1 level in Bromsgrove.

Members discussed the plans for the housing company and it was commented the the key thing to note from discussions of the Finance and Budget Working Group meeting was that, because of the wider

economic environment, it was anticipated that in the initial phase the return would not be as great as hoped on the 37 units. The view was that the benefits of a housing company would be seen in the long run when the housing company had managed to develop a bigger portfolio of houses.

It was reiterated that the primary aim of the Council's housing strategy was to provide housing to Bromsgrove residents rather than making a profit in the short term. The houses were built to enable people to stay in the local area and Members opined that Bromsgrove District residents should be prioritised in terms of getting a home in the District, for example to ensure that local key workers could find and purchase a home in the local area. It was reported that the average cost of a property in the District was around 14 times the average annual income and that this meant a very high number of 30-39 year olds were moving out of the District as they could not afford to buy or rent properties in the District. The motivation behind the Council-owned housing company in the longer term had to be ensuring that local residents were able to afford to stay in the District.

RESOLVED that the Finance and Budget Working Group Update be noted.

22/23

TASK GROUP UPDATES

Members considered scheduling the dates for meetings of the Governance Systems Review Task Group and it was agreed that appointments for weekly evening meetings (over August) would be sent out to Task Group Members and if any of these meetings were no longer necessary the appointments could be cancelled at a later date. Members of the Task Group and Officers would liaise over the next few days to agree precise dates for the meetings.

RESOLVED that the Task Group Updates be noted.

23/23

WORCESTERSHIRE HEALTH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - UPDATE

It was reported that the Overview and Scrutiny Board had not yet been delegated the authority to appoint a Member to serve on the Worcestershire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC). Therefore, nominations for this outside body appointment were to be considered once the Full Council had delegated this authority to the Board, which was expected for the meeting of the Board on 11th September 2023.

RESOLVED that the Worcestershire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee Update be noted.

24/23

CABINET WORK PROGRAMME

Agenda Item 3

Overview and Scrutiny Board
10th July 2023

The Cabinet Work Programme was presented for Members' consideration.

RESOLVED that the Cabinet Work Programme be noted.

25/23

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Overview and Scrutiny Board Work Programme was presented for Members' consideration.

RESOLVED that the Overview and Scrutiny Board Work Programme be noted.

The meeting closed at 8.01 p.m.

Chairman

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

11TH SEPTEMBER 2023, AT 6.00 P.M.

PRESENT: Councillors P. M. McDonald (Chairman), S. T. Nock (Vice-Chairman), A. Bailes, R. Bailes, A. M. Dale, E. M. S. Gray, R. J. Hunter, B. Kumar, S. A. Robinson, J. D. Stanley and D. G. Stewart (substitute).

Observers: Councillor S. R. Colella, Councillor P. J. Whittaker and Councillor S. J. Baxter.

Officers: Mr P. Carpenter, Mrs. C. Felton, Ms J. Willis, Mr M. Austin, Mrs. J. Bayley-Hill and Mr. M. Sliwinski

26/23

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor H. D. N. Rone-Clarke with Councillor D. G. Stewart attending the meeting as his substitute.

27/23

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND WHIPPING ARRANGEMENTS

There were no declarations of interest nor any whipping arrangements.

28/23

TO CONFIRM THE ACCURACY OF THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD HELD ON 10TH JULY 2023

The Chairman announced that the minutes of the meeting had been received in insufficient time for Members to read. It was therefore decided by the Board to postpone the consideration of the minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting of 10th July 2023 to the next meeting.

29/23

GRASS VERGE MAINTENANCE - PRE-SCRUTINY

The Environmental Services Manager presented a report on Grass Verge Maintenance for Members' consideration.

The report highlighted the Motion proposed at Full Council on 20th July 2022 to change the approach to management of verges, the Motion was detailed as follows: -

Agenda Item 3

Overview and Scrutiny Board
11th September 2023

“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.”

It was proposed that to meet the requirements of this Full Council motion, a cyclical mowing regime would be maintained on approximately 70 per cent of highway verges and open spaces with up to 30 per cent of grass areas potentially left to grow naturally during May, June and July to support wildlife that relied on pollen from wildflowers.

It was stated that capital investment would be required in terms of purchasing new flail mowers to support the cutting of longer vegetation at the end of the flowering season. However, 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. This meant that the additional capital investment that was requested for 2023/24 financial year would reduce from £62,100 to £32,100. A decision on whether a second flail deck mower was needed would then be made in the 2024/25 financial year.

It was highlighted that the capital investment detailed would support a reduction in the existing mowing fleet at an estimated saving of £34,000 on the Capital replacement budget over the next three years.

Revenue investment would also be required to support the delivery of the grass cutting programme with total additional revenue expenditure of £28,000 over the current and next three financial years. This would involve a short-term administrative role to support the Place Team in identifying appropriate locations across the District and consulting with local residents, Parish Councils, and the County Council in order to ensure that identified locations for naturalised verges were supported and would not impact on visibility on the public highway.

This administrative support was proposed for a four-month period in the first two cutting years. Additionally, the support of an Ecologist to assess the environmental impact of naturalised verges was required in 2024-25 and 2026-27 of the revenue investment. The Ecologist would document what plant species and wildlife being supported by the initiative and provide independent evidence as to whether grass verge naturalisation measures were having positive impact on wildlife. This would also support communications with residents on the issue.

The Cabinet Member for Leisure, Culture and Climate Change was invited to address the Board as the proposer of the original Council motion. He expressed his support for the report as presented and

commented that among the main objectives of his portfolio would be to develop a Biodiversity Action Plan for the Council as no such document was currently in place.

Following the presentation of the report, questions were asked by Members to which the following responses were provided:

- It was explained that wildflower verges differed from naturalised verges in that naturalised verges were left for natural growth without interference so there would be no seeding done on such grass and any grass cut would not be collected on such verges. This would lead to excessive amount of soil for wildflower growing. It was highlighted that the effect of naturalised verges on biodiversity would be monitored via the assessments by an ecologist.
- Members expressed concern that the naturalised verges could be perceived by the public as exclusively a cost-cutting measure unless the environmental benefits of the proposal were promoted among residents. It was commented that in wards where Place Team Officers had engaged with residents the attitudes towards the grass verges had generally been more positive. In some wards, however, Members commented that there had been a lack communication and in these wards there were a high number of complaints received by ward councillors about lack of regular grass cutting.
- Officers explained that naturalised verge trials had taken place in some parts of the District and these received a mixed reaction depending on the area. It was explained that, subject to the approval of this report by Cabinet, a full communications plan would be developed that would include information being put out to residents in the local Council Tax information bulletins.
- Officers undertook to circulate the pictures of signage that was in place on the edges of verge sites. It was stated that further signage would be put in place explaining why naturalised verges were left uncut and would be positioned around clearly defined edges in order to reassure the public.
- With regards to measuring the success of naturalised grass areas, it was stated that the ecologist would help the Council identify a baseline level in terms of biodiversity in Council and subsequent studies by the ecologist would allow the Council to gauge whether the naturalised grass areas were having a positive impact on overall biodiversity (including the pollination of plants and variety of habitats) within the District.
- The online schedule for grass cutting. Officers stated that due to factors such as weather conditions and requirement for continual maintenance of grass cutting equipment, it was not possible to provide precise dates for when grass cutting would take place at a given location. With the implementation of the new IT system for Environmental Services, however, the Council would be developing a GPS tracking on vehicles that would populate real time information about where grass cutting was taking place on a

given day. The earliest predicted date for implementation of this was currently mid-2024.

- It was stated that the administrative support role to facilitate communications with residents would commence from January 2024 and Member engagement was planned to take place from around this period to identify areas suitable for naturalisation. There would also be public consultation with residents on naturalisation plans in 2024.
- It was requested that engagement with Members be undertaken prior to launch of a public consultation to enable Members to have time to engage with residents in their wards.

