

Public Document Pack



BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MEETING OF THE COUNCIL

WEDNESDAY 17TH JULY 2024

AT 6.00 P.M.

PARKSIDE SUITE - PARKSIDE

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

AGENDA

WELCOME

1. **To receive apologies for absence**

2. **Declarations of Interest**

To invite Councillors to declare any Disclosable Pecuniary Interests or Other Disclosable Interests they may have in items on the agenda, and to confirm the nature of those interests.

3. **To confirm the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 15th May 2024 (Pages 7 - 18)**

4. **To receive any announcements from the Chairman and/or Head of Paid Service**
5. **To receive any announcements from the Leader**
6. **To receive comments, questions or petitions from members of the public** (Pages 19 - 20)

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

7. **Urgent Decisions**
8. **Political Balance** (Pages 21 - 24)

The covering report for this item is contained within this agenda pack. The appendix to the report will follow in a supplementary papers pack.

9. **Establishment of a Joint Appointments Committee including Terms of Reference** (Pages 25 - 42)
10. **Overview and Scrutiny Board - Annual Report 2023 - 2024** (Pages 43 - 76)
11. **Audit, Standards and Governance Committee Annual Report 2023 - 2024** (Pages 77 - 98)
12. **Recommendations from the Cabinet**

To consider the recommendations from the meeting(s) of the Cabinet held on 17th July 2024.

As this Cabinet meeting will be taking place earlier in the day on the day of the Council meeting any recommendations arising will be tabled at the Council meeting.

13. **Background Information on the recommendations from the Cabinet**
 - (i) Bromsgrove District Council Plan (Pages 99 - 126)
 - (ii) Productivity Plans (Pages 127 - 134)

14. **Questions on Notice (To Follow)**

Questions on Notice will follow in a supplementary papers pack to this agenda.

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

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

Each elected Member due to ask a question, may ask up to one supplementary question which must be based on the original question or the answer provided to that question.

15. **Motions on Notice (To Follow)**

Motions on Notice will follow in a supplementary papers pack to this agenda.

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

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

Sue Hanley
Chief Executive

Parkside
Market Street
BROMSGROVE
Worcestershire
B61 8DA

9th July 2024

If you have any queries on this Agenda please contact
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Please note that this is a public meeting and will be live streamed for general access via the Council's YouTube channel.

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[Live Stream - Bromsgrove District Council Meeting - 17th July 2024](#)

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

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

Notes:

Although this is a public meeting, there are circumstances when Council might have to move into closed session to consider exempt or confidential information. For agenda items that are exempt, the public are excluded.



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

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

at www.bromsgrove.gov.uk

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BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MEETING OF THE COUNCIL

15TH MAY 2024, AT 6.00 P.M.

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

Officers: Mrs S. Hanley, Mr P. Carpenter, Mr G. Revans, Mrs C. Felton, Ms. N Cummings, Mrs J. Bayley-Hill and Mrs J. Gresham.

1\24 ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN 2024/25

Councillor S. Ammar was not present at the commencement of the meeting.

Councillor B. Kumar, Vice-Chairman, welcomed everyone to the meeting and sought nominations for Chairman of the Council.

Councillor P. McDonald nominated Councillor S. Ammar as Chairman for the 2024-25 Municipal Year. Councillor K.A May seconded the nomination. On being put to the vote it was

RESOLVED that Councillor S. Ammar be elected Chairman of the Council for the ensuing year.

Councillor Ammar was invited into the meeting. She signed the Declaration of Acceptance of Office, thanked Members of the Council and stated that it was an honour and privilege to be elected to the Office of Chairman for a second term of office.

2\24 ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIRMAN 2024/25

Councillor K.A. May nominated Councillor B. Kumar as Vice-Chairman of the Council. Councillor P. Whittaker seconded the nomination. Following a vote it was

RESOLVED that Councillor B. Kumar be elected Vice-Chairman of the Council for the ensuing municipal year.

Councillor Kumar signed the Declaration of Acceptance of Office and thanked Members of the Council for electing him to the office of Vice-Chairman.

3\24 **TO RECEIVE APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors A. Dale, S. Evans and R. Lambert.

4\24 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

5\24 **TO CONFIRM THE ACCURACY OF THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COUNCIL HELD ON 10TH APRIL 2024**

The minutes of the meeting held on 10th April 2024 were presented for Members' consideration.

With reference to minute number 104/23, it was noted that Councillor Nicholl had declared an interest as a member of Worcestershire Wildlife Trust and not Councillor A. Bailes.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 10th April 2024 be approved as a correct record subject to Councillor A. Bailes being replaced by Councillor D. J. Nicholl in minute number 104/23 relating to membership of Worcestershire Wildlife Trust.

6\24 **TO RECEIVE ANY ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM THE CHAIRMAN AND/OR HEAD OF PAID SERVICE**

Chairman

The Chairman announced that the Chairman's Golf Tournament had raised approximately £1,700 for charity and she thanked all Councillors who had supported the event and the other Chairman's events held during the Municipal Year.

Head of Paid Service

There were no announcements from the Head of Paid Service.

7\24 **TO RECEIVE ANY ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM THE LEADER**

The Leader reported that Councillor C. Hotham had asked to step down from the Cabinet. The Leader thanked Councillor Hotham for his work over the past year, in particular in the review of governance arrangements.

The Leader reported that as a consequence there were changes to roles in the Cabinet and it now comprised the following members:

Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Strategic Partnerships and Enabling – Councillor Karen May

Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Regeneration – Councillor Sue Baxter

Cabinet Member for Environmental Services and Community Safety – Councillor Peter Whittaker

Cabinet Member for Finance – Councillor Steve Colella

Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing and Strategic Housing – Councillor Shirley Webb

Cabinet Member for Leisure and Climate Change – Councillor Bernard McEldowney

Cabinet Member for Planning, Licensing and WRS – Councillor Kit Taylor.

The Leader thanked all members of the Cabinet for the work they had carried out in their roles over the past year.

8\24

TO RECEIVE COMMENTS, QUESTIONS OR PETITIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

The Chairman reported that no questions or petitions had been received from members of the public.

9\24

URGENT DECISIONS

Members were informed that there had been one urgent decision taken since the previous meeting of the Council on the subject of Revised Parking Charges.

10\24

APPOINTMENTS TO COMMITTEES 2024/25

Councillor K. May, the Leader of the Council, introduced the report setting out the recommended political balance of the Council and explained that it was a technical report which was considered at each Annual Council meeting. Councillor May proposed, Councillor S. Baxter seconded and it was

RESOLVED that:-

- 1) for the ensuing Municipal Year, the Committees set out in the table in Appendix 1 of the report be appointed and that the representation of the different political groups on the Council on those Committees be as set out in that table until the next Annual Meeting of the Council, or until the next review of political representation under Section 15 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989, whichever is the earlier.

- 2) Members be appointed to the Committees and as substitute members in accordance with nominations to be made by Group Leaders.
- 3) the terms of reference for the Boards and Committees as set out at Appendix 2 be confirmed.

11\24

OUTSIDE BODIES

A report on appointments to various Outside Bodies was submitted for Councillors' consideration.

Councillor K. May proposed, Councillor S. Baxter seconded the appointments listed in the appendix to the report.

Councillor R. J. Hunter expressed thanks to Councillors May and Baxter for their support in reviewing appointments to outside bodies as part of the review of governance arrangements.

RESOLVED that

The Council nominates to the outside bodies as listed at the appendix to the minutes for the 2024-25 Municipal Year.

12\24

CONSTITUTION REVIEW

The Council reviewed its Constitution at each Annual meeting. Members considered a report which set out outcomes of the latest meeting of the Constitution Review Working Group (CRWG), held on 12th March 2024, at which various changes to the Council's constitution were discussed. These proposed recommendations were considered at a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board held on 22nd April 2024.

In presenting the report, Councillor K. May highlighted a change to the CRWG's proposals which had been suggested by the Overview and Scrutiny Board. The Board had endorsed the recommendations made by the CRWG, subject to an amendment to the proposed changes to the Scrutiny Procedure Rules to enable an issue to be discussed more than once in a 6-month period, subject to certain parameters. The proposed change had been included in the appendix to the report before the Council.

During consideration of the report a member thanked the Democratic Services Team for their work on the Member Officer Protocol and welcomed the clarification in that of the expectation for officers to respond promptly to Members' queries. Reference was also made to the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee's request for the publication of a Whistleblowing Strategy, and this was due to be presented shortly. The Committee was also looking at appointing an Independent Member.

Councillor May proposed, Councillor S. Baxter seconded and it was

RESOLVED that

- 1) The current version of the Officer Scheme of Delegations is agreed as set out at Appendix A;
- 2) The Joint Arrangements, at Part 7 of the constitution, be updated, as detailed in Appendix B;
- 3) The Planning Procedure Rules, at Part 14 of the constitution, be updated, as detailed in Appendix C and the Planning Call in process be removed from the Officer Scheme of Delegations at Part 6 of the constitution;
- 4) The Scrutiny Procedure Rules, at Part 12 of the constitution, be updated as detailed in Appendix D;
- 5) The Audit, Standards and Governance Committee Procedure Rules, at Part 13 of the constitution, be updated as detailed in Appendix E;
- 6) The amendments to the Member Officer Relations Protocol, at Part 22 of the constitution, whereby the Member Enquiries Guidance should be added as an appendix to that part of the constitution, be approved; and
- 7) The Committee terms of reference for the Licensing (Miscellaneous) Sub-Committees A and B for the number of Councillors be amended as detailed in Appendix G.

13\24

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE (TO FOLLOW)

The Chairman advised that four questions on notice had been received for this meeting.

Question submitted by Councillor R. Hunter

“When will members have the opportunity to input into the play audit with respect to their individual wards?”

Councillor S. Colella, the Cabinet Member for Finance, replied that

“This item is on the forward plan for Cabinet on the 11th September 2024. In advance of this it is anticipated that there will be a Cabinet Advisory Group on this matter. The date of the Cabinet Advisory Group is yet to be arranged, but we envisage that it will be in late June or early July”.

Councillor Hunter asked a supplementary question that ahead or shortly after the Cabinet Advisory Group whether there would be an opportunity for all members to have some input.

Councillor Colella answered that he agreed; it was important that all members understood the process, where their particular play areas fell in the ranking process and how the assessment was arrived at. Substantial capital expenditure had been set aside for this initiative, so it was important to understand needs across the district.

Question submitted by Councillor D. Nicholl

“When will the Council publish the next consultation on the local plan review?”

Councillor K. Taylor, the Cabinet Member for Planning, Licensing and Regulatory Services replied:

“The Bromsgrove District Plan Consultation is set to be considered by Members at the Cabinet in June and the Council in July, if approval is given consultation will begin shortly after the July Council meeting for an extended period to take into account the summer holiday period.”

Councillor Nicholl asked a supplementary question, whether the consultation would include potential site allocation, given concerns residents had about the green belt.

Councillor Taylor replied that potential site allocation would be included in the consultation.

Question submitted by Councillor J. Robinson

“When will the Ward Fund allocation for the 2024/25 financial year be available for members to access?”

Councillor S. Colella, the Cabinet Member for Finance responded that “The Ward Fund allocation application process for Members will be ready following the Council AGM meeting. This will include draft forms to be completed, and the checks and balances that the Council will need to undertake before monies are allocated to ensure we comply with all “subsidy” requirements (which has replaced the State Aid requirements we had when we were part of the EU). Members will be mailed the information, including key contacts and the estimated timescales from application to the delivery of the funds.”

Question submitted by Councillor S. Robinson

“It was recently reported that two thirds of councils expect not to hit the Government’s deadline of April 2026 for introducing food waste collections. This is because of a shortfall between the funding committed

by Government and what is actually needed to undertake the work. What does this mean for Bromsgrove?”

Councillor P. Whittaker, the Cabinet Member for Environmental Services and Community Safety replied:

“Defra have allocated a capital grant payment to Bromsgrove District Council of £902,511 for the purchase of food waste caddies and food waste vehicles. We have challenged this allocation as it is less than we have calculated is needed and await a response from Defra.

Details of two further funding streams to support the introduction of food waste collection are still awaited. Transitional resource funding is likely to cover the one-off costs such as communication materials, project management and delivery of the two food waste caddies to each house (internal to the property as well as the kerbside collection caddies). Ongoing revenue funding will then be paid to support the ongoing delivery of the service.

A review of the infrastructure required i.e. the waste disposal capacity for the service across the district and the county is also needed ahead of the service start. This will look at how we can deal with the collected food waste in the most efficient way, e.g. reducing transport through use of waste transfer rather than direct delivery to third party Anaerobic Digestion facilities.

A report updating Members is due to go to Overview and Scrutiny in July 2024. It is anticipated that the likely commencement of the service will be in late 2026.

14\24

MOTIONS ON NOTICE (TO FOLLOW)

The Chairman advised that one motion on notice had been submitted for this meeting.

White Ribbon Campaign

The Council considered the following Motion on Notice submitted by Councillor R. J Hunter:

“Council fully supports the White Ribbon campaign and thanks our Community Safety officers for their tireless proactive work to end domestic abuse in our communities.

Council will continue to support the development of new ways to help victims and survivors of domestic abuse, including through the ‘cut it out’ initiative.

Council calls upon officers to explore the potential for formal recognition of our efforts to eradicate domestic abuse through official White Ribbon accreditation.”

Councillor R. J. Hunter proposed the Motion. In doing so he referred to one in four women in England and Wales experiencing domestic abuse in their lifetime. The Police responded to a domestic abuse call every 30 seconds. The work undertaken by the Community Safety Team in collaboration with volunteers was vital in empowering women to get the help that they needed. A presentation at a recent Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting had highlighted the Council's work in this area and he gave examples of the initiatives supported by the Community Safety team. He acknowledged that survivors of domestic abuse included male victims, but 93% of perpetrators were men.

Councillor Hunter considered that the Motion as proposed would demonstrate the Council's strong support and show practical action as part of this. The White Ribbon Campaign and accreditation would help give recognition to the team and volunteers and in a practical sense would assess whether the Council was doing all it could to make sure all its employees were safe. He thanked officers and leading members for their support in bringing the Motion to Council.

The Motion was seconded by Councillor B. Kumar, who referred to awareness of the Campaign locally and across the world. The incidence of domestic abuse related crimes had increased by 7.7% between 2021 and 2023. Whilst the majority of cases were against women, women had also inflicted physical, emotional and psychological domestic abuse against men. Overall, he suggested there was an issue of underreporting of domestic abuse, especially during the Covid pandemic. In Bromsgrove, there were 30 cases in 2020-21 where the Council had been asked for assistance because an individual was being made homeless or was in fear of this. In 2022-23 there had been 27 approaches for temporary accommodation, and this had increased to 43 in 2023-24.

White Ribbon Day would begin on 16th November and whilst it was welcome, Councillor Kumar suggested year-round initiatives should be carried out, including workshops, seminars and school-based education and establishing and promoting support services. In his view the Council's website could include links to relevant sources of support and information. It would be important to monitor effectiveness of such programmes.