The Cabinet Member for Environmental Services and Community Safety addressed the Board and in doing so stated that these proposals follow a motion that was agreed at a full Council meeting which showcased general support from Members. The Cabinet Member stated that the report had been modified recently to ensure that capital investment costs could be reduced and to enable a better mechanism for measuring the benefits of naturalising grass verges by employing the ecologist. The Portfolio Holder added that Members would make decisions over which areas were left for naturalisation in their wards. It was hoped that through more data and consultations with Members and residents the right areas for naturalisation would be identified.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

30/23

NEWSTARTS COMMUNITY SHOP

The Chairman introduced this item and commented that all Members were concerned about the provision and effectiveness of community shops. It was suggested by the Chairman that this item be deferred to the next meeting and that the Board look at the provision of community shops and food banks across the District rather than concentrating specifically on NewStarts.

Other Members concurred with the need to widen the scope to examine community shop provision in the District as a whole. It was highlighted that Alvechurch, for example, followed a different food bank / community shop model than Bromsgrove, and it was important for the report to set out full details of the existing provision across the District. Additionally, it was highlighted that the report consider how provision differed, or should differ, based on different demographics and different locations in the District.

RESOLVED that this item be deferred and that a report into the community shop provision across the District, which includes case studies of the different models of operation for the community shops and supermarkets, be presented at the next meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board.

31/23

GOVERNANCE SYSTEMS TASK GROUP - FINAL REPORT

Agenda Item 3

Overview and Scrutiny Board
11th September 2023

The Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Board presented the Governance Systems Task Group final report for the consideration of Members. In doing so it was highlighted that the Governance Systems Task Group had been established as a result of a Motion agreed at a Full Council meeting held on 24th May 2023. The membership of the Task Group consisted of five Members from all parties across the Council. The timelines of the Task Group had been adhered to and the recommendations presented were to be considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Board and by Cabinet at its meeting on 13th September 2023. There was then an opportunity for all members to consider the report and the recommendations at an Extraordinary meeting of the Council on 20th September 2023.

In considering the report some Members raised concerns regarding the length of time the proposed change in governance structure to a hybrid Leader and Cabinet model would be in place. Members felt that any changes should be in place for at least a four year period. Officers explained that a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) could be put in place as part of any agreed changes in respect of the hybrid Cabinet and Leader model as recommended within the report. The MoU would be introduced between all political group leaders to maintain these working arrangements for at least the next four years.

Councillor R. Hunter suggested that an additional recommendation be made in order for the Task Group to consider further evidence from a local authority within the West Midlands that currently operated a committee system. It was noted that there were at least two Councils within Warwickshire of a similar size and geographical location to Bromsgrove District Council. Councillor Hunter stated that it would be useful to better understand how these Councils worked under the committee system and how successful this system had been. Furthermore, it was noted that as a result of the local elections held in May 2023 Bromsgrove District Council was currently under 'No Overall Control' and that this needed to be considered when looking at the governance structure of the Council for the future.

Some Members raised concerns regarding the costs involved in implementing a committee system and whether this provided value for money for residents of the District.

Furthermore, it was noted by some Members that an additional recommendation could cause delays that would impact on any implementation measures that needed to be undertaken if any change of governance structure was agreed. This would particularly delay the large

Agenda Item 3

Overview and Scrutiny Board
11th September 2023

amount of work Officers across the Council would have to carry out in order to prepare for any change to the structure prior to implementation in May 2024.

It was noted that any further recommendation was not designed to disrupt the investigation but merely be an opportunity to look at all possible evidence. Members suggested that a monitoring system could potentially be put in place in order to understand the success of any future governance model once implemented.

During a detailed discussion, Members were reminded that, a representative from the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) had been present at all meetings of the Task Group on order to provide detailed information to Members in respect of all governance models for local authorities. It was stated that the evidence had explained that there was not a 'better' model for a Council to adopt and it was important that any structure implemented; Leader and Cabinet model, hybrid Leader and Cabinet model or committee system worked best for that specific Council. Some Members reported that the current structure, following the local elections, had so far been successful and there had been greater engagement of all parties particularly with backbench members.

Following the discussion, and as outlined in the preamble above, Councillor R. Hunter proposed the following additional recommendation:

'That the Task Group reconvene to consider the evidence from at least one second tier local authority that had a committee system before finalising its recommendation.'

Councillor S. Robinson seconded the proposal.

On being put to the vote the recommendation was lost.

In concluding the consideration of the report, the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Board thanked the Members of the Task Group and all Officers involved in the investigation. It was particularly noted that Ms C. Buckley, the CfGS representative, had provided invaluable assistance throughout the investigation. Members agreed that a letter of thanks be sent to Ms. Buckley in recognition of her support throughout the process.

RECOMMENDED that

Agenda Item 3

Overview and Scrutiny Board
11th September 2023

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.

32/23

FINANCE AND BUDGET WORKING GROUP - UPDATE

There were no updates to report at this meeting concerning the Finance and Budget Working Group.

33/23

WORCESTERSHIRE HEALTH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - UPDATE

Councillor B. Kumar was nominated as the Council's representative on the Worcestershire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC) for the municipal year 2023/24.

The Deputy Leader of the Council was invited to comment as Council's representative on the HOSC last year and confirmed that meetings took place monthly during worktime hours and were preceded by a pre-meeting to discuss the agendas and questions for each meeting.

On being put to the vote it was:

RESOLVED that Councillor B. Kumar be appointed as the Council's representative on the Worcestershire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee for the 2023/24 municipal year.

34/23

CABINET WORK PROGRAMME

The Cabinet Work Programme for the period 1st October 2023 to 31st January 2024 was presented for Members' consideration.

In relation to the Cabinet Work Programme, it was requested by Councillor Hunter that an update report on the Council's UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) progress and projects be added to the Overview and Scrutiny Board Work Programme. As the item specifically on this matter was not currently on the Cabinet Work Programme, Members were advised that a specific report would be brought for

Agenda Item 3

Overview and Scrutiny Board
11th September 2023

consideration by the Overview and Scrutiny Board at a later date in the municipal year.

During consideration of the Cabinet Work Programme, Members requested that a column be added to the Cabinet Work Programme document which would give a description of the item on the Programme. It was stated that this would greatly assist, particularly the new Members, with understanding the substance of items on the Cabinet Work Programme and would help determine if it was a subject that Overview and Scrutiny would wish to pre-scrutinise. The Interim Director of Finance confirmed that this would be actioned by Officers following the meeting.

RESOLVED that the Cabinet Work Programme be noted.

35/23

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD WORK PROGRAMME

It was requested that the following items be added to the Overview and Scrutiny Board Work Programme for the next meeting on 16th October 2023:

- Agile Working Presentation
- Future of Libraries within the District (Council Motion of 19th July 2023).

The Chairman commented in relation to the Agile Working Presentation item that an invitation would be sent to all Councillors asking to attend the 16th October 2023 meeting of the Board for this presentation.

As discussed earlier in the meeting under NewStarts Community Shop item (Minute 30/23), it was agreed that a new report on the community shops provision in the District be presented to the 16th October 2023 meeting.

During consideration of this item, it was queried when the minutes of the Bromsgrove Partnership would be made available to Members of the Board as requested in previous municipal year. It was responded that this would be followed up with Members outside the meeting. Additionally, it was requested that the Board receive a report on the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) at one of its future meetings.

RESOLVED that the Overview and Scrutiny Board Work Programme be updated as per the preamble above.

The meeting closed at 7.32 p.m.

Chairman

Bromsgrove DC Overview and Scrutiny

16 October 2023

Page 27

Overview and Effectiveness of Community Supermarkets and Foodbanks in Bromsgrove

Judith Willis, Head of Community & Housing Services

Agenda Item 5



Bromsgrove
District Council
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Community Supermarket



Page 28

Agenda Item 5



Bromsgrove
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Newstarts Community Supermarket

- History
- Stand-alone cost £67K
- Pandemic and cost of living situation
- Poverty prevention verses Environmental Project
- Bromsgrove (Sherwood Road) and New Frankley sites



- Where would the food come from? Opening Times? Staffing? Business Model? Monitoring Success?

Site	No. of people	Income	Saved from waste
Bromsgrove (started 1 st June)	134	£420	750kg
New Frankley - serving Rubery (started 2 nd August)	82	£208	150kg

Expenditure	
Food	£596
Staff	£423
Sub-total	£1019
Surplus/Deficit	(£391)



Food Banks



New Starts Food Bank

Location – Sherwood Road, Bromsgrove and Arden Road, New Frankley – both sites are open to all Bromsgrove residents

Offer – Food and Household supplies

Opening hours – Monday to Friday 9.00 am – 4.00 pm

Operating model – Agency referral. Donations of cash, donations of food dropped off at either location, wholesale scheme with Morrisons and donations from Lidl, Aldi and Sainsburys.

Other services available – Community Supermarket, Furniture, White Goods & IT Scheme (free or at affordable prices), Money Mentors, School Uniform Bank and Community Hub

Number of parcels – 1,706 Bromsgrove and 1,246 Rubery



Catshill Baptist Church

Location – Catshill Baptist Church, Milton Road, Catshill – Focus is Catshill residents but open to all of Bromsgrove.

Offer – Food and Household supplies

Opening hours – Wednesdays 10.30am to 12.30pm.
Dedicated phonenumber 10.00am to 4.00pm weekdays.

Operating model – Agency referral. Donations of cash, donations of food dropped off at location, Catshill Co-op, Catshill Spar, Catshill One Stop, and Waitrose & Lidl supermarkets in Bromsgrove. Run by volunteers.

Other services available – White Goods and other community group events.

Number of parcels – 986 from 1st Jan – 30th September 2023.



Basement Project

Location – Hanover House, 1 Hanover Street. Focus is under 25's but open to all Bromsgrove residents.

Offer – Food and Toiletries supplies

Opening hours – Monday to Friday, 9.00am – 4.30pm.

Operating model – Self Referral/Agency Referral. Donations of cash, donations of food dropped off at location. Working with schools to provide food parcels to families.

Other services available – Services for the under 25's via drop-in and floating support. Support includes Housing, Living on a Budget, Mediation and Wellbeing Support.

Number of parcels – 610 in the last 12 months.



Hollywood Christian Life Centre

Location – Simms Lane, Hollywood. Open to all Bromsgrove Residents

Offer – Food and Toiletries supplies

Opening hours – Monday 1.30pm – 2.30pm, although parcels have been provided 5 days a week.

Operating model – Self Referral/Agency Referral. Donations of cash, Donations of food dropped off at the Parish Council.

Other services available – Free CAP (Christians Against Poverty), Money courses, White goods, Furniture and School Uniform, Community Events/Activities for Children, Young People and Older People, Holiday Hunger Programme during school half term. Run by volunteers and in association with Wythall Parish Council.

Number of parcels – Approximately 20-25 per week.



Alvechurch Community Larder

Location – Alvechurch Baptist Church Hall. Open to residents of the Parish

Offer – Food supplies and some household supplies

Opening hours – Every Friday Between 11.00am and 12.30pm.
Recently added another day due to popularity.

Operating model – Self referral – Pay £4 (cash) for approximately £20 of food. Set up as ‘helps stop food going to waste’ to reduce stigma.

Trust established with volunteers. Food provided from supermarkets

Other services available – looking to link with health bus, provide deliveries and wrap around services being looking into alongside a referral process to other services.

Number of parcels – To be advised.

Page 36



Bromsgrove
District Council

www.bromsgrove.gov.uk

Agenda Item 5

The Duke of York

Location – The Duke of York Pub, Sidemoor.

Offer – Food supplies

Opening hours – Monday and Wednesday Between 8.00am and 10.00am.

Operating model – Self referral, contact owner for food donations.

Page 37 **Other services available** – The landlord/community champion is currently looking at other community services, Newstarts have offered support.

Number of parcels – N/A still being set up.



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SCRUTINY INVESTIGATION PROPOSAL – FUTURE OF LIBRARIES IN THE DISTRICT

Relevant Portfolio Holder	Councillor S. R. Colella, Cabinet Member for Leisure, Culture and Climate Change
Portfolio Holder Consulted	Yes
Relevant Head of Service	Claire Felton, Head of Legal, Democratic & Property Services
Report Author: Mat Sliwinski	Job Title: Democratic Services Officer Contact email: mateusz.sliwinski@bromsgroveandredditch.gov.uk
Wards Affected	All
Ward Councillor(s) consulted	No
Relevant Strategic Purpose(s)	N/A
Non-Key Decision	
If you have any questions about this report, please contact the report author in advance of the meeting.	

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Overview and Scrutiny Board is asked to consider the request as detailed in paragraph 2.1 of this report and agree to one of the following:

- (a) that the request is included on the work programme and the Board considers the matter as an item of business at its next or subsequent meeting; OR**
- (b) that the request is included on the work programme and a Task Group Review is agreed to enable a more in-depth investigation of the matter, and that the broad terms of reference and timescales for the Review are agreed; OR**
- (c) that further information be requested from a relevant source before deciding whether or not further investigation is required; OR**
- (d) that the Board decides to take no further action.**

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Board are requested to investigate the future of library provision within the District. This follows a Notice of Motion put forward by Councillor H. D. N. Rone-Clarke at the Council meeting held on 19th July 2023 as follows:

“There is a threat to the future of our libraries and the way in which they are to be managed. It is proposed that Bromsgrove, Rubery and Wythall Libraries will be the first in the County to become ‘unmanned.’ There will be serious consequences associated with such changes both for staff and users of this service. Therefore, we call upon the Overview and Scrutiny Board to investigate the consequences of such action.”

3. OPERATIONAL ISSUES

- 3.1 A request from full Council has been made to investigate the consequences of proposed changes to the library provision in the District.
- 3.2 If the Board decides that it does wish to investigate this topic further, it then needs to decide whether it is appropriate for the Board itself to undertake the investigation at its regular meetings or whether a more in-depth investigation is required in a form of a task group or short-sharp review.
- 3.3 Another option is for the Board to request further information on the topic from a relevant source to assist Members to decide whether an investigation is required.
- 3.4 Alternatively, the Board could decide that it is not a topic it wishes to investigate, in which case no further action would be required.
- 3.5 It is noted that the Review of Libraries Task Group had been carried out in 2021 and Members may wish to consult the final report of that Task Group which is attached as Appendix 1 to this report.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 There are no financial implications directly relating to this report, however, if the proposal is accepted, any implications would be considered as part of the subsequent investigation undertaken.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 There are no legal implications directly relating to this report, however, if the proposal is accepted, any implications would be considered as part of the subsequent investigation undertaken.

6. OTHER - IMPLICATIONS

Relevant Strategic Purpose

- 6.1 Governance underpins all of Council's strategic purposes.

Climate Change Implications

- 6.2 There are no climate change implications at this stage. The green thread runs through the Council plan.

Equalities and Diversity Implications

- 6.3 There are no equalities implications at this stage.

7. RISK MANAGEMENT

- 7.1 Not applicable at this stage as this report is asking to consider the various options relating to the investigation of the Notice of Motion.

8. APPENDICES and BACKGROUND PAPERS

Appendix 1 - Final Report of Impact of the Review of Library Services Task Group, 2021.

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OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY BOARD

IMPACT OF THE REVIEW OF LIBRARY SERVICES TASK GROUP

FINAL REPORT

March 2021



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CONTENTS

1. Membership of the Task Group
2. Foreword from the Chairman
3. Summary of Recommendations
4. Chapter 1 - Promotion and Location of Libraries in the District
5. Chapter 2 – Areas for Consideration by Worcestershire County Council
- 6 Areas of Note
- 7 Conclusion
- 8 Background Information
- 9 Appendix 1 – Terms of Reference
- 10 Appendix 2 – Background Papers
- 11 Appendix 3 –Witnesses
- 12 Appendix 4 – Questions for Councillor Lucy Hodgson
- 13 Appendix 5 – Library Opening Times and Facilities

MEMBERSHIP OF THE TASK GROUP



Councillor Steve Colella (Chairman)



Councillor Sue Douglas



Councillor Janet King



Councillor Adrian Kriss



Councillor Maria Middleton



Councillor Caroline Spencer

Supporting Officer Details

Jo Gresham – Democratic Services Officer

joanne.gresham@bromsgroveandredditch.gov.uk

Foreword from the Chairman

The purpose of this report is an 'Investigation into the effects of the impacts of Library Service Changes in Bromsgrove'.