During consideration of the Motion the following points were made:

- the White Ribbon accreditation process supported embedding a culture in an organisation and many Councils had become accredited; the Council should support this.
- since the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 the Council had been obliged to provide a co-ordinator for domestic abuse; this post was in Bromsgrove District Housing Trust (bdht) and in practice this role worked very well. The officer worked with various community groups to raise awareness and included school visits.

Agenda Item 3

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- the statistics provided during the debate had illustrated that progress still needed to be made. Achieving white ribbon accreditation was crucial to ensuring Council employees felt safe and secure in their working environment.
- the view was expressed that the issue was wider than domestic violence and should be about all violence against all women. Educating younger men about appropriate behaviour was an important part of the initiative.
- the Motion was timely as the European Football Championships would begin in June and there was a risk of increased domestic abuse around the time of the competition.
- domestic abuse was endemic, and conversations should include all generations in the community.
- the community safety team worked with many groups on prevention of domestic abuse, but more could be done, and the Campaign provided a good framework for this.

Having been put to the vote the proposal was carried unanimously.

RESOLVED that

- 1) Council fully supports the White Ribbon campaign and thanks our Community Safety officers for their tireless proactive work to end domestic abuse in our communities;
- 2) Council will continue to support the development of new ways to help victims and survivors of domestic abuse, including through the 'cut it out' initiative; and
- 3) Council calls upon officers to explore the potential for formal recognition of our efforts to eradicate domestic abuse through official White Ribbon accreditation.

15\24

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

There was no urgent business on this occasion.

The meeting closed at 6.54 p.m.

Chairman

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Council Appointments to Outside Bodies

15th May 2024

Organisation	No. of Appts & Length of Office	Appointed 2023/2024	Nominations 2024/2025
Amphlett Hall Management Committee	2 (previous years 4) 1 year	H. Rone-Clarke S. Webb	J. Robinson S. Webb
Citizens' Advice Bromsgrove and Redditch	2 1 year	S. Ammar S. Webb	E. Gray S. Webb
Hereford & Worcestershire Integrated Care Partnership Assembly	1 and a substitute (new group first appointment made by Council on 17th October 2022)	S. Webb Substitute: S. Baxter	S. Webb Substitute: S. Baxter
Midlands Joint Council for Environmental Protection	2 1 year	H. Rone-Clarke	H. Rone-Clarke S. Evans
West Mercia Police and Crime Panel <i>Rep and sub must be from the same political group on the Council (usually the majority group)</i>	1 rep and 1 substitute	H. Jones Substitute: S. Colella B. Kumar (Council 24 th Jan 2024)	H. Jones Substitute: B. Kumar
Worcestershire County Council Corporate Parenting Board	1 1 year	E. Gray	E. Gray
Worcestershire County Council Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee	1 1 year	B. Kumar (Overview & Scrutiny Board 11 th Sept 2023)	Delegate to the next meeting of the O&S Board to determine
Worcestershire Regulatory Services Board (previously Worcestershire Shared Services Joint Committee)	2 1 year To include relevant Portfolio holder and one other member of the controlling group and one substitute	K. Taylor H. Jones Substitute: M. Marshall	K. Taylor H. Jones Substitute: M. Marshall

Bromsgrove District Council – 17th July 2024
Questions From the Public

1. From Dr I Pogson

Question for the Chairman

1. "The development of the old Fire Station and Library complex - this is a tragic decade-long waste of valuable real estate by our Council and whatever other agencies are involved. What do you propose?"

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Council
2024

17th July

Political Balance Report

Relevant Portfolio Holder		Councillor Karen May	
Portfolio Holder Consulted			
Relevant Head of Service		Claire Felton, Head of Legal, Democratic and Property Services	
Report Author Claire Felton	Job Title: Head of Legal, Democratic ad Property Services Contact c.felton@bromsgroveandredditch.gov.uk Contact Tel: (01527) 64252	email:	
Wards Affected		All	
Ward Councillor(s) consulted		N/A	
Relevant Strategic Purpose(s)		An Effective and Sustainable Council	
Non-Key Decision			
If you have any questions about this report, please contact the report author in advance of the meeting.			

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

Council is asked to RESOLVE that:-

- 1) **for the remainder of the 2024/25 Municipal Year, the Committees set out in the table in Appendix 1 of the report be appointed and that the representation of the different political groups on the Council on those Committees be as set out in that table until the next Annual Meeting of the Council, or until the next review of political representation under Section 15 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989, whichever is the earlier.**
- 2) **Members be appointed to the Committees and as substitute members in accordance with nominations to be made by Group Leaders.**

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The political balance is reported for Members' consideration at Annual Council meetings.
- 2.2 Further reports in respect of the political balance may be presented for Council's consideration during the municipal year should there be a change to the political composition of the authority.

Council
2024

17th July

2.3 This report has been prepared following changes to the political balance of the Council in June 2024.

3. OPERATIONAL ISSUES

3.1 The rules of political proportionality mean that the political balance of the Council needs to be reflected in the political composition of individual Boards and Committees. In addition, the total number of seats allocated to each group must reflect the political balance of the Council.

3.2 The proposed allocation of seats on each Board/Committee is done on a strict mathematical basis.

3.3 The political balance calculations have been reviewed following a change to the membership of one of the political groups at the Council.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

4.1 There are no specific financial implications.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Sections 15 -17 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 place a duty on Councils to allocate the seats on certain committees in proportion to the size of the political groups on the Council.

5.2 A review of the political balance must take place as soon as is reasonably possible after a change occurs to the Council's political balance.

6. OTHER - IMPLICATIONS

Relevant Strategic Purpose

6.1 This review of the Council's political balance is required following changes to political group membership at the authority. The review will help to ensure that the Council remains effective and sustainable.

Climate Change Implications

6.2 There are no specific climate change implications.

Equalities and Diversity Implications

6.3 There are no specific equalities and diversity implications.

7. RISK MANAGEMENT

- 7.1 Given there is a legal duty on Councils to allocate the seats on certain Committees in proportion to the size of the political groups on the Council, Members do need to agree the political balance.
- 7.2 There is a risk that if a political balance is not agreed for the Council this could cause reputational damage.

8. APPENDICES and BACKGROUND PAPERS

Appendix 1 – Political Balance (to follow)

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Establishment of a Joint Appointments Committee

Relevant Portfolio Holder	Councillor Karen May
Portfolio Holder Consulted	Yes / No
Relevant Head of Service	Claire Felton
Report Authors	<p>Job Title: Head of Legal, Democratic and Property Services Contact email: c.felton@bromsgroveandredditch.gov.uk Contact Tel: 01527 64252</p> <p>Job Title: Human Resources and Organisational Development Manager Contact email: becky.talbot@bromsgroveandredditch.gov.uk</p>
Wards Affected	N/A
Ward Councillor(s) consulted	N/A
Relevant Strategic Purpose(s)	An effective and sustainable Council
Key Decision / Non-Key Decision: This is a non-key decision	
If you have any questions about this report, please contact the report author in advance of the meeting.	

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Council **RESOLVE** that:-

- 1.1 **A Joint Appointments Committee (JAC) be established, to replace the current Appointments Committee, for Bromsgrove District Council (BDC) with Redditch Borough Council (RBC) of 10 Councillors (5 from each authority, which must include both Leaders) with terms of reference as detailed in Appendix 1.**
- 1.2 **The Joint Appointments Committee is directed to appoint a subcommittee of 6 members (3 from each authority), which will form the final interview panel for the appointment of the Head of Paid Service and S151 Officer and make recommendations to the JAC.**
- 1.3 **To appoint 5 members from Bromsgrove District Council to the JAC in accordance with para 2.2 of the report.**
- 1.4 **To authorise the Monitoring Officer to update the Constitution, including any consequential amendments required as a result of the above.**

Council

17th July 2024

1.5 To approve a 1.31% increase to the top increment of the Head of Paid Service grade.

1.6 To approve a revised Pay Policy to include changes to Head of Paid Service grade and the introduction of a new grade between top of NJC Grade and Hay Grades.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 This report details the governance proposals for the appointment of the Statutory Officers.

2.2 The terms of reference for the JAC are set out at Appendix 1. Its sole purpose is to enable Councillors from both authorities to have engagement in any recruitment roles of Statutory Officers. The JAC, which must be politically balanced, would comprise of 10 members, with 5 members being appointed by each Council. If Council approves the recommendations, it will also be asked to appoint its members.

2.3 The JAC would be established pursuant to the powers contained in sections 101 and 102 of the Local Government Act 1972.

2.4 It should be noted that the appointment of the Chairman for the JAC and its sub-committee will be chaired alternately between Members of the respective Councils and the Chairmanship will only last until the next meeting of that Committee/sub-committee.

2.5 In order to ensure that both BDC & RBC can contribute to the appointment process and ultimately recommend the most suitable candidate a Joint Appointments Committee will have to be established.

2.6 It is proposed that the JAC will consist of the Leaders of each and 4 other members from each authority.

2.7 The final interview will be a separate meeting of the Joint Appointments Sub-Committee. The membership of the Joint Appointments Sub-Committee will be determined by the JAC and consist of the Leaders of each authority where possible.

3. OPERATIONAL ISSUES

3.1 Following the announcement that the former Chief Executive, Mr Kevin Dicks, would be retiring in September 2023, a report was considered by Bromsgrove District Council as employing authority under the Shared Services Arrangements. As recommended, Members agreed at their meeting on 19th July 2023 that on the retirement of Mr Dicks, Mrs Susan Hanley be appointed as the Council's Head of Paid Service, Returning

Officer and Electoral Registration Officer. This was to be taken on an interim basis until such time as a new Chief Executive and Head of Paid Service could be recruited and appointed.

- 3.2 A recruitment exercise was undertaken for both the post of Chief Executive and Section 151 Officer, but the recruitment process resulted in the Council not being able to recruit on this occasion.
- 3.3 On 6th December 2023 the Council resolved that Susan Hanley continue to be appointed as the Interim Head of Paid Service for Bromsgrove until 30th November 2024, or if the date is later, until such time as a new permanent Head of Paid Service has commenced employment with the Council. Peter Carpenter was appointed as Interim Deputy Chief Executive and Interim Executive Director of Resources (S151 Officer) on a fixed term basis until 30th November 2024. Claire Felton, Head of Legal, Democratic and Property Services, was appointed as the Returning Officer and Electoral Registration Officer for Bromsgrove District Council.
- 3.4 A further recruitment process for the two senior officers is underway.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The salary for the Chief Executive is currently £142,663-£148,485. In addition, a 1.31% increase to the top of the grade is proposed with revised salary points of £142,251, £142,251 and £150,000. The costs are covered 50:50 between Bromsgrove District Council and Redditch Borough Council.
- 4.2 Increasing the bottom of the Chief Executive grade was also assessed but as this links to all management grades there would be a knock-on impact on employee budgets of £70-80,000.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Local Authorities have powers to create a joint committee pursuant to S101 and 102 of the Local Government Acts 1972 and all other relevant legal powers.
- 5.2 Joint non-executive committees are subject to the political proportionality requirements imposed by the Local Government and the Housing Act 1989.
- 5.3 It is a legal requirement that the appointment of the Head of Paid Service and statutory officers is made by full Council. This is set on in the relevant regulations (The Local Authorities) Standing Orders Regulations 2001 (as amended) Schedule 1 Part II which are

reproduced in the Officer Employment Rules at Part 17 of the Constitution.

- 5.4 The Council is required to nominate an officer under section 151 of the Local Government Act 1972 to be responsible for the proper administration of its financial affairs. The relevant wording states:- 'without prejudice to section 111 above, every local authority shall make arrangements for the proper administration of their financial affairs and shall secure that one of their officers has responsibility for the administration of those affairs'.
- 5.5 Section 6 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 further sets out that (1) on and after the commencement day the Common Council shall (a) make arrangements for the proper administration of such of its financial affairs as relate to it in its capacity as a local authority, police authority, or port health authority and (b) secure that one of its officers has responsibility for the administration of those affairs'.
- 5.6 Section 113 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988 requires that the officer appointed as the Chief Finance Officer (CFO) must be a member of a specified accountancy body.

6. OTHER - IMPLICATIONS

Relevant Strategic Purpose

- 6.1 Effective financial management underpins all the Council's operations and achievement of strategic purposes.
- 6.2 The appointment of a Head of Paid Service and S151 Officer will ensure there is stability and continuity.
- 6.3 This continuity and stability will assist the Council in terms of being an effective and sustainable authority moving forward.

Climate Change Implications

- 6.4 There are no specific climate change implications.

Equalities and Diversity Implications

- 6.5 The report is about joint decision making for the appointment of statutory officers and therefore does not directly impact on any protected characteristics. There are no known equalities implications arising from the options outlined in this report.

7. RISK MANAGEMENT

7.1 These proposals seek to reduce risk for each Council by the provision of a single decision-making process to enable a consistent and co-ordinated approach to the appointment of statutory officers.

7.2 Failure to recruit to the Head of Paid Service position could lead to:-

- A deterioration in ensuring the Council's priorities are clear and translated into effective service delivery.
- A gap in leadership and direction to staff and positioning each organisation to meet current and future challenges.
- A diminution of the Council's corporate statutory and policy direction alongside the desired organisational culture.

7.3 Failure to recruit to the Section 151/Deputy Chief Executive position could lead to:-

- A failure to comply with the legal requirement for the Council to have a Section 151 Officer in place after expiry of the fixed term arrangements beyond 30th November 2024.
- A failure to maintain the financial health and integrity of both councils.
- Potential adverse findings from external audit and inspection bodies.

7.4 Both the roles of Head of Paid Service and Section 151 officers are pivotal roles to ensure the Council operates effectively in accordance with legal and regulatory requirements. Failure to do so could have far reaching consequences on the Council's governance, operational, financial and reputational risks.

8. APPENDICES and BACKGROUND PAPERS

Appendix 1: Joint Appointments Committee – terms of reference

Appendix 2: Pay Structure Amendment Report

Appendix 3: Pay Policy - Updated

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Appendix 1

REDDITCH BOROUGH COUNCIL AND BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

JOINT APPOINTMENTS COMMITTEE

COMPOSITION AND TERMS OF REFERENCE

Status

The Joint Appointments Committee is a joint committee of Redditch Borough Council (RBC) and Bromsgrove District Council (BDC) established in accordance with Section 102 (1)(B) of The Local Government Act 1972.

The purpose of the JAC is to enable the two Councils to undertake a joint recruitment process for the appointment of statutory officers.

Members

The Joint Appointments Committee shall comprise of the respective Leaders of both Councils plus **4** members appointed by RBC and **4** members appointed by BDC. Only those members who have undertaken appropriate training may sit on the Committee.

Appointments shall be made in accordance with the Local Government (Committees and Political Groups) Regulations 1990.

All members of the Committee must have undertaken appropriate training on recruitment and selection with the respective Council, prior to participating in the recruitment process.

Quorum

The quorum of the Joint Appointments Committee shall be **[TBC]** (subject to each Council being represented at a meeting by at least 1 member).

Procedure Rules applicable

[TBC]

Venue and frequency of meetings

Meetings will be held as and when required. The venue for the meetings shall normally alternate between the two Councils with the host Leader Chairing the meetings.

Chairman

The Joint Appointments Committee shall be chaired alternately between the respective Leaders.

Substitute

Substitutes shall not be appointed.