The Task Group took a very pragmatic view looking at the overall impact on Library Services in the Bromsgrove District, taking the opportunity to question Worcestershire County Council senior Officers and WCC Cabinet member for Community Services Councillor Lucy Hodgson.

The recommendations made by this Task Group are focused on ensuring that the review of the Library service has not undermined service delivery to an extent that public amenity in Bromsgrove has been disadvantaged and that there has not been any long-term loss and derogation of service.

The task group heard how Libraries are dynamic, far reaching excellent services offering a varied and high-class public amenity. The review highlighted the wide range of age groups, social demographics and stakeholders that rely on libraries and how enthusiastic local people are ensuring its survival. However, there is a 'but'; under the service review the County Council's objective is to reduce costs through staff reorganisation, cost reduction and income maximisation.

The Task Group identified several important issues that although have not formed recommendations should be noted. The review of Library Services has resulted in an organisational restructure, staff role and responsibility review, added pressures on the voluntary sector and in many cases resulted in pressures on other organisations to make financial contributions and a shifting of asset management to local administrators.

Whilst I personally welcome greater local control by local stakeholders there is a balance between the statutory duty of Worcestershire County Council and the sustainability of local communities to pick-up the impact of such service changes. To expect the voluntary sector and district and parish councils to fund service gaps merely moves the problem rather than addresses the long-term existence of the service as we know it today.

Continuation of this strategy would mean that services in Libraries being reduced further. To date the County Council's review has been met with enthusiasm by local communities and ward councillors to ensure that the overall public amenity is maintained. The pressure to continue to backfill service changes by local stakeholders would result in an unsustainable over reliance on goodwill and third-party funding.

Agenda Item 7

I would like to thank the Democratic Services' Officers for their hard work and dedication to this task group and fellow councillors for their valuable contributions, and importantly sincere thanks go to Worcestershire County Council officers and Portfolio Holder for their open and transparent approach to this Task Group.

I strongly believe that the value of undertaking this Task and Finish Group is reflected in the thanks given by the Portfolio Holder that this district is the only one to hold such a review.

Councillor Steve Colella
Chairman, Impact of Review of Library Services Task Group

Summary of Recommendations

Chapter 1 – Promotion and Location of Libraries in the District

Recommendation 1
That all Members continue to receive up to date information in relation to any proposed changes to libraries in their Wards.
Financial Implications for recommendations: There are no direct financial implications in relation to this recommendation.
Legal Implications for recommendations: There are no direct legal implications in relation to this recommendation.
Resource Implications: There are no direct resource implications

Recommendation 2
That all Members be consulted when any proposed changes are to be made to the Strategic Libraries in the District.
Financial Implications for recommendations: There are no direct financial implications in relation to this recommendation.
Legal Implications for recommendations: There are no direct legal implications in relation to this recommendation.
Resource Implications: There are no direct resource implications

Recommendation 3
That a publicity campaign be undertaken to promote the facilities available at Libraries.
Financial Implications for recommendations: There may be a small financial implication, depending on the type of the publicity campaign.
Legal Implications for recommendations: There are no direct legal implications in relation to this recommendation.
Resource Implications: Officer time.

Chapter 2 - Areas for Consideration by Worcestershire County Council

Recommendation 4
That Worcestershire County Council ensure that any grant funding received is distributed to Libraries accordingly.
Financial Implications for recommendations: There are no direct financial implications in relation to this recommendation.
Legal Implications for recommendations: There are no direct legal implications in relation to this recommendation.
Resource Implications: There are no direct resource implications

Background Information

Councillor S. Colella presented a topic proposal form containing proposed terms of reference for a Task Group entitled 'Investigation into the Effect of the Impact of Library Service Changes in Bromsgrove' supported by other Councillors and library users, many of whom attended the Library consultation meetings. Councillor Colella wished this Task Group to investigate the Library Service Review which had been undertaken by Worcestershire County Council (WCC) in order to ascertain the effect on Bromsgrove's Libraries.

At the Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting on 13th January 2020, during consideration of the topic proposal 'The Wigan Deal' was discussed with Members of the Board and Councillor Karen May, Leader and Portfolio Holder for Economic Development, the Town Centre and Strategic Partnerships. During this discussion, the main Overview and Scrutiny Board were informed that an announcement was only 10-12 weeks away regarding libraries in the District and therefore this Task Group may not be needed. However, Members agreed that they would like more certainty around the potential closures of certain libraries as there was some confusion between a statement made by the Member of Parliament and information from the Place Partnership. It was therefore agreed at that meeting that a Task Group should be established and Councillor S. Colella was appointed as its Chairman. The Membership and quorum were set at the meeting of the Board held on 10th February 2020.

Although the first meeting was held on 11th March 2020 when the work programme and witnesses for the investigation were agreed, the impact of Covid-19 meant that there was a delay in the subsequent meeting, which was held virtually on 30th June 2020.

The Task Group held six meetings (two of which were not quorate) in total which included scrutinising the research carried out in respect of services the libraries currently provided and interviews with officers and Councillor L. Hodgson, the Cabinet Member with responsibility for Communities from Worcestershire County Council. During these interviews, the witnesses were provided with questions prior to the meeting in order for them to provide members with as much detail as possible during the session.

Chapter 1 – Promotion and Location of Libraries in the District

During the investigation, the Task Group agreed that an area that they wanted to understand more fully was what activities currently took place in libraries across the District and it was agreed that the Democratic Services Officer would undertake research to ascertain library facilities pre-Covid. The research provided Members with a clear picture of what was available to residents and enabled Members to understand what services, if any, might not be included following the implementation of the new strategy (see Appendix 5). There was also detailed discussion throughout the investigation regarding the promotion of meeting rooms within the libraries (which had the potential to also create a small income stream) and whether residents were aware that there were rooms available for hire. It was noted by some Members that although there was some pricing information available on the WCC website it was difficult to navigate and might be an area that required clarification to encourage increased use of the facilities for residents. In addition to the room hire information some Members queried the facilities that were included on the website and whether it was all up to date. The Democratic Services Officer contacted WCC and it was clarified that their officers did aim to keep the web pages updated and that a check of the web pages would be completed shortly. This was welcomed by Members of the Task Group.

During the interview with Hannah Perrott, Assistant Director for Communities and Carol Brown, Head of Service for Libraries, WCC it was acknowledged that advertising within the communities had not always been successful. However, officers confirmed that future plans included greater use of social media, webpages and the use of more local channels including Parish Councils to publicise libraries and the facilities that were available within them.

As a result of this discussion Members agreed that further efforts were required to inform residents and businesses of those facilities and meeting room spaces that were available in libraries. It was felt that this was particularly important, in light of the positive changes to the Digital Strategy including the upgrade of library PC's to Windows 10 and the introduction of digital champions and the potential for an income revenue stream from room hire.

Councillor Lucy Hodgson, Cabinet Member with responsibility for Communities - WCC attended a meeting of the Task Group in December 2020 and a number of questions regarding areas of interest were provided prior to the meeting. During the interview she provided information regarding the shared plans for a new community hub with multi-purpose modular functionality which was being considered for Rubery Library, as there had been little investment at this library for many years. It was confirmed by Councillor Hodgson that Members had been kept up to date with the

Agenda Item 7

plans and that updates would also be sent to all Ward Members and further consultation would be undertaken in wards that had a library, in due course. Although this was welcomed by Members, they were keen for assurances that the provision of up-to-date information regarding any proposed library changes would continue to be provided to Ward Members in the future.

Throughout the investigation all Members were in agreement that the new strategy was dynamic and had the potential to be a positive step forward for libraries in the District.

The Task Group therefore recommends the following:

Recommendation 1

That all Members continue to receive up to date information in relation to any proposed changes to libraries in their Wards.

Recommendation 2

That all Members be consulted when any proposed changes are to be made to the Strategic Libraries in the District.

Recommendation 3

That a Joint publicity campaign be undertaken to promote the facilities available at Libraries.
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Chapter 2 - Areas for Consideration by Worcestershire County Council

During the interviews with Councillor Lucy Hodgson and officers from WCC further information was provided to the Task Group regarding the implementation of the Strategy. It was confirmed that it was hoped that the strategy would deliver efficiencies to the service and it was explained to Members that a library should be considered as a community asset that was used as much as possible and should be a vibrant community hub. This opinion was echoed by the Task Group who were pleased that this had been considered as part of the new strategy.

It was discussed that WCC needed to make budget cuts of £300k across the service, however officers explained that they would not be made by taking a certain amount of money away from each library across the County and indeed the District. It was reported that some libraries may change, and some may not change at all. It was noted that the decrease in budget would be managed predominantly by restructure and remodelling, in addition to some potential streams of Covid-19 funding which had been received to support libraries during the lockdown. Members were informed that as part of the restructure new roles of a Library Services Development Manager and a Library Service Communications Manager had been established to help develop the services. In addition to these, a new staff position was to be established who would be responsible for identifying and bidding for extra funding for libraries e.g., Arts Council funding.

Members were keen to clarify whether the Open Plus staffing model utilised in some libraries was not being considered for the District. It was explained that the Open Plus model was a system that allowed libraries to provide more flexible hours, making them more accessible to the community. Members were in agreement that staffed libraries, whether supervised by voluntary or paid staff, were more appropriate and although it was recognised that staffing had been identified as the largest potential cost saving, the consultation undertaken by WCC had indicated that residents were still keen to have a service where staff were present during opening hours.

During the investigation, the Chairman shared the current experience at Hagley Library with Members of the Task Group. It was explained that the Parish Council (of which he was the Chairman) currently paid for the 'bricks and mortar' of the library. This had been possible due to the support for the library from the residents of Hagley who were satisfied that some of their Parish Council precept taxes be used to manage the upkeep of the library there. However, the Chairman did raise concerns regarding this approach and highlighted that in addition to the Parish Council precept taxes, library services were reflected directly through precept council tax being included in WCC. It was thought by the Chairman that this might not be a resilient

Agenda Item 7

approach to library support going forward as residents (in a parished ward) could feel that they were paying for the service twice and that Parish Councils were being asked to financially support the continuation of the service. (Further reference to this is highlighted in the areas to note section of this report.)

The Task Group therefore recommends the following:

Recommendation 4
That Worcestershire County Council ensure that any grant funding received is distributed to Libraries accordingly.

Chapter 3 - Areas to Note

Some of the Members of the Task Group wanted to further understand the Green Thread within the new library strategy. There was a discussion that a potential recommendation might be appropriate regarding any future remodelling and new build libraries, as there may be the potential to include solar panels on those new buildings. This would not only provide an opportunity to encourage a more sustainable library service but might be beneficial in areas where budget savings needed to be made. This was raised with WCC officers and it was advised that when any library property remodelling scheme was pursued, improvements were identified in order to increase energy efficiency for the scheme. It was clarified that the installation of solar panels would be managed as part of any corporate facilities management initiatives. The Task Group therefore felt it was not appropriate to include a recommendation in this respect but wanted to highlight this within its report that this was something which they had considered and had raised with WCC.

Members also wished to highlight that during the interview with Councillor Hodgson the Task group were thanked for taking the time to consider the Impact of the Review of Libraries and the new strategy. She advised that Bromsgrove District Council was the only Council to have done so. Members were pleased to hear this as it confirmed the importance of the scrutiny process in areas of particular interest for the residents of Bromsgrove.

Members raised concerns that public support of the library services was being reflected directly through precept council tax being included in WCC as well as in Parish Council precept taxes (for those parished wards). The Task Group therefore wanted to highlight that residents could feel that they were “paying for the service twice” and that Parish Councils were being asked to financially support the continuation of the service. It was questioned whether this was sustainable for the Parish Councils in the long term.

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY BOARD – Impact of the Review of Library Services Task Group

Terms of Reference as at March 2020

The Impact of Library Service Task Group has been set up by the Overview & Scrutiny Board to carry out detailed scrutiny/pre-scrutiny of the Impact of the Review of Library Services in the District.

1. The Task Group be made up of 7 Members with a quorum of 4. The Task Group will meet throughout the next six months at intervals to be decided by the Group.
2. The Task Group will be a standing item on the agenda of the Overview & Scrutiny Board and either a verbal or written report will be provided at each of the Board's meetings.
3. The Task Group is able to make recommendations to the Overview & Scrutiny Board who will then put forward its recommendations for consideration by Cabinet or directly to Cabinet/Council.
4. The Task group is expected to complete the investigation in six months and provide its findings and recommendations to the Overview and Scrutiny Board in a written report at that time.

Aims and Objectives of the Task Group

Scrutiny of the Impact of the Review of Library Services Task Group will cover the following areas, although this list is not exclusive:

- The task group proposes to review the outcome of the consultation and the implications for Library services across the district of Bromsgrove.
- Determine any loss of service, any degradation of service and impacts on local communities that each Library servers.
- BDC to consider what support it can give to the continuity of the Library Service

Background Papers

External Documents

Worcestershire County Council Library Strategy 2020-2025
The Wigan Deal

Witnesses

The Task Group considered evidence from the following sources before making its recommendations:

External Witnesses

Hannah Perrott, Assistant Director (Families, Communities and Partnerships) -
Worcestershire County Council

Carol Brown, Head of Service for Libraries - Worcestershire County Council
Councillor Lucy Hodgson, Cabinet Member with responsibility for Communities -
Worcestershire County Council

Questions for Councillor Lucy Hodgson

1. We have considered the content of the Worcestershire Library Strategy 2020-2025 as part of this review and noted the changes included within the plan. What implications, if any, would the actions detailed in this strategy have for library services in Bromsgrove District specifically?
2. Will there be an expectation that Bromsgrove District Council provide budgetary support for their District libraries as part of the new strategy?
3. Do you think that there will be a degradation of any Bromsgrove library services once the Worcestershire Library Strategy 2020-2025 is fully implemented?
4. As Hagley, Rubery Bromsgrove and Catshill now form a Bromsgrove North Group of Libraries what are the differences between this and the previous grouping in terms of Management, Budget and Resourcing (including IT and books)?
5. As Members we tend to receive queries from the public about libraries and their services. Are there any guarantees we can have to reassure residents that any changes that are made as part of the strategy will not impact negatively on their local library service?
6. This year's savings and changes to the library service has been disrupted by Covid-19. Has this changed future year's changes or budget savings?
7. Is there anything further that you would like to add for our consideration?

Library Services and Opening Times in the District

Alvechurch

Birmingham Road
Alvechurch
Birmingham
B48 7TA

Normal Opening Times

- Monday: 9.00am – 1.00pm, 2.00pm – 5.00pm
- Tuesday: 9.00am – 1.00pm, 2.00pm – 5.00pm
- Wednesday: Closed
- Thursday: 2.00pm – 5.00pm
- Friday: 9.00am – 1.00pm, 2.00pm – 5.00pm
- Saturday: 10.00am - 1.00pm, 2.00pm - 4.00pm

Adult Learning Courses

French for Improvers - £30.00 or £50.00

Spanish Continuing Beginners - £40.00

Watercolours for Improvers - \$50.00

Notices and Promotions

Children's Spoken Word Promotion:

Keep your children entertained by borrowing any Children's Spoken Word Cassettes or CDS for FREE.

Alvechurch Library is working as part of an Eco Communities project with the local schools and a village nursery to encourage sustainability together and individual in our settings. The Library has adopted very different ways of using our resources in order to be able to reduce our impact, support our community and apply for a Green Flag award.

Events at Alvechurch Library

Showing 1 to 5 of 5 events.