Voting

Any matter will be decided by a simple majority of those Members of the Joint Appointments Committee present and voting at the time the question is put. A vote shall be taken either by show of

hands, or if there is no dissent, by the affirmation of the meeting. In the event of a tie in voting, the Host Chair will have a second and casting vote.

Functions

The purpose of the functions of the JAC are:-

Appointment of Chief Executive/Head of Paid Service

- (a) Subject to (b) below, to undertake and determine on behalf of the Councils the recruitment and selection of the Joint Chief Executive/Head of Paid Service, including the final approval of the terms and conditions of employment (based on current provisions) for that post.
- (b) The final decision as to the appointment of the Joint Chief Executive/Head of Paid Service shall be reserved to full meetings of both Councils and subject to no material or well-founded objection to the making of an offer of appointment being received by either the Leader on behalf of the RBC Executive or the Leader on behalf of BDC Cabinet.
- (c) To confirm into post or otherwise, the successful candidate following any probationary or trial period.
- (d) To be responsible for ad-hoc employment matters affecting any Joint Statutory Officer posts, except for any disciplinary matters which would be determined by the Statutory Officers' Disciplinary Panel.

Appointment of Joint Statutory Officer posts

- (a) Subject to (b) below, to undertake and determine on behalf of the Councils the process for the appointment of any Joint Statutory Officer posts.
- (b) The final decision as to the appointment of any Joint Statutory Officer posts shall be reserved to full meetings of both councils and subject to no material or well-founded objections to the making of an offer of appointment being received by either Leader.
- (c) To be responsible for ad-hoc employment matters affecting any Joint Statutory Officer posts except for any disciplinary matters which would be determined by the Statutory Officers' Disciplinary Panel.

Appendix 2 - Pay Structure

The Council's pay and grading structure comprises of grades 1 – 11. These are followed by grades for Managers 1 - 2, Assistant Director 1, Assistant Director 2, Director WRS, Executive Director, Deputy Chief Executive and then Chief Executive.

Please note the Head of Services have recently been renamed to Assistant Directors and are referred to as such in this report.

Within each grade there are a number of salary / pay points. Up to and including grade 11 scale, at spinal column point 43, the Council uses the nationally negotiated pay spine. Salary points above this are locally determined. The Council's Pay structure is set out below.

All Council posts are allocated to a grade within this pay structure, based on the application of a Job Evaluation process. Where posts are identified as being potentially too 'large' and 'complex' for this majority scheme, they will be double tested evaluated using the Hay scheme, and where appropriate, will be taken into the Hay scheme to identify levels of pay.

The Hay grades are calculated as a percentage (score based) on the Chief Executive role. This has meant that as the Chief Exec pay has increased, in accordance with national pay bargaining arrangements, the Hay grade salaries have increased and have pulled further away from the top of the NJC, resulting in an £11,000 difference between the two schemes.

It is proposed that a new HAY grade is introduced to bridge the existing gap between the Grade 11 and existing HAY Graded roles, this new grade would sit just below the existing Hay 1 Grade and will enable roles that exceed the NJC scheme but that are smaller than our existing HAY roles.

The proposed new grade is highlighted below. We are advised that most Councils have increased grades to accommodate the largest management roles.

If approved, the Pay Structure and Pay Policy would be amended to reflect this change along with the proposed change to the Head of Paid Service salary, if approved.

Pay Grades

Grade	Spinal Column Points		Nationally determined rates	
			Minimum £	Maximum £
1	2	2	22,366	22,366

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2	2	5	22,366	23,500
3	5	9	23,500	25,119
4	9	14	25,119	27,334
5	14	19	27,334	29,777
6	19	24	29,777	33,024
7	25	30	33,945	38,223
8	30	34	38,223	42,403
9	34	37	42,403	45,441
10	37	40	45,441	48,474
11	40	43	48,474	51,515
Manager Grade HAY	Hay evaluated	38 %	54,056	56,239
Manager Hay Grade 1	Hay evaluated	43%	62,548	65,015
Manager Hay Grade 2	Hay evaluated	45%	64,993	67,603
Assistant Director 1	Hay evaluated	51%	73,833	76,766
Assistant Director 2	Hay evaluated	61%	87,877	91,383
Director of WRS	Hay evaluated	68%	98,168	101,688
Executive Director	Hay evaluated	74%	108,037	112,208
Deputy Chief Executive & 151	Hay evaluated	80%	114,444	118,843
Chief Executive	Hay evaluated	100%	142,251	150,000

APPENDIX 3

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL PAY POLICY STATEMENT

Introduction and Purpose

1. Under section 112 of the Local Government Act 1972, the Council has the “power to appoint officers on such reasonable terms and conditions as authority thinks fit”. This pay policy statement sets out the Council’s approach to pay policy in accordance with the requirements of Section 38 of the Localism Act 2011. It shall apply for the financial year 2023 and each subsequent financial year, until amended.
2. The purpose of the statement is to provide transparency with regard to the Council’s approach to setting the pay of its employees by identifying;
 - a. the methods by which salaries of all employees are determined;
 - b. the detail and level of remuneration of its most senior staff i.e. ‘chief officers’, as defined by the relevant legislation;
 - c. the Committee(s) responsible for ensuring the provisions set out in this statement are applied consistently throughout the Council and for recommending any amendments to the full Council
3. Once approved by the full Council, this policy statement will come into immediate effect and will be subject to review on a minimum of an annual basis, in accordance with the relevant legislation prevailing at that time.

Legislative Framework

4. In determining the pay and remuneration of all of its employees, the Council will comply with all relevant employment legislation. This includes the Equality Act 2010, Part Time Employment (Prevention of Less Favourable Treatment) Regulations 2000, The Agency Workers Regulations 2010 and where relevant, the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Earnings) Regulations. With regard to the equal pay requirements contained within the Equality Act, the Council ensures there is no pay discrimination within its pay structures and that all pay differentials can be objectively justified through the use of equality proofed Job Evaluation mechanisms. These directly relate salaries to the requirements, demands and responsibilities of the role.

Pay Structure

5. The Council’s pay and grading structure comprises grades 1 – 11. These are followed by grades for Managers 1 - 2, Assistant Director 1, Assistant Director 2, Director WRS, Executive Director, Deputy Chief Executive and then Chief Executive; all of which arose following the introduction of shared services with Redditch Borough Council.

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6. Within each grade there are a number of salary / pay points. Up to and including grade 11 scale, at spinal column point 43, the Council uses the nationally negotiated pay spine. Salary points above this are locally determined. The Council's Pay structure is set out below.

Grade	Spinal Column Points		Nationally determined rates	
			Minimum £	Maximum £
1	2	2	22,366	22,366
2	2	5	22,366	23,500
3	5	9	23,500	25,119
4	9	14	25,119	27,334
5	14	19	27,334	29,777
6	19	24	29,777	33,024
7	25	30	33,945	38,223
8	30	34	38,223	42,403
9	34	37	42,403	45,441
10	37	40	45,441	48,474
11	40	43	48,474	51,515
Manager Hay	Hay Evaluated	38%	54,056	56,239
Manager Hay Grade 1	Hay evaluated	43%	62,548	65,015
Manager Hay Grade 2	Hay evaluated	45%	64,993	67,603
Assistant Director 1	Hay evaluated	51%	73,833	76,766
Assistant Director 2	Hay evaluated	61%	87,877	91,383
Director of WRS	Hay evaluated	68%	98,168	101,688
Executive Director	Hay evaluated	74%	108,037	112,208
Deputy Chief Executive & 151	Hay evaluated	80%	114,444	118,843

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Chief Executive	Hay evaluated	100%	142,251	150,000
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7. All Council posts are allocated to a grade within this pay structure, based on the application of a Job Evaluation process. Posts at Managers and above are evaluated by an external assessor using the Hay Job Evaluation scheme. Where posts are introduced as part of a shared service, and where these posts are identified as being potentially too 'large' and 'complex' for this majority scheme, they will be double tested under the Hay scheme, and where appropriate, will be taken into the Hay scheme to identify levels of pay. This scheme identifies the salary for these posts based on a percentage of Chief Executive Salary (for ease of presentation these are shown to the nearest whole % in the table above). Posts below this level (which are the majority of employees) are evaluated under the "Gauge" Job Evaluation process.
8. In common with the majority of authorities the Council is committed to the Local Government Employers national pay bargaining framework in respect of the national pay spine and annual cost of living increases negotiated with the trade unions.
9. All other pay related allowances are the subject of either nationally or locally negotiated rates, having been determined from time to time in accordance with collective bargaining machinery and/or as determined by Council policy. In determining its grading structure and setting remuneration levels for all posts, the Council takes account of the need to ensure value for money in respect of the use of public expenditure, balanced against the need to recruit and retain employees who are able to meet the requirements of providing high quality services to the community; delivered effectively and efficiently and at all times those services are required.
10. New appointments will normally be made at the minimum of the relevant grade, although this can be varied where necessary to secure the best candidate. From time to time it may be necessary to take account of the external pay market in order to attract and retain employees with particular experience, skills and capacity. Where necessary, the Council will ensure the requirement for such is objectively justified by reference to clear and transparent evidence of relevant market comparators, using appropriate data sources available from within and outside the local government sector.
11. For staff not on the highest point within the salary scale there is a system of annual progression to the next point on the band.

Senior Management Remuneration

12. For the purposes of this statement, senior management means 'chief officers' as defined within S43 of the Localism Act. The posts falling within the statutory definition are set out below, with details of their basic salary as at 1st April 2023 (assuming no inflationary increase for these posts).

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13. Bromsgrove District Council is managed by a senior management team who manage shared services across both Bromsgrove District and Redditch Borough Councils. All of the posts listed below have been job evaluated on this basis, with the salary costs for these posts split equally between both Councils.

Title	% of Chief executive salary	Pay range (minimum) £	Pay range (maximum) £	Incremental points	Cost to Bromsgrove Borough Council £
Chief Executive	100%	142,251	148,056	2	74028
Deputy Chief Executive & S151	80%	114,444	118843	2	59,421
Executive Director o	74%	108,037	112,208	3	54,018
Director Worcestershire Regulatory Services	68%	98,168	101,688	3	<i>This is a shared post across 6 district Authorities at a cost of £16,948 each</i>
Assistant Director Finance and Customer Services	61%	87,877	91,383	3	45,691
Assistant Director Planning, Regeneration and Leisure Services	61%	87,877	91,383	3	45,691
Assistant Director Transformation, Organisational Development	61%	87,877	91,383	3	45,691

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and Digital Services					
Assistant Director Legal, Democratic and Property Services	61%	87,877	91,383	3	45,691
Assistant Director Environmental and Housing Property Services	61%	87,877	91,383	3	44146
Assistant Director Community and Housing Services	61%	87,877	91,383	3	45,691

Recruitment of Chief Officers

14. The Council's policy and procedures with regard to recruitment of chief officers is set out within the Officer Employment Procedure Rules as set out in the Council's Constitution. When recruiting to all posts the Council will take full and proper account of its own equal opportunities, recruitment and redeployment Policies. The determination of the remuneration to be offered to any newly appointed chief officer will be in accordance with the pay structure and relevant policies in place at the time of recruitment. Where the Council is unable to recruit to a post at the designated grade, it will consider the use of temporary market forces supplements in accordance with its relevant policies.
15. Where the Council remains unable to recruit chief officers under a contract of service, or there is a need for interim support to provide cover for a vacant substantive chief officer post, the Council will, where necessary, consider and utilise engaging individuals under 'contracts for service'. These will be sourced through a relevant procurement process ensuring the council is able to demonstrate the maximum value for money benefits from competition in securing the relevant service. The Council does not currently have any Chief Officers under such arrangements.

Performance-Related Pay and Bonuses – Chief Officers

16. The Council does not apply any bonuses or performance related pay to its chief officers. Any progression through the incremental scale of the relevant grade is subject to satisfactory performance which is assessed on an annual basis.

Additions to Salary of Chief Officers (applicable to all staff)

17. In addition to the basic salary for the post, all staff may be eligible for other payments under the Council's existing policies. Some of these payments are chargeable to UK Income Tax and do not solely constitute reimbursement of expenses incurred in the fulfilment of duties. The list below shows some of the kinds of payments made.
- a. reimbursement of mileage. At the time of preparation of this statement, the Council pays an allowance of 45p per mile for all staff, with additional or alternative payments for carrying passengers or using a bicycle;
 - b. professional fees. The Council pays for or reimburses the cost of one practicing certificate fee or membership of a professional organisation provided it is relevant to the post that an employee occupies within the Council.
 - c. long service awards. The Council pays staff an additional amount if they have completed 25 years of service and having completed 40 years service.
 - d. honoraria, in accordance with the Council's policy on salary and grading. Generally, these may be paid only where a member of staff has performed a role at a higher grade;
 - e. fees for returning officer and other electoral duties, such as acting as a presiding officer of a polling station. These are fees which are identified and paid separately for local government elections, elections to the UK Parliament and EU Parliament and other electoral processes such as referenda;
 - f. pay protection – where a member of staff is placed in a new post and the grade is below that of their previous post, for example as a result of a restructuring, pay protection at the level of their previous post is paid for the first 12 months. In exceptional circumstance pay protection can be applied for greater than 12 months with the prior approval of the Chief Executive.
 - g. market forces supplements in addition to basic salary where identified and paid separately;
 - h. salary supplements or additional payments for undertaking additional responsibilities such as shared service provision with another local authority or in respect of joint bodies, where identified and paid separately;
 - i. attendance allowances.

Payments on Termination

18. The Council's approach to discretionary payments on termination of employment of chief officers prior to reaching normal retirement age is set out within its policy statement in accordance with Regulations 5 and 6 of the Local Government (Early Termination of Employment) (Discretionary Compensation) Regulations 2006 and Regulations 12 and 13 of the Local Government Pension Scheme (Benefits, Membership and Contribution) Regulations 2007.

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19. Any other payments falling outside the provisions or the relevant periods of contractual notice shall be subject to a formal decision made by the full Council or relevant elected members, committee or panel of elected members with delegated authority to approve such payments.
20. Redundancy payments are based upon an employee's actual weekly salary and, in accordance with the Employee Relations Act 1996, will be up to 30 weeks, depending upon length of service and age.

Publication

21. Upon approval by the full Council, this statement will be published on the Council's website. In addition, for posts where the full time equivalent salary is at least £50,000, the Council's Annual Statement of Accounts will include a note on Officers Remuneration setting out the total amount of:
 - a. Salary, fees or allowances paid to or receivable by the person in the current and previous year;
 - b. Any bonuses so paid or receivable by the person in the current and previous year;
 - c. Any sums payable by way of expenses allowance that are chargeable to UK income tax;
 - d. Any compensation for loss of employment and any other payments connected with termination;
 - e. Any benefits received that do not fall within the above.

Lowest Paid Employees

22. The Council's definition of lowest paid employees is persons employed under a contract of employment with the Council on full time (37 hours) equivalent salaries in accordance with the minimum spinal column point currently in use within the Council's grading structure. As at 1st April 2023 this is £22,366 per annum.
23. The Council also employs apprentices (or other such categories of workers) who are not included within the definition of 'lowest paid employees' (as they are employed under a special form of employment contract; which is a contract for training rather than actual employment).
24. The relationship between the rate of pay for the lowest paid and chief officers is determined by the processes used for determining pay and grading structures as set out earlier in this policy statement.
25. The statutory guidance under the Localism Act recommends the use of pay multiples as a means of measuring the relationship between pay rates across the workforce and that of senior managers, as included within the Hutton 'Review of Fair Pay in the Public Sector' (2010). The Hutton report was asked by Government to explore the case for a fixed limit on dispersion of pay through a requirement that no public sector manager can earn more than 20 times the lowest paid person in the organisation. The report concluded that "it would not be fair or

wise for the Government to impose a single maximum pay multiple across the public sector". The Council accepts the view that the relationship to median earnings is a more relevant measure and the Government's Code of Recommended Practice on Data Transparency recommends the publication of the ratio between highest paid salary and the median average salary of the whole of the authority's workforce.

26. As part of its overall and ongoing monitoring of alignment with external pay markets, both within and outside the sector, the Council will use available benchmark information as appropriate.

Accountability and Decision Making

28. In accordance with the Constitution of the Council, the Council is responsible for setting the policy relating to the recruitment, pay, terms and conditions and severance arrangements for employees of the Council. Decisions about individual employees are delegated to the Chief Executive.
29. The Appointments Committee is responsible for recommending to Council matters relating to the appointment of the Head of Paid Service (Chief Executive), Monitoring Officer, Section 151 Officer and Chief Officers as defined in the Local Authorities (Standing Orders) Regulations 2001 (as amended);
30. For the Head of Paid Service, Monitoring Officer and the Chief Finance Officer, the Statutory Officers Disciplinary Action Panel considers and decides on matters relating to disciplinary action.



Overview and Scrutiny **Annual Report**

2023-2024



Bromsgrove
District Council

www.bromsgrove.gov.uk

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OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT 2023-2024

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FOREWORD FROM THE CHAIRMAN

The first year of the new council has been a challenging one inasmuch as the number of task groups and the workload in general. In addition, the Board managed to deliver the most significant changes to the constitution efficiently and on time.

There is no doubt the following year will be just as challenging which will require the number of meetings to increase to ensure scrutiny is carried out in an efficient and robust manner.

I would like to thank all members of the Board that have committed their time and energy to the tasks we were confronted with and of course all those who took part in task groups.

I also realise the amount of work this has placed on our officers and hopefully capacity in this area will increase in the coming year, in recognition of the officer's workload.

Councillor Peter McDonald
Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Board

INTRODUCTION

We are pleased to present the Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report which outlines our work during 2023-2024 (this covers the municipal year from May 2023 to April 2024) and provides general information on the overview and scrutiny processes at Bromsgrove District Council.

Overview and Scrutiny is a key part of the democratic decision-making process in local Councils, where elected Councillors outside of the Cabinet can contribute to shaping Council policy, community well-being and accountability. This is done by reviewing Council services and policies, community issues and key decisions and making recommendations for improvement.

The four key principles of Overview and Scrutiny, as defined by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) the lead organisation supporting Overview and Scrutiny in the country, are:

- provide constructive “critical friend” challenge
- amplify the voice and concerns of the public
- be led by independent people who take responsibility for their role
- drive improvement in public services.

The Members of the Board consider these principles when selecting topics to investigate whether it is holding the Cabinet to account, reviewing policies, policy development or scrutiny of external bodies.

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MEMBERSHIP (The Board is made up of 11 Members)



**Councillor P. M. McDonald
(Chairman)**



**Councillor S. T. Nock
(Vice-Chairman)**



Councillor A. Bailes



Councillor R. Bailes



Councillor A. M. Dale



Councillor E. M. S. Gray



Councillor R. J. Hunter



Councillor B. Kumar



Councillor S. A. Robinson



Councillor H. D. N. Rone-Clarke



Councillor J. D. Stanley

THE ROLE OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

Overview and Scrutiny is a key part of the Council's political structure, and it plays a vital role in improving the services that people of the District use. It does not just look at the way the Council carries out its services, it can look at anything which affects the lives of people within the District, and it allows citizens to have a greater say in Council matters.

Overview and Scrutiny allows Councillors to review and scrutinise decisions, look at existing practices and make recommendations to help ensure the residents of Bromsgrove District receive excellent services. The aim is to ensure Overview and Scrutiny adds value to the Council's decision-making process and makes a positive contribution towards policy development.

The detailed terms of reference and procedure rules for the Overview and Scrutiny Board can be found at Part 5 and Part 12 of the Council's Constitution. The Council's Constitution can be accessed by using the following link.

[Link to the Constitution of Bromsgrove District Council](#)

(Please click on the latest date to access the most recent version of the Council's constitution).

Meetings

Throughout 2023-24, Overview and Scrutiny Board meetings had been taking place in person and were open to the public to attend at Parkside Hall in Bromsgrove. Meetings are live streamed if there is significant local interest in the items being considered at Overview and Scrutiny Board meetings. Meetings of scrutiny Task Groups and Working Groups continue to be held remotely, since these meetings are private.

REPORTS CONSIDERED BY THE BOARD

The Board continues to receive updates in order to monitor the progress of recommendations it has made, with the recommendations made throughout this year outlined in this report. This contains both recommendations put forward by Task Groups and accepted by the Cabinet, together with recommendations put forward by the Board itself. In respect of Task Groups, the Board does, where necessary, receive an update report 12 months following acceptance of its recommendations.

During the course of the year the Board had made a number of recommendations. There has been continued support from the relevant Portfolio Holders this year, with regular attendance at Overview and Scrutiny meetings in relation to reports concerning Portfolio Holders' areas of responsibility. This has given the Portfolio Holders an opportunity to hear first-hand the debate and ideas that the Board has put forward. On a number of occasions, whilst the Board has not made any recommendations in respect of an item, it has endorsed and/or supported recommendations which were then considered by Cabinet at its meetings.

6th June 2023

Overview and Scrutiny Board Annual Report 2022-23

The Annual Report detailed and summarised the work undertaken by the Overview and Scrutiny Board in 2022-23, including the recommendations made by the Board to Cabinet throughout the year.

It was noted that 2022-23 saw a greater proportion of Overview and Scrutiny Board recommendations being accepted by Cabinet than was the case in the previous few years. It was highlighted that scrutiny had an important role in reviewing the progress of the Levelling Up Fund and UK Shared Prosperity Fund projects taking place in Bromsgrove District. It was also noted that in 2022-23 the Overview and Scrutiny Board had concluded one task group review in respect of fuel poverty.

Overview and Scrutiny Board – Recommendation Tracker for 2022-23

The Overview and Scrutiny Board Recommendations Tracker for 2022-23 was presented for Members' consideration and it was noted that the purpose of the tracker was to record the recommendations that the Board made to Cabinet throughout the year and to track the status of these recommendations.

Notice of Motion – Request to Investigate

This item followed a motion agreed unanimously at the Annual Council meeting of 24th May 2023 calling for “the Overview and Scrutiny Board to prepare a report regarding the transition of the Council from a Cabinet System to that of a Committee System. The report to be presented to an Extraordinary Meeting of the Council to be held in September.”

The Overview and Scrutiny Board agreed to nominate Councillor P. M. McDonald as the Chairman of the Governance Systems Review Task Group, and agreed that the remaining four positions on the Task Group be allocated equally to all political groups represented on the Council (i.e. 1 position per political group).

Finance and Budget Working Group – Membership Report

The Overview and Scrutiny Board appointed the Chairman and Members to the Finance and Budget Working Group. It was noted that the Chairman of the Group had traditionally been the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Board and Members agreed that this arrangement should continue for 2023-24.

It was noted that in addition five additional members of the Board plus the Chairman of the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee would be represented on the Finance and Budget Working Group as per the Terms of Reference. The Members appointed to the Finance and Budget Working Group were: Councillor P. M. McDonald (Chairman), Councillor D. J. Nicholl (as Chairman of Audit, Standards and Governance Committee, and Councillors R. Bailes, R. J. Hunter, S. T. Nock, S. A. Robinson, and H. D. N. Rone-Clarke.

10th July 2023

Governance Systems Review – Presentation from Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS)

The Representative from the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny delivered a detailed presentation on the governance system options available to local authorities. The Board was advised that no governance system was inherently better or worse but instead the right governance option for an authority depended on local circumstances.

The main features of governance systems available to local authorities in England were outlined including potential advantages and disadvantages of choosing each option.

The legal process of implementing changes to the governance arrangements of a local authority was discussed. Members were informed that the Localism Act provided local authorities with the option to change their governance arrangements and there were two ways through which local authorities could make the change which were outlined.

There was a detailed discussion with respect of the presentation including about the possibility of reverting back to a previous governance system – it was explained in this regard that 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. However, in the second case, any decision to revert back to previous governance arrangements could only be made via a referendum.

It was also discussed the position on making adjustments within an existing governance system model – 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 (i.e. adopted a limited hybrid model for example). Therefore, the authority would not need to wait for five years (or ten years in case of referendum option) before making another governance change. This applied as long as no change was made to the governance system arrangement itself.

Scrutiny Investigation Proposal – Blue Badge Holders Parking

A detailed presentation was provided on the current system for Blue Badge holders parking and income projections for the Council if free parking to Blue Badge holders was offered.

Following the presentation, arguments were provided by Members as to the potential advantages and disadvantages of offering the free parking as well as discussion about the evidence of need for free Blue Badge parking.

The Overview and Scrutiny Board decided to refer the proposal for free Blue Badge Holder parking for further discussion by the Finance and Budget Working Group (a sub-group of the Overview and Scrutiny Board).

Corporate Peer Challenge Action Plan – Pre-Scrutiny

The Deputy Chief Executive Officer provided a presentation on the Corporate Peer Challenge – Action Plan and in doing so explained that the report contained the Local Government Association (LGA) Corporate Peer Review Challenge feedback and six key recommendations, together with the Council's written response to those recommendations.

It was highlighted that the Corporate Peer Challenge provided an opportunity and to consider and reflect on areas of improvement and for both the shared service authorities, Bromsgrove and Redditch Councils. The Corporate Peer Challenge was requested by Bromsgrove District Council at its full Council meeting in December 2022, primarily in response to the Section 24 notice (for non-delivery of financial statements for 2020-21).

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

Finance and Budget Working Group – Update

A verbal report was provided of the meeting of Finance and Budget Working Group that took place on 7th July 2023. It was reported that the Group 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. It was reported that the main item of discussion with respect of this was in relation to the Council's key decision threshold. The authority's current key decision threshold was £50,000 and any procurement above had to be reported via a full report to Cabinet.

It was noted that this key decision thresholds was unusually low compared to many authorities, and as there were a large number of procurements that crossed the threshold and not enough resources, including officer resource, there were instances where reports were not being submitted 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. It was outlined that information about all procurements above £500 was published on the Council's website.

The Group also looked at the Burcot Lane Housing Development. It was noted that the Group concluded that the sale of the development to a housing company owned by the District Council was the best way forward in relation to the 37 private rented units in the development. These would be put on for rent 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 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.

11th September 2023

Grass Verge Maintenance – Pre-Scrutiny

It was noted that this Cabinet report followed the Council motion of 20th July 2022, where it was agreed to change the approach to management of verges 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.

It was noted that this would not be a one size fits all approach, instead the Council would work with local residents and elected members to find an approach that worked in 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.

There would be a capital and revenue investment required to implement the new regime. It was detailed that the additional capital investment that was requested for 2023/24 financial year would be reduced from £62,100 to £32,100 as decision on whether a second flail deck mower was needed would be made in the 2024/25 financial year. The capital investment detailed above would support reduction in budget for the existing mowing fleet at an estimated saving of £34,000 on the capital replacement budget over the next three years.

Revenue investment required to support the delivery of the grass cutting programme would be £28,000 per year over the next three financial years.

Governance Systems Task Group – Final Report

The final report of the Governance Systems Task Group was submitted to Overview and Scrutiny Board. It was noted that the 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. There would be an opportunity for all elected members to consider the report and the recommendations at an Extraordinary meeting of the Council on 20th September 2023.

During a detailed discussion, the Board considered various points, including a proposal to reconvene the Task Group to consider evidence from at least one second tier local authority that had a committee system before the it finalised its recommendation(s). This recommendation was lost on being put to the vote.

Members also discussed the need to embed any governance change. In this regard, Members were discussed the length of time any proposed change in governance structure would have to be in place for. Most Members felt that the hybrid Leader and Cabinet suggested in the Final Report 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. The MoU would be introduced between all political group leaders to agree in principle to maintain the arrangements agreed for at least the next four years.

Following the discussion, it was RECOMMENDED that:

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

- a) *Agree changes to the Council's constitution during the 2023/24 municipal year, as detailed in the report.*

- b) *Introduce working protocols designed to embed more collegiate working in the Council's governance culture.*
- c) *Introduce Cabinet Advisory Panels.*
- d) *Take action to improve communication with Members.*
- e) *Introduce a Memorandum of Understanding between all political group leaders to maintain these working arrangements for at least the next four years.*

The final report recommendations were subsequently considered by Cabinet on 13th September 2023. The Cabinet recommended an additional recommendation to those listed above. The final set of recommendations at the Extraordinary Meeting of Council on 20th September 2023 was as follow:

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

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

Worcestershire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee – Update

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

16th October 2023

Agile Working Presentation

A presentation on the Council's Agile Working policy was provided. It was explained that the policy was launched in June 2023 and applied to all permanent and fixed term contracted employees of the Council. There were clear parameters within the policy and at service level to ensure that agile working was adjusted as and when required to ensure that it did not impact negatively on the priority objective of serving residents.

Three key areas had been covered since the launch of the policy – customers, staff, and infrastructure. The project team were working with service managers to ensure that the policy was adopted and working. Fourth tier managers were being surveyed and that would be followed up with meetings to explore operational models, policies

and procedures, staff training and development, communication, infrastructure, and service measures. The Council remained committed to supporting staff health and wellbeing whilst working in a different way.

It was noted that a small project team had taken on board feedback about Members' about officer responsiveness to Members. This would be reported to the Strategic Management Team. It was emphasised that officers must be responsive and proactive to Members.

It was emphasised that customers remained at the heart of how the Council's services operated whilst officers were developing and implementing the agile working policy.

Community Shop Provision in the District – Overview

The Board received a presentation on food bank provision across the District. Details of the known organisations that were running foodbanks and/or community supermarkets in the District were given, together with known statistics about the number of users, referral models and other details.

Following the discussion, Members agreed that it would be appropriate to establish a Task Group to investigate the food banks provision in the District, including what models of operation could work best in the District.

Worcestershire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee – Update

The Representative on the Worcestershire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC), Councillor B. Kumar, provided an update on the items discussed by HOSC at its meeting on 11th October 2023. This included Hillcrest Mental Health Ward, Children's Services (paediatric audiology), and Health Services Winter Planning.

20th November 2023

Governance Systems Review – Implementation Progress Update

Details of the work undertaken to date by officers to implement the recommendations made by the Governance Systems Task Group were provided.

Members were asked to approve (for recommendation to Cabinet and Full Council) the draft terms of reference for the Cabinet Advisory Groups and the cross-party Memorandum of Understanding in respect of the hybrid Leader and Cabinet governance arrangements.