Baby Bounce & Rhyme at Alvechurch Library – weekly, free

Agenda Item 7

Bounce and Rhyme - weekly, free

Saturday Story time at Alvechurch Library - weekly, free

Tuesday Story Time at Alvechurch Library - weekly, free

Alvechurch Readers Group - meets: Last Tuesday of the month, free

Alvechurch Library Meeting Room for hire (see charges in appendix 1)

Size: medium

- Capacity: up to 15 people
- Category: Bronze, Silver

Facilities: Available during opening hours (closed Wednesdays)

- Toilets
- Chairs / Tables
- Plug sockets
- Flip chart
- Suitable for exhibition space
- Vending Machine

Bromsgrove Library

Parkside
Market Street
Bromsgrove
B61 8DA

Normal Opening Times

- Monday: 9.00am - 7.00pm
- Tuesday: 9.00am – 5.00pm
- Wednesday: 9.00am – 5.00pm
- Thursday: 9.00am – 5.00pm
- Friday: 9.00am – 5.00pm
- Saturday: 10.00am - 4.00pm

Author and Poetry Event – An Afternoon of Poetry with Jo Bell at Bromsgrove Library

Cost: Free

Author Event – An Evening with Philip Caine, author of the Jack Castle series of adventure novels at Bromsgrove Library

Cost: £3

Adult Learning Courses

Computer Skills Stage 2 - £144.00/Free (subject to conditions)

Computer Skills Stage 3 - £144.00/Free (subject to conditions)

Weekly Events

Baby, Bounce and Rhyme at Bromsgrove Library – **weekly, free**

Bounce and Rhyme at Bromsgrove Library - **weekly, free**

Bromsgrove Readers Group - **one day every month, free**

Code Club at Bromsgrove Library – **weekly, free (term time only)**

Job Club at Bromsgrove Library – **weekly, free**

Sewing Group at Bromsgrove Library – **weekly, free**

Talking About Books Group at Bromsgrove Library - **one day every month, free**

Bromsgrove Library Meeting Rooms (see charges in appendix 2)

Medium Room

- Capacity: Up to 15 people

Agenda Item 7

- Category: Bronze, Silver

Small Room

- Capacity: up to 6 people
- Category: Bronze, Silver

Facilities for both rooms:

- Vending Machine access
- Tables and Chairs
- Equipment available on request
- Late night opening on Monday

Catshill Community Library

The Community Room
Catshill Middle School
Meadow Road
Catshill
Bromsgrove
B61 0JW

Normal Opening Times

- Monday: 9:15am - 12:15pm
- Tuesday: 3:00pm - 7:00pm
- Wednesday: Closed
- Thursday: 3:00pm - 5.30pm
- Friday: 9:30am - 12:00pm
- Saturday: 9:30am – 12:30pm
- Sunday: Closed

Adult Learning Courses

None available

Activities

Baby, Bounce & Rhyme at Catshill Library – **weekly, free (term time only)**

Catshill Readers Group – **2nd Monday of every month, free**

Saturday Storytime at Catshill Library – **weekly, free**

Hagley Library

Worcester Road
Hagley
Stourbridge
West Midlands
DY9 0NW

Normal Opening Times

- Monday: 9.00am - 1.00pm, 2.00pm - 5.00pm
- Tuesday: Closed
- Wednesday: 9.00am - 1.00pm, 2.00pm - 5.00pm
- Thursday: 9.00am - 1.00pm, 2.00pm - 5.00pm
- Friday: 9.00am - 1.00pm, 2.00pm - 5.00pm
- Saturday: 9.00am - 1.00pm, 2.00pm - 4.30pm

Adult Learning Course

None available

Activities

Active Tots at Hagley Library Every Monday – **weekly, free (term time only)**.

Book Buzzers at Hagley Library on the First Thursday of Every Month – **weekly, free (term time only)**

Bounce and Rhyme at Hagley Library Every Monday – **weekly, free (term time only)**

Bounce and Rhyme at Hagley Library Every Other Wednesday – **every fortnight, free (term time only)**

Hagley Library Book Club Every Month – **once a month, free**

Hagley Library Healthy Walking Group - **1st and 3rd Wednesday of each month, free**

Storytime at Hagley Library Every Thursday – **weekly, free (term time only)**

Hagley Readers' Group - **third Thursday of the month**

Rubery Library

7 Library Way
Rubery
Birmingham
B45 9JS

Normal Opening Times

- Monday: 9:30am – 5.00pm
- Tuesday: 9:30am – 5.00pm
- Wednesday: Closed
- Thursday: 9:30am – 6.00pm
- Friday: 9:30am - 5.00pm
- Saturday: 10.00am – 2.00pm

Activities

Easter Wreath Meeting £30.00

Baby, Bounce & Rhyme at Rubery Library – **weekly, free**

Creative Writing Group at Rubery Library – **fortnightly, free**

Rubery Stitchers – **weekly, free**

Rubery's Readers Group - **fourth Thursday in the month, free**

Walkers Group for adults at Rubery Library – **weekly, free**

Rubery Library Meeting Room (see charges in appendix 1)

Size: medium

- Capacity: up to 12 people
- Category: Bronze

Facilities: Available during opening hours (closed Wednesdays) °Toilets access

- Vending Machine access
- Table
- Chairs
- Flipchart
- Plug sockets
- Space on the upper floor for hire

Wythall Library

Woodrush Community Hub
Shawhurst Lane
Hollywood
Birmingham
B47 5JW

Normal Opening Times

- Monday: 9.30am - 1.00pm, 2.00pm - 5.00pm
- Tuesday: 9.30am - 1.00pm, 2.00pm - 5.00pm
- Wednesday: 9.30am - 1.00pm, 2.00pm - 5.00pm
- Thursday: Closed
- Friday: 9.30am - 1.00pm, 2.00pm - 5.00pm
- Saturday: 9.30am - 1.00pm, 2.00pm - 4.00pm

Adult Learning Courses

None available

Activities

Baby, Bounce & Rhyme at Wythall Library – **weekly, free**

Chatterbooks Group at Wythall Library – **weekly, free**

Digital Champion Computer Training at Wythall Library – **weekly, free**

Hollywood and Wythall Mental Health Group at Wythall Library – **weekly free**

Lego Club at Wythall Library – **once a month, £1**

Library Readers Group at Wythall Library - **free**

Saturday Storytime at Wythall Library - **weekly, free**

Tuesday Storytime at Wythall Library - **weekly, free**

Library Facilities

	Alvechurch	Bromsgrove	Catshill	Hagley	Rubery	Wythall
Library Service at Home	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Wi-Fi	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Exhibition facilities	✓	✓				✓
Meeting room	✓	✓				✓
Internet public access terminals	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Printing (A4) b&w and colour (costs incurred)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Scanner		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Access for wheelchairs	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Self-Issue Terminal	✓		✓	✓		✓
Photocopying A4 and A3	✓	✓			✓	
Public toilets	✓	✓	✓			
Disabled toilets	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Baby changing facilities	✓	✓			✓	✓
USB Memory Sticks available to buy	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Reading Glasses available to buy	✓			✓		✓
Earphones available to buy	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Children's Events and activities	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Local History publications on sale		✓				
Energy Saving Monitors				✓		
Cafe						✓
Vending Machine						✓

Agenda Item 7

Worcestershire County Council

Libraries & Learning Service Meeting Room & Library Space Hire – Pricing Matrix

*Equipment availability will vary at each location, please check with venue prior to your event	Size		
Facilities (equipment used in room)	Small (less than 6 people)	Medium (6-12 people)	Large (12+ people)
Standard (*tables & chairs)	Bronze	Bronze	Silver
Intermediate (*As 'standard' plus flip chart, whiteboard etc)	Silver	Silver	Gold
High (*Projector, electronic smart board, plasma screen, DVD player, WiFi)	Silver	Gold	Gold
Executive – The Hive only (*Very high standard of equipment/very large sized room)	Platinum	Platinum	Platinum

Non-profit making (per hour or part of an hour)	Profit making (per hour or part of an hour)	
Bronze	£8.25	£16.50
Silver	£11.00	£22.00
Gold	£13.75	£27.50
Platinum	£22.00	£44.00
Hiring library space (where available) - Daily rates are based on 50% of the Bronze full hourly category- £4 per hour for non-profit making or £8.25 per hour for profit making. The Hive rates are based on the full hourly bronze category - £8.25 non-profit making/£16.50 profit making.		
Prices exclude Public Liability Insurance - 10% of the hire fee or £2 whichever is the greater.		
Activities promoting the work of Libraries & Learning – Free of charge		

Direct costs attributable to the letting to be in addition to the above. Staff costs outside normal working hours of caretaker or other staff is currently charged at the rate of £10.00 per hour. Please check with the Library Manager at the venue if these are payable.