It was highlighted that the role of Cabinet Advisory Groups would be clearly distinct from that of the challenge committees - the Overview and Scrutiny Board and the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee. It was also noted that if approved the dates for the meetings of Cabinet Advisory Groups would be built into the 2024-25 meetings calendar.

During consideration of this item, the Board requested that some amendments be made to both the proposed terms of reference for the Cabinet Advisory Groups and the cross-party Memorandum of Understanding. It was agreed that the following should be recommended:

- 1) *The terms of reference for the Cabinet Advisory Group be approved, subject to addition of Paragraph 12 which would read as follows: “Memorandum of Understanding also applies”.*
- 2) *The proposed Memorandum of Understanding concerning cross party working be approved, subject to an amendment to point 5 of the Principles section to read as follows: “Recognise and respect that each individual member can contribute to decisions that are taken and should be involved and able to provide their opinion before a decision is taken”.*

These recommendations were subsequently considered at meetings of Cabinet (22nd November 2023) and full Council (6th December 2023) and a slightly amended wording to these recommendations was agreed as follow:

- 1) *The terms of reference for the Cabinet Advisory Groups be approved, subject to addition of Paragraph 12 which would read as follows: “Memorandum of Understanding also applied when taking part in a Cabinet Advisory Group”; and*
- 2) *The proposed Memorandum of Understanding concerning cross party working be approved, subject to an amendment to point 5 of the Principles section to read as follows: “Recognise and respect that each individual Member can contribute to decisions that are taken and should be given the opportunity to be involved and able to provide their opinion before a decision be taken.”*

Worcestershire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee – Update

The Representative on the Worcestershire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC), Councillor B. Kumar, provided an update with respect of the HOSC meeting which took place on 13th November 2023. It was reported that the main item on the agenda at that meeting was a 12 month review of Public Health.

Agile Working Policy – Progress Brief on Addressing Queries Raised at the Last Meeting

A response to Members’ questions with regard to the Agile Working Policy was provided in the form of a briefing note. The responses were discussed and a number of actions were requested which included:

- To receive updates on the work of Business Improvement Team to look at the best ways the Council could collect feedback and measure satisfaction across all customer facing services;
- Investigate how Bromsgrove District Council could link up services with Worcestershire County Council to enable a more seamless experience for residents;

- Provide a list of the agreed and statutory response times that Council Officers were bound by when responding to members of the public;
- Enquire into the possibility of regular data on response times to be shared as part of the Council's suite of performance measures;
- Make induction / key contact documents available to Members on Microsoft Teams in addition to the current formats;
- Investigate how to make better use of Microsoft Teams for Member-Staff communication in general.

Food Bank and Community Supermarket Provision Task Group – Membership Report

The following membership of this task group was agreed: Councillors A. Bailes, E. M. S. Gray, B. Kumar, P. M. McDonald, D. J. Nicholl, and D. G. Stewart.

Notice of Motion – Request to Investigate – Future of Libraries within the District

It was agreed that Worcestershire County Council Cabinet Portfolio Holder with responsibility for library provision be invited to a meeting of Overview and Scrutiny Board when a presentation on this subject would be provided.

16th January 2024

Parking Enforcement – Service Level Agreement with Wychavon District Council

The Board considered a presentation on the parking enforcement service level agreement arrangements with Wychavon District Council (WDC). It was stated that WDC currently had responsibility over management and enforcement of On and Off-Street Parking in Bromsgrove District in addition to administrative functions around enforcement. The report as presented proposed that WDC would continue to provide parking enforcement and management service for Bromsgrove for a period of 5 years from April 2024. The report also asked that the Council's existing yearly budget for parking enforcement and management service of £242,000 be increased to £335,000 from April 2024. The proposed draft service level agreement was included as an appendix to agenda documents.

Members discussed the proposed service level agreement and expressed concerns about the proposal, raising concerns over current level of parking enforcement service delivered in the District, particularly in outlying wards. Members reported that they were receiving regular complaints from residents about anti-social parking, particularly in hotspot locations, and were therefore aware of the locations where parking enforcement was particularly needed. Members requested that they be involved in compiling a list of hotspot locations for parking enforcement and noted that a regular forum for Members meeting with parking wardens was needed.

Following a detailed discussion, the Board recommended that:

With regard to the parking enforcement service the Cabinet consider the following options: a) go out to tender for the parking enforcement contract; b) have the service delivered in-house.

Cabinet considered the proposals and agreed it would be useful for the Cabinet and Officers to explore both options proposed by the Board as part of the authority's review of parking arrangements. For this reason, Members of Cabinet suggested that the word "and" should be added to the wording of the proposal to ensure that the viability of both options would be investigated further.

After the Overview and Scrutiny Board had looked at this parking enforcement report in detail and after this consideration Cabinet was of the opinion that a strategic assessment was required in order to determine what requirements for parking enforcement service were needed.

It was agreed by Cabinet on 14th February 2024 that:

- 1) A strategic review of requirements for parking services including on and off street enforcement, be undertaken. This review would provide a Business Case based on options that would consider agreement of a longer-term SLA with WDC, tendering all or part of the service, in house delivery of the service or other options to be brought back to Cabinet for further consideration.*
- 2) Delegation be given to the interim Head of Environmental and Housing Property Services following consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Economic Development and Regeneration, and the Head of Legal, Democratic and Property Services to agree a shorter-term (18 month) SLA with WDC with an appropriate end/term to enable recommendation 1 above to take place*

Worcestershire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee – Update

The Representative on the Worcestershire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC), Councillor B. Kumar, provided an update with respect of the HOSC meeting which took place on 9th January 2024. It was reported that the main item on the agenda at that meeting were the Health Care System Plans to reduce inappropriate admissions to hospital. A detailed discussion took place including routes for patients to avoid hospital admissions. It was noted that in the current system, with backlogs in the primary care, it was impossible for many patients to avoid going to emergency department, even with the best will and effort of patients to avoid that route. It was noted that, for example, phoning NHS 111 often resulted in people being directed back to emergency department. It was commented that there was a need for more local treatment centres for minor illnesses as this would contribute to reducing demand on Accident and Emergency (A&E).

Governance Systems Review – Implementation Progress Update

Members were informed that in line with proposals detailed in the Governance Systems Task Group there were budget implications arising from this report to fund an additional Democratic Services Officer post at a cost of £40,000 per annum.

Recruitment of this Officer was subject to approval of this budget bid in the Medium Term Financial Plan Tranche 2 report.

This proposal was approved by full Council as part of the MTFP budget paper on 21st February 2024.

Finance and Budget Working Group – Update

The Chairman noted that a discussion concerning Ward Councillor Funds took place at the 12th January 2024 meeting of Finance and Budget Working Group the Group agreed that a proposal be put forward for discussion to Overview and Scrutiny Board regarding a fund of £62,000 per year to be established for Councillor Ward Budgets from 2024-25 financial year for a period of three years. The briefing paper containing a draft Bromsgrove Ward Councillor Fund pilot scheme was included in supplementary papers for this meeting, and paper copies were tabled for Members' consideration.

A detailed debate took place on the proposal. Some Members expressed concern about the possible introduction of this fund, citing the fact that the County Council divisional ward funds were not being spent to their full capacity. It was suggested that the arrangement that existed at the Council via the New Homes Bonus (NHB) Community Grants Panel would be a more appropriate solution. Through the Grants Panel, members of the public were able to apply for funding for community projects directly and applications were examined by Members who sat on the Panel. It was noted that the proposal for ward budgets as tabled would provide funds directly to elected members to spend.

Other Members thought that as detailed in the draft Ward Councillor Fund pilot scheme, there would be stringent oversight of the funding requests by ward members and a clear audit trail would be kept and requests closely monitored. Any funding request under the scheme would need to be made in writing by the Member and would need to be approved before funds could be released. The funding requests would also need to clearly evidence what the funding provided would be spent on. Spending would be open to scrutiny by the public via the Council's website. It was also noted that there were many local community projects such fund could be used for. Examples were given of helping local clubs with purchasing items of sports equipment or setting up an afterschool youth club.

Following a debate, the Board RECOMMENDED that:

the Cabinet consider, as part of the 2024/5 Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) Tranche 2, approval of the Ward Budgets proposal contained in the briefing paper now submitted, as tabled at the meeting of Overview and Scrutiny on 16th January 2024.

The Cabinet gave consideration to the recommendation and recommended to the full Council that this budget proposal should be accepted.

At the Full Council meeting on 21st February 2024, as part of the approved Medium Term Financial Plan 2024-25 (Tranche 2), it was agreed that for years 2024-25 to 2026-27:

“a new Earmarked Reserve for Ward Budgets be set up and £234k allocated to it.”

(Medium Term Financial Plan (including Treasury Management Strategy, Capital Strategy, Minimum Revenue Provision and Investment Strategy) (Tranche 2)), Resolution (6), Minute No. 96/23, Meeting of Council, Wednesday 21st February 2024)

12th February 2024

Libraries Provision – Worcestershire County Council Presentation

The Deputy Leader of Worcestershire County Council (WCC) was in attendance alongside Officers from WCC to provide a presentation on the implementation of Libraries Unlocked project and answer questions from Members of Overview and Scrutiny Board.

In the course of a detailed presentation and debate, some of the main points noted were that:

- Formal public consultation on library transformation options was undertaken in 2018-19. 2000 responses were received in addition to feedback from public meetings held across all libraries in the county. The Libraries Unlocked scheme was therefore based on and informed by customer feedback expressed in the consultation, particularly with regard to addressing barriers to customers using libraries when unstaffed and best times of day for libraries to be unstaffed.
- There were 21 libraries in Worcestershire of which 2 (Droitwich and Stourport) were adopters of the Libraries Unlocked in phase 1 of the scheme. As part of phase 2, a further 12 libraries would be considered for adoption of the Libraries Unlocked scheme.
- It was highlighted that the implementation of Libraries Unlocked at each location would be determined after a detailed stakeholder engagement, cost-benefit analysis, and formal staff consultation. It was noted that additional feasibility work was required to determine whether Libraries Unlocked could be implemented in libraries operating under Private Finance Initiative (PFI) arrangements, which applied to Alvechurch, Wythall, and Hagley libraries.
- Impact of Library Unlocked on staff including experienced librarians – It was noted that in all County libraries, all staff was experienced in customer service and library managers had to be qualified librarians. This would remain the case in libraries in which the Libraries Unlocked scheme would be introduced. In terms of staffing, the main impact for users would be that staff would be on hand for a reduced number of hours per week (and work reduced hours).
- It was reiterated that no library activities were proposed to be scrapped as part the Libraries Unlocked scheme. Individual libraries within the County retained discretion over timetabling library activities such as ‘bounce and rhyme’ sessions, the timetabling of which might be affected by the implementation of libraries unlocked.

- It was confirmed that the next phase would see Bromsgrove (Town) and Rubery libraries go ahead with the Libraries Unlocked scheme. In terms of staff hours and opening hours, it was confirmed that for Bromsgrove (town) library, staff hours would be reduced by 25 per cent and overall opening hours would increase by 50 per cent when Libraries Unlocked is introduced. For Rubery library, staff hours would reduce by 30 per cent but opening times increase by 106 per cent following Libraries Unlocked implementation. All libraries under Libraries Unlocked had an opening time of 72 hours per week.

Governance Systems Review – Implementation Progress Update

It was noted that in 2023-24 Councillors from political groups not represented on the Cabinet were serving as Chairmen of the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee and Overview and Scrutiny Board (which complied with national best practice). The Chairman of the Council was also from a political group not on Cabinet. These arrangements, however, were not currently a constitutional requirement.

It was reported that Members felt this needed to be formalized and the proposed amendments to the Committee Terms of Reference and the Council Procedure Rules, at Parts 5 and 8 of the constitution, were designed to enable the Council to continue in the future to appoint Councillors who are members of political groups not represented on the Council's Cabinet wherever possible.

It was stated that in the event that following future local elections insufficient numbers of opposition Members available to appoint to the positions of Chairmen of the Council, the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee and the Overview and Scrutiny Board respectively, provisions were made in the proposed wording of the Committee Terms of Reference and Council Procedure Rules to enable other Councillors to be appointed to those positions, thereby ensuring that Council business could continue without disruption.

It was RECOMMENDED that:

- 1) *That the proposed amendments to the Committee Terms of Reference, at Part 5 of the Constitution, in respect of provisions as to the Chairmen of the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee and the Overview and Scrutiny Board, be approved as detailed in Appendix 1 to the report;*
- 2) *That the proposed amendments to the Council Procedure Rules, at Part 8 of the Council's Constitution, in relation to the appointments of the Chairman of the Council and the Chairmen of the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee and the Overview and Scrutiny Board, be approved, as detailed in Appendix 2 to the report.*

These recommendations were recommended for full Council approval by Cabinet on 14th February 2024 and subsequently approved by full Council on 21st February 2024.

Playing Pitch Strategy – Pre-Scrutiny

A report on playing pitch strategy was presented which covered the following aspects:

- How many playing pitch facilities there were in Bromsgrove?
- What was the quality of these facilities?
- Were these facilities accessible?
- What was the current demand?
- What was the future demand up to 2040?

It was explained that the Council worked with a consultancy to ensure the exercise was undertaken in an independent and unbiased manner. In addition, a team of national governing bodies had overseen this work and Sports England acted as a supervisor and was responsible for signing off the Strategy.

It was also explained that the purposes of the Playing Pitch Strategy document were:

- To provide confidence to the Leisure Team when taking actions on playing pitches.
- To support the local planning authority in making confident decisions about protecting / enhancing provision of playing pitches in Bromsgrove.

Following the presentation of the report, Members asked questions about specific playing pitches within the District and enquired into detail of how the Strategy would assist in determining how Section 106 developer contributions. It was clarified that agreement with regard to Section 106 contributions are determined at the planning approval stage, and not decided via a Strategy, which however provided an overall framework for identifying playing pitch need in the District.

Members also enquired into costs of the consultants' work on developing the Playing Pitch Strategy. It was noted that the costs of consultants and associated work was £50,000 of which circa a quarter was the cost of producing the Strategy document itself.

The recommendations of the report were endorsed by the Board.

Notice of Motion – Request to Investigate – Actions against the impact of Impending Heatwaves

The Board agreed that a Short Sharp Review Group should be established to investigate actions that could be undertaken to protect residents from the impact of impending heatwaves. It was agreed that all Members be contacted with regard to joining the Short Sharp Review Group, with membership to be confirmed at the next meeting of the Board.

Levelling Up Funding Update

An update report was provided in respect of the Levelling Up Funding (LUF) projects within the District. It was noted that the Council had been awarded £14.1m of LUF in 2022. In addition to this, the Council had added £1.6m of its own funding.

North Worcestershire Economic Development and Regeneration (NWEDR) provided overall programme management for the Bromsgrove LUF programme. Given the changes to this arrangement in the future, plans were to be put in place on how these programmes were to progress moving forward.

A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was to be signed with Worcestershire County Council (WCC) to undertake the Public Realm works.

Members were informed that Planning application for the Market Hall site was to be considered at a Planning meeting due to take place on 19th February 2024.

The present plan for the Market Hall site would result in a completed construction date of September 2025, which was six months after the present deadline for spending of any Government LUF Grant. The Council had been in communication with Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) to seek a six-month extension to this project. This was provisionally approved by DLUHC on 5th February 2024.

(During consideration of this item, Members discussed matters that necessitated the disclosure of exempt information. It was therefore agreed to move to exclude the press and public prior to any debate on the grounds that information would be revealed Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

Termination of Shared Service Arrangement: North Worcestershire Economic Development and Regeneration – Pre-Scrutiny

The Board received a report which detailed proposals for the termination of the shared service for North Worcestershire Economic Development and Regeneration (NWeDR).

Members were informed that in the summer of 2023, the Leader of Wyre Forest District Council had approached the Leader of Bromsgrove District Council and the Leader of Redditch Borough Council, which also formed part of the shared service, to advise them of Wyre Forest District Council's intention to end the shared service agreement. This shared service had been in place for over 10 years and had provided economic development and regeneration services in the north of the county during this time.

Subsequent to this, Officers had been attending meetings with representatives of Wyre Forest District Council to discuss this matter further and, subject to an exit agreement between all parties, the shared service would cease to operate on 30th June 2024. End of terms were still being negotiated and would need to address issues such as indemnity clauses.

The Board endorsed the following recommendations as printed in the report:

- 1) *To agree that the Collaboration Agreement relating to the Provision of Economic Development and Regeneration Services should be terminated mutually under clause 15.1 (Determination of this Agreement), with effect from 30 June 2024 and that a new Exit Agreement be entered into;*

- 2) *Delegate to the Executive Director (interim) following consultation with the Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Regeneration, and Executive Director Resources to negotiate, finalise and approve the Exit Agreement and to take any other steps that arose from the termination process; and*
- 3) *That an additional budget of £72,836 be approved for the new structure.*

Recommendations 1 and 2 were approved by Cabinet on 14th February 2024 (Minute No. 78/23 refers).

Recommendation 3 above was approved by Full Council on 21st February 2024 (Minute No. 96/23 refers).

(During the consideration of this item, Members discussed matters that necessitated the disclosure of exempt information. It was therefore agreed to move to exclude the press and public prior to any debate on the grounds that information would be revealed which related to the financial and business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information) and which related to any consultations or negotiations, or contemplated consultations or negotiations, in connection with any labour relations matter arising between the authority or a Minister of the Crown and employees of, or office holders under, the authority).

11th March 2024

Governance Systems Review – Implementation Progress Update

It was reported that the next meeting of the Constitutional Review Working Group (CRWG) was due to take place on 12th March 2024. Any recommendations arising from that meeting which relate to the outcomes of the Governance systems Task Group report would be reported for the consideration of the Overview and Scrutiny Board at its April meeting.

Members queried when guidance would be released with respect of the Cabinet Advisory Group (CAG) and it was noted that this would be done in advance of the new municipal year.

Local Heritage List Strategy – Pre-Scrutiny

The Local Heritage List Strategy report was presented. During the presentation it was highlighted that this report provided an update on progress of the Local Heritage List Strategy adopted in 2016. It was noted that there had been progress in compiling the list, however, issues were faced particularly in the public engagement element of the Strategy. The report therefore asked for an updated version of the Strategy to be approved.

Members' attention was drawn to the summary of the Local Heritage List Strategy contained within the report which included information regarding the value of heritage assets to local communities and that the Bromsgrove District Plan (2017)

acknowledged the importance of adopting a Local List to formerly identify the locally important heritage assets within the District.

Officers reported that the criteria for inclusion on the Local Heritage List had been identified, and included Age, Authenticity and Rarity, Architectural interest, Historic interest, and Townscape / Villagescape / Landscape interest. Of those criteria, it was stated that in order to be included on the List, assets needed to satisfy the first criteria stated above and at least one other.

The Principal Conservation Officer stated that heritage assets identified on a local list, would be recognised by the local authority as having heritage significance, and would therefore merit consideration in planning matters. When considering planning applications which impact on heritage assets on the local list, the Local Planning Authority (LPA) would be required to take a balanced judgement having regard to the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the heritage asset, in determining the application.

In terms of how the draft lists would be presented, Officers stated that there would be a half page summary of the heritage asset, which included a brief description, the assessment of criteria and a location map of the site.

It was noted that draft lists had been prepared in respect of Beoley, Alvechurch, Belbroughton and Dodford. These lists added 140 properties to the draft Local Heritage List, and cover a diverse range of properties including houses, schools, village halls, places of worship and canal infrastructure. Work was now underway to prepare draft lists on Bromsgrove, Lickey and Blackwell and Wythall.

Following the presentation of the report, Members scrutinised the report in detail. Disappointment was expressed at the lack of involvement of ward Members in identification of local heritage assets to date and a recommendation to Cabinet was made in that regard.

Members also proposed that the final list of heritage assets should be compiled within an 18-month timeframe which was also agreed as a recommendation to Cabinet.

Recommendations were therefore made to Cabinet as follow:

- 1) *That District Ward Councillors be directly involved in the consultation process for the Local Heritage List (LHL) in their respective ward areas;*
- 2) *That the final Local Heritage List (LHL) for Bromsgrove, covering the whole district, be completed and published within the next 18 months.*

These recommendations were considered and approved by Cabinet at their meeting on 13th March 2024.

Bromsgrove Centres Action Plan Review 2024-25 – Pre-Scrutiny

The Bromsgrove Centres Action Plan Review 2024/25 was presented. It was highlighted that the Bromsgrove Centres Strategy and Action Plan 2023-2026 was approved by Members in January 2023. The Action Plan set out Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness and success of the plan. These KPIs included budget monitoring, actions, and response for certain projects.

Outstanding actions from the previous action plan would be carried forward and continued in the 2024/25 municipal year.

Following the report presentation, Members had a number of queries concerning village centres outside of Bromsgrove Town Centre, the Shopwatch scheme and its effectiveness in catching shoplifters, the Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) in Bromsgrove Town Centre and its effectiveness, and shop frontages enforcement among other matters. Following the debate, it was agreed to recommend to Cabinet that:

the action plan be named 'Bromsgrove District Centres Action Plan' to emphasise that it is targeting centres in all wards of the District.

This recommendation was accepted by Cabinet at its meeting on 13th March 2024.

Review of the work of North Worcestershire Community Safety Partnership 2022-23

Local authorities were required to scrutinise and review the work of the local Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership on an annual basis. At this meeting the work of the local crime and disorder reduction body, the North Worcestershire Community Safety Partnership (NWCSP), was scrutinised by the Board, focusing on the work undertaken by the Partnership in Bromsgrove District.

Members received a detailed presentation and held a detailed debate on the NWCSP, the core funding of NWCSP, and the grants available to the Partnership through the West Mercia Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) and how they had been spent within Bromsgrove District. An update was also received on the initiatives of the Partnership, including the Community Safety Project updates for 2023-24.

There was also a discussion regarding local initiatives, such as the Empowering Young People Project, Youth Outreach, Young Citizen's Challenge, Bromsgrove Youth Hub, and The Respect Programme.

Cost of Living Funding Proposal – Pre-Scrutiny

A presentation was provided on the funding proposal with regard to the Cost of Living. It was reported that in 2020-21 the Council allocated £50,000 to support the Community Hubs initiative. Further allocations were made in 2021-22 and 2022-23 equalling a total budget of £150,000. It was confirmed that this budget was currently sat in earmarked reserves.

In February 2020, a budget was approved by Cabinet as a revenue bid to support the development of the Worcestershire County Council (WCC) Community Hubs in libraries initiative across the District. Following a new direction of travel by WCC, this budget was never provided to the County Council. Therefore, the £150,000 funding remained within reserves.

Due to the Cost of Living crisis, the report was asking for consideration to be given to awarding this funding towards a Cost-of-Living initiative. This followed a multi-agency Cost of Living Group was established with partners such as WCC, Bromsgrove District

Housing Trust (BDHT) and other partners. Following discussions at this group, two surveys were carried out, in order to better understand the specific needs of local communities. The findings from the survey highlighted that the crisis was affecting a broad range of residents not just those on benefits or a lower income.

It was proposed that the earmarked reserve be used for one-off investments of a Citizen's Advice specialist housing adviser at £52,000, voluntary sector money adviser at £32,000, and enhancing the support of the Council's Financial Inclusion at £42,000. This would be for a trial period of 14 months with a view to the trial period informing a lottery bid by the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) to further sustain the work. If the lottery bid was successful any monies not spent on the project would be put back in to reserves.

Recommendations printed in the report were endorsed by the Board. On 13th March 2024 these recommendations were approved by Cabinet.

Finance and Budget Working Group – Update

A verbal update was provided with respect of the Finance and Budget Working Group. It was noted that the last meeting of the Group took place on 8th March 2024. It was reported that at the meeting Members were informed that there had been a continued improvement in staff turnover rates, which stood at only 8.8 per cent, significantly under the national average rate of staff turnover (15.6 per cent). The other issues highlighted by the Chairman included the Dolphin Centre redevelopment and the key decision threshold.

With reference to the Council's refuse fleet refurbishment, it was noted that there had been a reappraisal of costs. Officers explained that the company hired to undertake the refurbishment had struggled to refurbish the vehicles in time and there was now a backlog of vehicles waiting to be refurbished. It was reported that it was more viable in this context to purchase new vehicles rather than undertake refurbishment works. It was agreed that a briefing note on this subject would be submitted to the next Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting.

Impact of Heatwaves Short Sharp Review – Membership Report

The Board agreed that Councillors S. Ammar, R. Baines, B. Kumar, M. Marshall, B. McEldowney, and J. Robinson be appointed to the Impact of Heatwaves Short Sharp Review Group. The terms of reference and chairmanship were due to be agreed at the first meeting of the Group.

Worcestershire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee - Update

The Representative on the Worcestershire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC), Councillor B. Kumar, provided an update with respect of the HOSC meeting which took place on 19th February 2024. It was reported that the main item on the agenda at that meeting concerned General Practice across Herefordshire and Worcestershire Integrated Care System (ICS) area. It was reported that at that meeting data was provided on how many GP appointments were delivered but it was

found concerning that no distinction was made in the dataset between GP appointments within the last year were face-to-face and how many telephone consultations.

It was noted that patient satisfaction rates with GP services in Worcestershire were low compared to neighbouring counties / metropolitan boroughs and were continuing to decline in Worcestershire.

It was highlighted that a particular issue in Worcestershire was people being unable to get GP appointments being referred to 111. It was noted that there was no data available on how many GP patients who called 111 landing in A&E. The Representative highlighted that the Herefordshire and Worcestershire Primary Care Access Recovery Plan had two main ambitions: to tackle the '8am rush' and to enable patients to know on the day they contact their practice how their request will be managed.

22nd April 2024

The Board is due to consider the following reports at this meeting:

- Agile Working Policy – Update on Implementation
- Local Heritage List Strategy – Update on Action Plan
- Cost of Parking Enforcement Review Update
- Council Fleet Options – Briefing Note
- Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG)
- Interim Update on the Transfer of Economic Development Unit (EDU) from Wyre Forest District Council to Bromsgrove and Redditch Councils
- Governance Systems Review – Implementation Progress Update
- Foodbank Provision Task Group – Final Report
- Overview and Scrutiny Board Annual Report 2023-24

WORCESTERSHIRE HEALTH OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE (HOSC)

The Council's representative on the Worcestershire-wide Health Overview and Scrutiny must be a Member of the Overview and Scrutiny Board and is required to provide the Board with regular updates on the work being carried out.

The Board's representative for the municipal year 2023-24 was Councillor B. Kumar.

During the year Councillor B. Kumar, has provided comprehensive and informed updates on meetings of HOSC and responded to questions from Members on matters including:

- Mental Health provision in Worcestershire (including Hill Crest MH Ward)
- Children's Hearing Services
- Health Services Winter Planning
- Review of Public Health Function
- Health Care System Plans (including Urgent Community Response)
- West Midlands Ambulance Service (WMAS) calls
- Community Ambulances and Primary Care (GP) Access within Worcestershire
- Access to GP appointments
- Herefordshire and Worcestershire Primary Care Access Recovery Plan

WORKING GROUPS – UPDATE

In 2023-24 the Board continued to have a dedicated Finance and Budget Working Group. This enabled a dedicated group of Members to consider budgetary matters in both more detail and in a timelier manner and had also, when necessary, enabled Members to feed through any recommendations to Cabinet more promptly.

The terms of reference for the Finance and Budget Working Group were agreed by the Board prior to 2023-24. A review of the Working Groups, as part of the review of the overall Overview and Scrutiny Board function, will be carried out at the start of 2024-24 municipal year.

Finance & Budget Working Group

Membership: (7) Councillors P. M. McDonald (Chairman), R. Bailes, R. J. Hunter (stepped down October 2023), D. J. Nicholl, S. T. Nock, S. A. Robinson, H. D. N. Rone-Clarke.

This Group met on six occasions this year with the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Enabling in attendance at all the Group's meetings, together with the Deputy Chief Executive (Section 151 Officer) and the Head of Finance and Customer Services.

The list below contains some of the topics/reports which the Working Group has considered and gives an insight into the work that has been carried out:

- 2024-25 Budget
- Medium Term Financial Plan 2024-25 to 2026-27 – Tranche 1 and Tranche 2 Reports
- Finance and Performance Monitoring Reports
- The Financial Outturn Report
- Council Tax Empty Homes Discounts and Premiums report
- Council Tax Support Scheme
- Council Tax and Non-Domestic Rates Discretionary Relief Policy
- Council Tax and Business Rates Yield 2024-25
- Financial Recovery Plan
- Blue Badge Holders Parking Proposal
- Ward Funds Proposal

By being able to consider a number of reports in more detail and prior to their consideration at Cabinet, Members of the Board were able, via the Working Group, to play an increased part in the budget setting process.

However, Members of Overview and Scrutiny Board felt that the budget reports (Medium Term Financial Plan Tranche 1 and Tranche 2 reports) should be considered as agenda items at main meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Board from 2024-25.

TASK GROUP INVESTIGATIONS & SHORT, SHARP REVIEWS CARRIED OUT

For Task Groups The detailed final reports of all these investigations can be found on the Council's website within the Overview and Scrutiny section.

Governance Systems Task Group

Membership: (5) Councillors P. M McDonald (Chairman), A. Bailes, R. J. Hunter, E. M. S. Gray, S. Nock

The final report, recording the outcome of this Task Group's investigation can be found earlier in this report in the 'Reports Considered by the Board' section for the meeting of 11th September, Governance Systems Task Group – Final Report.

This report and its recommendations were subsequently approved at Cabinet and by Full Council at its meeting on 20th September 2023. The recommendations of the report are being implemented with the view for these to come into force at the start of the 2024-25 municipal year.

Foodbank and Community Supermarket Provision Task Group

Membership: (6) Councillors E. M. S. Gray (Chairman), A. Bailes, B. Kumar, P. M. McDonald, D. J. Nicholl, D. G. Stewart

The final report for this Group is being finalized and is due to be presented to Overview and Scrutiny Board at its meeting on 22nd April 2024.

Impact of Heatwaves Short Sharp Review

Membership: (6) Councillors M. Marshall (Chairman), R. Bailes, S. Ammar, B. Kumar, B. M. McEldowney, J. W. Robinson

This Short Sharp Review Group is currently ongoing. The next meeting of the Review Group is due to take place in the week commencing Monday 22nd April.