Commercial organisations using the premises in connection with a profit-making business may be charged an additional fee dependent on the circumstances at the discretion of the Head of Libraries & Learning.

All activities of commercial organisations and profit making activities of non-profit making bodies attract the full rate.

All wishing to hire library premises will be asked to sign and agree to the standard list of terms and conditions. A £50 damage waiver deposit may be requested for non-standard activities, e.g. Children's parties

CABINET LEADER'S WORK PROGRAMME

1 NOVEMBER 2023 TO 29 FEBRUARY 2024
(published as at 2nd October 2023)

This Work Programme gives details of items on which key decisions are likely to be taken in the coming four months by the Council's Cabinet

The Work Programme gives details of items on which key decisions are likely to be taken by the Council's Cabinet, or full Council, in the coming four months. **Key Decisions** are those executive decisions which are likely to:

- (i) result in the Council incurring expenditure, foregoing income or the making of savings in excess of £50,000 or which are otherwise significant having regard to the Council's budget for the service or function to which the decision relates; or
- (ii) be significant in terms of its effect on communities living or working in an area comprising two or more wards in the district;

If you wish to make representations on the proposed decision you are encouraged to get in touch with the relevant report author as soon as possible before the proposed date of the decision. Contact details are provided, alternatively you may write to the Head of Legal, Democratic and Property Services, Parkside, Market Street, B61 8DA or e-mail: democratic@bromsgroveandredditch.gov.uk

The Cabinet's meetings are normally held every four weeks at 6pm on Wednesday evenings at Parkside. They are open to the public, except when confidential information is being discussed. If you wish to attend for a particular matter, it is advisable to check with the Democratic Services Team on (01527 64252 ext 3031) to make sure it is going ahead as planned. If you have any queries Democratic Services Officers will be happy to advise you. The full Council meets in accordance with the Councils Calendar of Meetings. Meetings commence at 6pm.

CABINET MEMBERSHIP

Councillor K J May	Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Strategic Partnerships
Councillor s. Baxter	Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Regeneration
Councillor S. Colella	Cabinet Member for Leisure, Culture and Climate Change
Councillor C. Hotham	Cabinet Member for Finance and Enabling
Councillor K. Taylor	Cabinet Member for Planning, Licensing and Worcestershire Regulatory Services
Councillor S. Webb	Cabinet Member for Health and Well Being and Strategic Housing
Councillor P. Whittaker	Cabinet Member for Environmental Services and Community Safety

Decision including Whether it is a key Decision	Decision Taker Date of Decision	Details of Exempt information (if any) and information explaining why items have been postponed (where available)	Documents submitted to Decision Maker / Background Papers List	Contact for Comments
Cost of Living Funding Proposal Key: Yes	Cabinet 22 Nov 2023		Report of the Head of Community and Housing Services	Judith Willis, Head of Community and Housing Services Tel: 01527 64252 Ext 3284 Councillor K.M May Councillor S. A. Webb
Finance and Performance Monitoring Report Quarter 2 2023/24 Key: No	Cabinet 22 Nov 2023 Council 6 Dec 2023	This report will contain exempt information which might need to be considered in private session at a meeting of Cabinet.	Report of the Head of Finance and Customer Services	Michelle Howell, Head of Finance and Customer Services Tel: 01527 64252 Councillor C. A. Hotham

Decision including Whether it is a key Decision	Decision Taker Date of Decision	Details of Exempt information (if any) and information explaining why items have been postponed (where available)	Documents submitted to Decision Maker / Background Papers List	Contact for Comments
Half Yearly Treasury Update Report 2023/24 Key: No	Cabinet 22 Nov 2023 Council 6 Dec 2023		Report of the Head of Finance and Customer Services	Michelle Howell, Head of Finance and Customer Services Tel: 01527 64252 Councillor C. A. Hotham
Homelessness Prevention Grant and Domestic Abuse Grant Key: Yes	Cabinet 22 Nov 2023		Report of the Head of Community and Housing Services	Amanda Delahunty, Strategic Housing Officer Tel: 01527 881269 Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing and Strategic Housing
Medium Term Financial Plan - Tranche 1 Budget Update including Fees and Charges Key: No	Cabinet 22 Nov 2023 Council 6 Dec 2023		Report of the Executive Director of Resources	Peter Carpenter, Interim Section 151 Officer Tel: 01527 64252 Councillor C. A. Hotham

Decision including Whether it is a key Decision	Decision Taker Date of Decision	Details of Exempt information (if any) and information explaining why items have been postponed (where available)	Documents submitted to Decision Maker / Background Papers List	Contact for Comments
Medium Term Financial Plan - Tranche 1 Budget including Fees and Charges (prior to consultation) Key: No	Cabinet 22 Nov 2023		Report of the Executive Director of Resources	Peter Carpenter, Interim Section 151 Officer Tel: 01527 64252 Councillor C. A. Hotham
Parking Enforcement Service Level Agreement Key: Yes	Cabinet 22 Nov 2023		Report of the Head of Environmental and Housing Property Services	Kevin Hirons, Environmental Services Manager Tel: 01527 881705 Councillor P. J. Whittaker
Play Audit Key: Yes	Cabinet Not before 22nd Nov 2023		Report of the Head of Planning, Regeneration and Leisure Services	Ishrat Karimi Fini, Parks and Events Service Manager Tel: 07713 085872 Councillor S. R. Colella

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Decision including Whether it is a key Decision	Decision Taker Date of Decision	Details of Exempt information (if any) and information explaining why items have been postponed (where available)	Documents submitted to Decision Maker / Background Papers List	Contact for Comments
Playing Pitch Strategy Key: No	Cabinet Not before 22nd Nov 2023		Report of the Head of Planning, Regeneration and Leisure Services	Jonathan Cochrane, Development Services Manager Tel: 01527 64252 Councillor S. R. Colella
Promsgrove Town Centre Regeneration - Land at the Dolphin Centre and at Windsor Street Key: Yes	Cabinet Not before 17th Jan 2024		Report of the Chief Executive	Peter Carpenter, Interim Section 151 Officer Tel: 01527 64252 Councillor K. J. May
Carbon Reduction Strategy - Annual Review Key: No	Cabinet Not before 17th Jan 2024 Council Not before 24th Jan 2024		Report of the Head of Community and Housing Services	Judith Willis, Head of Community and Housing Services Tel: 01527 64252 Ext 3284 Councillor S. R. Colella

Page 15

Decision including Whether it is a key Decision	Decision Taker Date of Decision	Details of Exempt information (if any) and information explaining why items have been postponed (where available)	Documents submitted to Decision Maker / Background Papers List	Contact for Comments
Council response to Local Plan Consultations; Birmingham Development Plan, South Staffordshire Local Plan and South Worcestershire Development Plan Key: No	Cabinet Not before 17th Jan 2024 Council Not before 24th Jan 2024		Report of the Head of Planning, Regeneration and Leisure Services	Mike Dunphy, Strategic Planning and Conservation Manager Tel: 01527 881325 Councillor C. B. Taylor
Council Tax Base and Business Rates Yield 2024/25 Key: No	Cabinet 17 Jan 2024 Council 24 Jan 2024		Report of the Head of Finance and Customer Services	Michelle Howell, Head of Finance and Customer Services Tel: 01527 64252 Councillor C. A. Hotham