Conclusion

A significant amount of pre-scrutiny work has been carried out by the Board throughout the year and based on detailed discussions a number of recommendations had been made to Cabinet and Full Council. Some of these recommendations were subsequently approved by the decision-making bodies. In addition to this, the work of the the Finance and Budget Working Group has been useful in providing Members with an opportunity to look at complex finance reports in some considerable detail.

During the year, one task group investigation (the Governance Systems Review) had been concluded with a further two task group investigations (Foodbank Provision and Impact of Heatwaves) underway or close to being concluded. Through the Governance Systems Task Group, Overview and Scrutiny has made a key contribution in proposing that the Council implement a hybrid Leader and Cabinet governance model. This change is due to be implemented from the start of 2024-25 municipal year. Overall, this was a constructive year for the Overview and Scrutiny function in Bromsgrove.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Overview and Scrutiny Board Meetings

Overview and Scrutiny Board meetings are open to the public. To find out more visit our website at <http://www.bromsgrove.gov.uk/council/the-council/overview-and-scrutiny.aspx> or telephone 01527 881288 and ask to speak to the Democratic Services Officer.

Public Involvement

If you would like to have your say on issues being considered by Overview and Scrutiny or to suggest a topic for consideration you can email scrutiny@bromsgrove.gov.uk or complete the form on the Council's website at <https://www.bromsgrove.gov.uk/council/the-council/overview-and-scrutiny/public-participation.aspx>

Giving Evidence

Members of the public or organisations with a special interest or knowledge about a particular topic being considered by Overview and Scrutiny can put forward evidence to a Committee or appear as a witness to give evidence for an investigation. If you think you or your organisation might be able to participate in an issue currently under review, please contact us.

If you have a personal issue with a Council service you may find it more useful to contact your local ward Councillor who can help you decide the best way to take it forward.

Contact Overview and Scrutiny

If you would like to find out more about any aspect of the Overview and Scrutiny Board then you can email scrutiny@bromsgrove.gov.uk or telephone 01527 881288 and ask to speak to the Democratic Services Officer.

Overview and Scrutiny

Legal, Democratic and Property Services

Bromsgrove District Council

Parkside, Market Street, Bromsgrove B61 8DA

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Bromsgrove District Council



Audit, Standards and
Governance Committee

ANNUAL REPORT

2023-2024



Bromsgrove
District Council

www.bromsgrove.gov.uk

CHAIRMAN'S FOREWORD

On behalf of the Committee, I would like to thank Councillor Steven Collella for his Chairmanship prior to the May local elections. I am particularly grateful to all the Members of the Committee for their diligence and attention given the breadth of work that the Committee undertakes.

My particular thanks go to Democratic Services Officers for their support, and to Mr Carpenter for dealing with the ongoing issues of non-delivery of the 2020-2021 accounts - issues, as highlighted, that are facing many local councils in the current economic climate. I am grateful for Councillor McEldowney, as Risk Champion, inquiring, amongst other topics, into the concerns over RAAC concrete.

Looking forward, there are two aspects this Committee should look to ensure happen. The first is the appointment of an independent lay member of the Committee. This is both a national recommendation and something that was highlighted in Councillor Collella's previous report to Council. Finally, as our Committee's role covers whistle-blowing strategies, this should be made more explicit to the public via the Bromsgrove District Council website.

I believe that the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee has provided and continues to provide a valuable contribution to the development of standards and protocols across the Council's governance in an effective and compliant way.

Councillor David Nicholl

Chairman of the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee

MEMBERSHIP



David Nicholl (Chairman)



Harrison Rone Clarke (Vice-Chairman)



Rachael Bailes



Samuel Evans



Derek Forsythe



David Hopkins



Bakul Kumar



Bernard McEldowney



Simon Nock



Justin Stanley



David Stewart



Marc Worrall (Parish
Councils' Representative)

INTRODUCTION

This report provides an overview of the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee's activities during the municipal year 2023-24.

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

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

- Monitoring Officer's Report – which details complaints and training which has taken place during the period between meetings.
- Updates from the External Auditors, Grant Thornton in respect of their work.
- Updates on the work of the Internal Audit Team.
- Joint Interim Auditor's Annual Report 2021-22 and 2022-23
- Quarterly Risk Update
- Annual Review from the Local Government Ombudsman
- Financial Compliance Report (including updates on Statements of Accounts)
- Financial Savings Monitoring Report
- Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 (RIPA) Report.

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

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

[Meeting dates and minutes of the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee meetings 2023-24](#)

The Role of The Audit, Standards And Governance Committee

Scope and Responsibility

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

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

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

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

Meetings of the Committee – 2023-2024

The Council's constitution requires the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee to hold quarterly meetings. At its meeting on 9th March 2023, the Committee agreed that it should hold six meetings per municipal year (meet bi-monthly) until issues with the submission of the outstanding Statements of Accounts have been resolved.

Standards Regime

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

Monitoring Officer's Report

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

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

The Council's Code of Conduct is designed primarily with the view of maintaining standards through a conciliatory approach and there was a high reliance on the Monitoring Officer working in cooperation with political Group Leaders when finding resolutions to Member complaints.

It was reported through the Monitoring Officer's report that Members received training throughout the 2023-2024 municipal year. The training included the following sessions:

- Code of Conduct training
- Modern.gov
- Safeguarding
- Data Protection
- Member Safety Training
- Carbon Literacy Training
- Decarbonisation of the Vehicle Fleet
- Procurement Training

The Member Development Steering Group (MDSG) has met a number of times throughout this municipal year. MDSG discussed the needs and adaptations required to make training relevant to Members. In addition, discussions took place regarding the Member Induction and training for the next municipal year.

The Constitution Review Working Group (CRWG) is a cross-party group where any potential changes to the Council's constitution are discussed. CRWG has continued to meet during 2023-2024 and had been considering issues relating to constitutional changes that follow the Council's approval on 20th September 2023 of the hybrid Leader and Cabinet governance model. This is due to be implemented from the start of 2024-25 municipal year. Among the items of business that the Group discussed are various constitutional updates deemed necessary to enact the hybrid Leader and Cabinet arrangements including updates to terms of reference for the Cabinet Advisory Group (CAG), Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for cross party working.

Agenda Item 11

Topics such as behaviour at meetings and the rules for remote participation in meetings have also been considered.

Member Complaints

An update on Member complaints has been provided in all Monitoring Officer's reports. It is noted that several Member complaints had been received to date in 2023-24, most of which have been resolved locally. There had also been a number of complaints received in respect of Parish Councillors. It was noted that these were most appropriately dealt with by Parish Councils and not by the District Council's Monitoring Officer.

Dispensation Report

The Audit, Standards and Governance Committee received a number of dispensations reports this year.

On 1st June 2023, the General Dispensations Report was considered and through this the Committee agreed to grant General Dispensations (including Budget and Council Tax discussions) and Outside Body Appointment Dispensations.

The reports on Individual Member Dispensations were considered 17th July 2023 and 14th September respectively. The requests for individual member dispensations detailed in those reports were granted by the Committee. The dispensations agreed at these meetings remain valid until the first meeting of the Audit, Governance and Standards Committee following the next District Council Elections in May 2027 unless amended by the Committee prior to that date.

A further Individual Member Dispensations Report would be considered at the meeting on 7th March 2024.

Parish Council Involvement

The Parish Councils representative is able to add any item on to the agenda as required as outlined in the Committee Terms of Reference. Whilst Parish Councils have the opportunity to appoint two representatives on to the Committee, only one of these places was taken up. The Parish Councils Representative for the municipal year 2023-2024 is Mr M. Worrall.

Investigations and Enquiries

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

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

The current Independent Person, Mr. Mel Nock, has continued to support the Monitoring Officer in the management of Member to Member complaints where necessary. The Council has considered joining the other District Councils in Worcestershire that had a retained pool of Independent Persons – any proposals for this would be considered by the Committee. In the meantime, Mr. Nock, remains the Independent Person on an interim basis.

INTERNAL AUDIT REPORTS

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

- Internal Audit Plan 2023-2024 (1st June 2023 meeting)
- Internal Audit Annual Report and Audit Opinion 2022-23 (1st June 2023 meeting)
- Internal Audit - Progress Report (every meeting).

EXTERNAL AUDITORS

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

- Grant Thornton - Sector Update (quarterly)
- Joint Interim Auditor's Annual Report 2021-22 and 2022-23 (27th November 2023)

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

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

SECTION 24 NOTICE

In November 2022, Bromsgrove District Council was issued with a Section 24 Notice with the key reason being the non-delivery of the 2020-2021 Statement of Accounts. This year due to continued non-delivery of Statements of Accounts for 2020-2021, the Section 24 Notice was reissued by the External Auditor in November 2023. The Audit, Standards and Governance Committee recommended that this is accepted at the meeting of 27th November 2023, and this was subsequently approved at full Council on 6th December 2023.

At the 27th November 2023 meeting, it was noted that the Council continued to make progress in respect of addressing the key and improvement recommendations issued by External Auditors. It was restated that the sole reason for the reissuing of the statutory recommendation (Section 24 Notice) was the non-delivery of 2020-21 Statement of Accounts.

The Council has continued to implement the recommendations of the Bromsgrove Audit Task Group that carried out a root and branch review of how the Council arrived at the Section 24 Notice (these recommendations were approved for implementation by Cabinet on 15th March 2023).

Risk Champion Updates

The Risk Champion for the Council, Councillor B. M. McEldowney, has provided comprehensive updates on risk at all meetings of Audit, Standards and Governance Committee. The risk updates spurred a number of significant discussions among Members and a number of issues were followed up in detail. At the request of the Risk Champion, a detailed discussion and a response from senior officers was provided on equal pay and financial vulnerabilities of the Council. This followed concerns raised by the Risk Champion, the Chairman, and all Members of the Committee, about the situation at Birmingham City Council with regard to equal pay. Members were reassured about the Council's reasonable financial position, and officers explained that the Council last carried an equal pay audit in 2019 and was confident that its scheme ensures equality of pay.

Below is a summary of the main matters discussed at Audit, Standards and Governance Committee in this municipal year:

1st June 2023

Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 (RIPA) Report 2023-24

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

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

General Dispensations Report

A number of general dispensations for all Councillors were granted. This includes a dispensation under Section 33 (2) of the Localism Act 2011 to allow Members to address Council and Committees in circumstances where a member of the public may elect to speak, and a dispensations under the above legislation to allow all Members to participate in and vote at Council and Committee meetings when considering the setting of the Budget, Council Tax, Members' Allowances, and non-Domestic Rates – discretionary rate relief policy and guidance affecting properties within the District.

It was noted that these dispensations remain valid until the first meeting of the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee following the next District Council Elections in 2027 unless amended by the Committee prior to that date.

Grant Thornton – External Audit Progress Report and Sector Update

The Committee was updated on the Council's submission of 2020-21 Accounts. It was recapped that a draft version of the Council's 2020-21 financial statements was presented to Members of the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee in December 2022, however, the Account had not yet been signed-off and submitted to the External Auditor. It was acknowledged that this was due to the Section 151 Officer awaiting the conclusion of the External Auditor's work on opening balances before signing the draft 2020-21 financial statements.

The External Auditor reported that testing had been performed on the data migration event from the Council's legacy financial ledger, eFinancials, to the new financial ledger supplied by TechnologyOne. Testing involved the selection of 25 transactions from the eFinancials reports to the TechnologyOne system and 25 transactions from the equivalent TechnologyOne transactional reports to the eFinancials system and checking that they had been migrated appropriately. No issues had been identified

during this testing.

It was explained, however, that the number of transactions tested represented a negligible volume of total transactions processed in the data migration event and the External Auditor had been unable to gain sufficient assurance on the basis of this testing that the whole data migration event was performed correctly. As a result automated solutions for gaining assurance over the data transfer were being considered by the External Auditor.

It was noted that 31st May 2023 was the statutory deadline for local authorities to submit the draft 2022-23 financial statements to their external auditors. The Council was significantly behind in terms of completion of its Accounts audits, and the Committee was reminded the Council was issued with statutory recommendations under Section 24 of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 primarily for non-delivery of its 2020-21 Statement of Accounts.

Quarterly Risk Update

It was noted that this was the fourth cycle of reviewing Corporate and Departmental Risks since the original baselining of risks in April 2022.

The number of Corporate Risks stood at 13, including a risk related to the Cost of Living Crisis. Since last reporting, a new Corporate Risk had been added which related to the replacement of the Council's existing Customer interface, which was also linked to significant budgetary savings in the 2025/26 financial year.

The number of Departmental Risks continued to reduce and in this reporting period stood at 51. There was 1 red risk related to Revenues - Performance Indicator data which was not deemed robust as it could not be system generated. It was reported that it was unlikely the number of departmental risks could now be further reduced as most of the remaining risks were linked to compliance.

Financial Compliance Report including progress update on Statements of Accounts

Members were informed that the Accounting Policies Report before the Committee provided details of the financial governance framework under which the Council operated and the legislative reporting requirements for reporting to central government in respect of financial compliance.

It was noted that the Council's 2023/24 Budget was approved in February. Budgets were now loaded and a draft budget book was being prepared to assist in Members understanding the Budget. In terms of the budget process, Members were informed that a provisional outturn report would be presented to Cabinet at its July meeting.

It was agreed that this report would come to each Audit, Standards and Governance

Committee meeting to alert Members to possible no compliance issues.

Internal Audit Plan 2023-2024

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

- The adequacy of the internal audit resource allocation.
- The changing internal environment and ongoing transformational work being undertaken.
- Internal and external audit findings in respect of the financial systems and their inclusion as audit areas, as it is considered certain risks remain in these areas.
- The flexibility of the plan and the balanced approach taken, with progress being monitored and reviewed regularly.
- If the plan were to be amended in the future this would be done in consultation with the Section 151 Officer and brought back to this Committee.

It was explained that the coverage of the Plan had been based upon the Council's risk priorities as per the Corporate and Departmental risk registers. Areas of large budgetary spend areas had also been considered, along with areas that had direct association to the Council Plan.

Internal Audit Annual Report & Audit Opinion 2022-23

This report was a summary of looking back over the last year's internal audit work and provided commentary on Internal Audit's delivery for the period 1st April 2022 to 31st March 2023, against the performance indicators agreed for the service and further information on other aspects of service delivery.

It was noted that Debtors and Main Ledger audits received limited assurance and this was linked to issues with the cash receipting module of the new ledger system. It was highlighted that the implementation of the new finance system had created significant risks for the Council, however, the Council was undertaking significant work to rectify the issues (including clear outstanding sets of unaudited accounts).

It was the opinion of the Internal Auditor that enough coverage in terms of internal audit had been provided in 2022-23.

Annual Appointment of Risk Champion

The Committee appointed Councillor B. M. McEldowney as the Council's Risk Champion for 2023-24.

17th July 2023

Dispensations Report – Individual Member Dispensations

This report considered specific dispensations that Members had applied for in advance of this meeting. The Individual Member Dispensations (IMDs) and Outside Body Appointments dispensations that were requested by Members up to the point of the meeting were granted under section 33 (2) of the Localism Act 2011. This enables those Members who applied for specific dispensations to participate in and vote at Council and Committee meetings in the individual circumstances detailed.