Decision including Whether it is a key Decision	Decision Taker Date of Decision	Details of Exempt information (if any) and information explaining why items have been postponed (where available)	Documents submitted to Decision Maker / Background Papers List	Contact for Comments
Council Tax - Discretionary Council Tax Reduction Policy Key: No	Cabinet 17 Jan 2024 Council 24 Jan 2024		Report of the Head of Finance and Customer Services	David Riley, Revenue Services Manager Tel: 01527 64252 Councillor C. A. Hotham
Council Tax - Empty Homes Discounts and Premiums Key: No	Cabinet 17 Jan 2024 Council 24 Jan 2024		Report of the Head of Finance and Customer Services	David Riley, Revenue Services Manager Tel: 01527 64252 Councillor C. A. Hotham
Decarbonisation of the Council Fleet Key: No	Cabinet Not before 17th Jan 2024 Council Not before 24th Jan 2024		Report of the Head of Environmental and Housing Property Services	Kevin Hirons, Environmental Services Manager Tel: 01527 881705 Councillor P. J. Whittaker

Decision including Whether it is a key Decision	Decision Taker Date of Decision	Details of Exempt information (if any) and information explaining why items have been postponed (where available)	Documents submitted to Decision Maker / Background Papers List	Contact for Comments
District Heat Network Revisions Key: Yes	Cabinet Not before 17th Jan 2024		Report of the Head of Community and Housing Services	Judith Willis, Head of Community and Housing Services Tel: 01527 64252 Ext 3284 Councillor C. A. Hotham, Councillor P. J. Whittaker
Final Council Tax Support Scheme 2024/25 Key: No	Cabinet 17 Jan 2024 Council 24 Jan 2024		Report of the Executive Director of Resources	Peter Carpenter, Interim Section 151 Officer Tel: 01527 64252 Councillor C. A. Hotham
Environmental Enforcement Business Case Key: Yes	Cabinet 17 Jan 2024	This report may contain exempt information which may need to be considered in private session.	Report of the Head of Worcestershire Regulatory Services	Mark Cox Worcestershire Regulatory Services Councillor C. B. Taylor

Decision including Whether it is a key Decision	Decision Taker Date of Decision	Details of Exempt information (if any) and information explaining why items have been postponed (where available)	Documents submitted to Decision Maker / Background Papers List	Contact for Comments
Finance Recovery Plan - Update Key: No	Cabinet 17 Jan 2024		Report of the Executive Director of Resources	Peter Carpenter, Interim Section 151 Officer Tel: 01527 64252 Councillor C. A. Hotham
Non-Domestic Rates - Discretionary Rate Relief Policy Key: No	Cabinet 17 Jan 2024 Council 24 Jan 2024		Report of the Head of Finance and Customer Services	David Riley, Revenue Services Manager Tel: 01527 64252 Councillor C. A. Hotham
Pay Policy 2024/25 Key: No	Cabinet 17 Jan 2024 Council 24 Jan 2024		Report of the Executive Director of Resources	Becky Talbot, Human Resources and Development Manager Tel: 01527 64252 Councillor C. A. Hotham

Decision including Whether it is a key Decision	Decision Taker Date of Decision	Details of Exempt information (if any) and information explaining why items have been postponed (where available)	Documents submitted to Decision Maker / Background Papers List	Contact for Comments
Independent Remuneration Panel Recommendations 2024/25 Key: No	Council 24 Jan 2024		Report of the Head of Legal, Democratic and Property Services	Peter Carpenter, Interim Section 151 Officer Tel: 01527 64252 Councillor C. A. Hotham
Finance and Performance Quarter 3 Monitoring Report 2023/24 Key: No	Cabinet 14 Feb 2024 Council 21 Feb 2024		Report of the Head of Finance and Customer Services	Michelle Howell, Head of Finance and Customer Services Tel: 01527 64252 Councillor C. A. Hotham
Medium Term Financial Plan (including Treasury Management Strategy, Capital Strategy, Minimum Revenue Provision and Investment Strategy) (Tranche 2) Key: No	Cabinet 14 Feb 2024 Council 21 Feb 2024		Report of the Executive Director of Resources	Peter Carpenter, Interim Section 151 Officer Tel: 01527 64252 Councillor C. A. Hotham

Decision including Whether it is a key Decision	Decision Taker Date of Decision	Details of Exempt information (if any) and information explaining why items have been postponed (where available)	Documents submitted to Decision Maker / Background Papers List	Contact for Comments
Council Tax Resolutions 2024/25 Key: No	Cabinet 21 Feb 2024 Council 21 Feb 2024		Report of the Executive Director of Resources	Peter Carpenter, Interim Section 151 Officer Tel: 01527 64252 Councillor C. A. Hotham
Finance and Performance Outturn Report 2023/24 Key: No	Cabinet Not before 1st Jun 2024 Council Not before 1st Jun 2024		Report of the Head of Finance and Customer Services	Michelle Howell, Head of Finance and Customer Services Tel: 01527 64252 Councillor C. A. Hotham

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OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

WORK PROGRAMME

2023-2024

RECOMMENDATION:

That the Board considers and agrees the work programme and updates it accordingly.

ITEMS FOR FUTURE MEETINGS

Date of Meeting	Subject	Additional Information
16 th October 2023	Agile Working Presentation - Overview	Sue Hanley, Interim Chief Executive Officer
	Community Shops and Food Markets in the District – Presentation - Overview	Judith Willis, Head of Community and Housing Services
	Scrutiny Investigation Proposal - Future of Libraries within the District (Council Motion of 19 th July 2023)	Councillor H. D. N. Rone-Clarke – the proposer of the motion.
	Governance Systems Review – Implementation Progress Update (Standing Item)	
	Task and Working Group Updates	
	WCC Health Overview & Scrutiny Committee – update from Representative	
	Cabinet Leader’s Work Programme	
20 th November 2023	Parking Enforcement Service Level Agreement – pre-scrutiny	Kevin Hirons, Environmental Services Manager
	Playing Pitch Strategy – pre-scrutiny	Jonathan Cochrane, Development Services Manager
	Governance Systems Review – Implementation Progress Update (Standing Item)	
	Task and Working Group Updates	
	WCC Health Overview & Scrutiny Committee – update from Representative	
	Cabinet Leader’s Work Programme	
16 th January 2024	Decarbonisation of the Council Fleet – pre-scrutiny	Kevin Hirons, Environmental Services Manager

Agenda Item 11

	Bromsgrove Town Centre Regeneration - Land at the Dolphin Centre and at Windsor Street – pre-scrutiny	Peter Carpenter, Interim Section 151 Officer
	UK Shared Prosperity Fund projects update	Peter Carpenter, Interim Section 151 Officer
	Governance Systems Review – Implementation Progress Update (Standing Item)	
	Task and Working Group Updates	
	WCC Health Overview & Scrutiny Committee – update from Representative	
	Cabinet Leader’s Work Programme	
12 th February 2024	North Worcestershire Community Safety Partnership – Annual Review of Work in 2022-23	Bev Houghton, Community Safety Manager
	Governance Systems Review – Implementation Progress Update (Standing Item)	
	Task and Working Group Updates	
	WCC Health Overview & Scrutiny Committee – update from Representative	
	Cabinet Leader’s Work Programme	
11 th March 2024	6-month Review of Hybrid Cabinet Governance Arrangements implementation	Chairman of the Board Monitoring Officer
	Task and Working Group Updates	
	WCC Health Overview & Scrutiny Committee – update from Representative	
	Cabinet Leader’s Work Programme	
15 th April 2024	Overview and Scrutiny Board – Annual Report 2023-2024	Chairman of the Board
	Overview and Scrutiny Board – Recommendation Tracker for 2023-24	Chairman of the Board
	Governance Systems Review – Implementation Progress Update (Standing Item)	
	Task and Working Group Updates	
	WCC Health Overview & Scrutiny Committee – update from Representative	
	Cabinet Leader’s Work Programme	

Agenda Item 11

Items referred to Finance and Budget Working Group

Item	Update
Draft Council Tax Support Scheme 2024/25 – pre-scrutiny	Referred to Finance & Budget Working Group for consideration – 17.10.2023 meeting
Scrutiny Investigation Proposal – Free Blue Badge Parking on Council Car Parks – Presentation	Referred to Finance and Budget Working Group for investigation – 07.11.2023 meeting

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