It was noted that the dispensations granted would remain valid until the first meeting of the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee following the next District Council Elections in 2027 unless amended by the Committee prior to that date.

It was agreed that the Monitoring Officer write to each political Group Leader asking that they remind all Members of their obligation to request appropriate dispensations, if this was required.

Quarterly Risk Update

The Committee considered a risk update which set out corporate and departmental risks changes since the report to Committee in June 2023. It was reported that there had been no changes to the number of corporate risks since the last report. The cyber risk had moved from amber to red due to the increased risk in this area despite all the mitigations put in place. The total number of Departmental Risks also remained unchanged from last report.

Internal Audit - Progress Report

The Committee received the Internal Audit Progress Report that summarised progress made against the delivery of the Internal Audit Plan 2023-24 up to 30th June 2023. It was reported that the outstanding pieces of work with respect to the 2022-23 Internal Audit Plan were now nearing completion.

Financial Compliance Report including update on Statements of Accounts

The Committee considered the Accounting Policies Report which noted, as at the end of June, progress with the 2020/21 Statement of Accounts, the 'budget book' for 2023/24 and key reporting deliverables that were required by legislation to be submitted to the Government.

Dispensations Report – Individual Member Dispensations

A further report on individual member dispensations was considered as more requests for individual dispensations were received after the meeting of the Committee on 17th July 2023. The new requests were detailed and those dispensations were granted under section 33 (2) of the Localism Act 2011. This enables those Members named in the dispensations to participate in and vote at Council and Committee meetings in the individual circumstances detailed.

It was noted that the dispensations granted would remain valid until the first meeting of the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee following the next District Council Elections in 2027 unless amended by the Committee prior to that date.

Grant Thornton – External Audit Progress Report and Sector Update

It was reported that some progress had been made with regard to the work on the Council's 2020-21 Statement of Accounts since that meeting. The External Auditors were able to verify and gain assurance that data reports from the legacy eFinancials system for periods 1 to 11 of the 2020-21 financial year provided real financial data. The data for periods 1 to 11 was now available in the format appropriate for its audit.

However, it was not possible to date for the Council to provide auditors with data included in period 0 of 2020-21 financial year. As a result, External Auditors had not yet been able to undertake any work on the balance sheet as period 0 transactions were critical for understanding the balance sheet position (the opening position). The Council continued attempts to reinstate their business objects licence for the eFinancials system in order to run a period 0 report and export it into an appropriate file. This would enable work on verification of period 0 balances to be started.

The External Auditor reported that on 15th August 2023 a decision was taken to redirect the audit team to other work as there were insufficient working papers were available. It was reported that the External Auditors would resume work on the 2020-21 Accounts audit in October 2023, with the timeline for audit completion of the Council's 2020-21 Accounts estimated to be March 2024.

It was stated that a joint Auditors Value for Money Annual Report for 2021-22 and 2022-23 financial years would be prepared and it was expected that this would be reported to the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee in this calendar year.

The Committee was updated in respect of the work undertaken each year in the certification of the Council's Housing Benefit subsidy claim to the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). It was reported that the External Auditor had certified the Authority's annual Housing Benefit Subsidy claim in accordance with procedures agreed by DWP. The work on 2021-22 subsidy claim certification was expected to be

concluded within the next month. Members were reassured that there was no impact to residents, including in terms of payments of benefits, as a result of the national delays to certification work on Housing Benefit claims.

Internal Audit - Progress Report

The Committee received the Internal Audit Progress Report that summarised progress made against the delivery of the Internal Audit Plan 2023-24 up to 31st July 2023.

Financial Compliance Report including update on Statements of Accounts

The Committee considered the Financial Compliance Report which noted, as at the end of June, progress with the 2020/21 Statement of Accounts, the 'budget book' for 2023/24 and key deliverables as required by legislation and government.

It was noted that a number of key legislative deliverables had recently been submitted to Central Government, however, the key returns that remained outstanding for the Council were the Revenue Outturn forms for 2020/21 and 2021/22 and the VAT returns.

It was reported that measures were in place to improve procurement processes including the 'No Compliance No Order' process that had been live since April 2023, and all contracts requiring renewal over the existing £50,000 key decision threshold being reported to Cabinet through quarterly Finance and Performance Monitoring Report.

It was highlighted that the key issue remained the closure process for 2020-21 Statement of Accounts with work still undertaken by the Council and the External Auditors to validate the take on balances. The audit of the 2020-21 accounts was expected to be finalised in spring 2024.

The Committee made a Recommendation to Cabinet in respect of the concerns over provisional plans for the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) to introduce backstop dates for when the auditing of accounts had to be completed. The provisional deadlines for local authorities were as follows: 2020-21 Statements of Accounts to be signed-off by auditors by 31st March 2024 and the 2021-22 Statements of Accounts to be signed off by auditors by September 2024. The Recommendation to Cabinet read as follows:

RECOMMENDED that Cabinet ascertain from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) the mechanism for audit of local authorities' accounts to be caught up as per their press release.

This recommendation was considered by Cabinet on 18th October 2023 (Minute No 39/23). A number of amendments to the wording of the recommendation were made and the Cabinet passed the following resolution:

RESOLVED that The Leader of the Council writes to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) regarding the mechanism for auditing of local authorities' accounts to be caught up as per their press release and that a copy of the letter be forwarded to the Local Government Association (LGA).

Financial Savings Monitoring Report

This report outlined the areas of savings for the Council. It was explained that the Council was able to make additional savings of circa £1 million accounted for over the 2023-24, 2024-25 and 2025-26 financial years as a result of the favourable outcome of the triennial pension fund valuation. The next valuation was to be undertaken in the 2026-27 financial year. Another saving are highlighted was the one-off savings expected from recovering old debt (engaged capacity grid). The Council had around £6 million in uncollected debt, and it was expected that around 10 per cent of that figure might be recovered.

It was reported that at Q1 the projected full year overspend position on the 2023-24 revenue budget was £788,000. The overspend position was due to two main factors and these were the Local Government Pay Award, which at circa 6% is significantly more than the 2 per cent budget assumption, and the additional costs of maintaining the fleet.

Officers commented that a pay award offer for the local government sector was 6.8 per cent for the current financial year. It was commented that following last year's pay award of over 6 per cent, if confirmed, this offer would represent another year of pay awards in excess of 2 per cent, which was unprecedented.

To offset the impact of this, the Q1 Finance and Performance Monitoring Report going to Cabinet proposed that the assumed yearly drawdown of £351,000 be made from the Utilities Reserve, given the lower-than-anticipated utilities inflation. This would mitigate some of the overspend position and leave a £437,000 overspend position. The ongoing 2023/24 pay increases position, once finalised and ratified later this year, would then need to be resolved as part of the 2024/25 Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) process. It was proposed that in the following year's budget the percentage increase anticipated for ongoing pay awards be raised to 3 per cent.

It was clarified that the Council presently had an estimated £5.226 million in General Fund Reserves to cover one off issues, and a further £5.502 million in Earmarked Reserves for specific purposes. Accessing these was the only recourse available to the Council, apart from making reductions in spending, that the Council had to mitigate the present overspend position.

Annual Review Letter of The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman

The Committee considered the report on the Local Government Ombudsman's Annual Review Letter, which set out the statistics for complaints made against the Council covering the year ending 31st March 2023.

During consideration of this report, it was noted that the Monitoring Officer was required to report this to Members, including to summarise the findings on upheld complaints over a specific period. It was reported that there was a cost implication of £150 arising from an upheld complaint that had been met from existing budgets. It was noted that in relation to this complaint, the Ombudsman also recommended that the Council review its practices in terms of recovering overpayments.

Members requested that this report be brought forward to the Committee earlier in the municipal year, in line with when the Annual Review Letter was issued by the Ombudsman (usually in summer each year). It was noted that reporting on complaints would become more regular as it would form part of the Quarterly Finance and Performance Monitoring Reports that would be presented to Cabinet and scrutinised on request by the Finance and Budget Working Group (sub-committee of the Overview and Scrutiny Board).

Members asked that the next iteration of reporting on complaints include detail on the number of outstanding complaints at the start of the Ombudsman reporting period.

Joint Interim Auditor's Annual Report 2021-22 and 2022-23

The Joint Interim Auditor's Annual Report, covering the period from 1st April 2021 to 31st March 2023, followed from the Section 24 Report considered by Audit, Standards and Governance Committee on 9th November 2022. Last year's Section 24 Report set out the Statutory Recommendation issued by the External Auditor under Section 24 of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014. It was highlighted that the Report before Members at this meeting updated on the progress against Statutory, Key and Improvement Recommendations that were issued in November 2022.

The Key Audit Partner explained that the Statutory Recommendation issued last year had been updated, and this was solely due to the Council's non-delivery to date of the 2020-21 financial statements. Subsequent financial statements also remained unaudited. It was deemed appropriate by the External Auditor to continue with the statutory recommendation due to the issues of transparency with financial reporting that still need to be fully resolved.

An update was provided on the status of the five key recommendations issued by the External Auditor in the previous year. It was noted that of the five key recommendations, four had been lifted, resolved, or downgraded to an improvement recommendation status, a lower level of recommendation that could be issued by the auditor. There were now 10 improvement recommendations. One serious weakness remained in relation to opening balances linked to the budget which would only be resolved through the delivery of the Accounts. This continued to be highlighted in that the Section 24 Statutory Recommendation remained.

It was noted that the External Auditor's had raised one new key recommendation with regard to organisational capacity and capability. The External Auditor deemed it appropriate to raise this key recommendation due to the Council's high staff turnover and capacity constraints coupled with the task of rectifying the issues with the ledger implementation. It was noted that the Council now had a Workforce Strategy in place which was a step in the right direction to resolve this recommendation, but effort now needed to be directed towards embedding this Strategy within the Council's processes.

This report proposed two recommendations to the Committee, which were accepted. These are as follows:

RECOMMENDED

- 1) That the Section 24 Statutory Recommendation is accepted and that Council review the recommendation, endorse the actions included in the management responses which form the rectification process required as per legislation; and*
- 2) That Audit, Standards and Governance Committee members are updated on key deliverables, where deemed applicable by the Chairman, the Cabinet Member for Finance and Enabling and the Section 151 Officer, between Committee meetings and that appropriate governance arrangements are put in place to resolve the Council's position.*

These recommendations were subsequently considered, and approved, by full Council on 6th December 2023.

Quarterly Risk Update

It was noted that this was the sixth cycle of reviewing Corporate and Departmental Risks since the original baselining of risks in April 2022. The organisational risk level had moved to a moderate assurance level from May 2023.

There were 13 Corporate Risks, a number unchanged since March 2023. It was highlighted that risks relating to financial position rectification and new customer facing interface had moved from amber to red due respectively to lack of clarity from

the Government on audit deadlines (backstop dates) and the volume of work required in ensuring Council's customer interfaces data was up-to-date.

The number of Departmental Risks continued to reduce and now stood at 43 (compared to 51 at the previous report). There was 1 red risk related to Revenues - Performance Indicator data which was not deemed robust as it could not be system generated. It was reported that it was unlikely the number of departmental risks could now be further reduced as most of the remaining risks were linked to compliance.

Internal Audit – Progress Report

The Internal Audit Progress Report was presented. This report requested that revisions be approved to the 2023-24 Internal Audit Plan. This was due to pressures that affected the Worcestershire Internal Audit Shared Service (WIASS), including long-term sickness of staff and the loss of key personnel.

As a result, the report asked for approval of revisions to the 2023-24 Internal Audit Plan, in particular deferral of audits where this was prudent to do from a risk assurance perspective. The audits to be chosen for deferral to 2024-25 financial year were in relation to the Council Tax, National Non-Domestic Rates, and Benefits. The Committee agreed to the revisions proposed in the report.

Accounting Polices Report including update on Council's Statements of Accounts

An update on training that had taken place to increase financial awareness and skills of staff was provided. Training had been taking place on the use of the Council's enterprise resource planning (ERP) system. A mandatory budget manager training (which included the use of the TechnologyOne system) took place in September 2023 – through this training budget managers have been upskilled to input their budget forecasts directly into the system, rather than on spreadsheets. Further mandatory financial awareness training for managers took place in August and September 2023.

Equal Pay and Financial Vulnerabilities – Response to Members' Questions

A written response was provided by the Chief Executive Officer in relation to Members' questions on equal pay and financial vulnerabilities. The Council's Risk Champion thanked the Chief Executive and Council Officers for the swift response on this matter, especially in the context of recent reports about the situation at Birmingham City Council.

18th January 2024Internal Audit Progress Report

The Committee received the Internal Audit Progress Report that summarised progress made against the delivery of the Internal Audit Plan 2023-24 up to 31st December 2023. It was explained that as of this date, 48 per cent of the plan for the year had been completed. This was an improvement on last year's progress at this point.

In terms of critical audit reviews, it was noted that Accounts Receivable and General Ledger were the key internal audits from the Council's perspective as they provided a reflection of the progress the Council has made in terms of the financial recovery programme.

It was reported that with respect to cyber security that following publicised cyber-attacks on other councils, there was a proposal as part of the Tranche 2 of the Medium Term Financial Plan to increase the Council's annual funding for cyber security. It was also noted that as part of the Q2 Monitoring Report, an additional £50k was requested for upgrading and replacing tape drives. The tapes provided physical back up of IT data.

Capital Strategy 2024-25 including Treasury Management Strategy

The Committee received a report on the Capital Strategy 2024-25 including Treasury Management Strategy. The report combined an overview of how capital expenditure, capital financing, treasury and other investment activity contribute to the provision of local public services along with an overview of how associated risk was being managed and the implications for future financial sustainability of the Council.

The Deputy Chief Executive and Section 151 Officer explained that these reports were important from a compliance point of view. Any deviation from these strategies had to be reported directly to Audit, Standards and Governance Committee and then Council.

The Committee recommended that the Council approve the Capital Strategy as an overarching strategy for the Council in addition to the Treasury Management Strategy, the associated Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) policy, and the Investment Strategy.

This was considered by full Council, and all strategies were approved, on 21st February 2024.

Accounting Policies Report including update on Council's Statements of Accounts

It was reported that local authorities have now been informed of Government proposal to introduce a backstop date of 30th September 2024 for completion of all outstanding local audits up to 2022-23 financial year. Local authorities would be consulted on the plans to tackle local government audit delays, including on the proposed backstop date, in February 2024.

It was reported that around 290 local authorities had yet to have their 2021-22 Accounts audited. As such, the proposal was a significant concern across the local government sector. There also remained concerns that the backstop proposal has not addressed the issue of lack of external audit resource.

Key points arising from the Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement were also presented. It was noted that generally there would be a 4.9 per cent increase in funding for Borough and District Councils, local authorities would have the ability to increase Council Tax by up to 2.99 per cent. For planning applications, there would be a charge increase of 25 per cent (small) and 35 per cent (large) applications respectively.

Financial Savings Monitoring Report

The report looked at 2023-24 budget savings and provided monitoring of savings. It was reported that savings from both tranches of the budget process were set out at Appendix A. The areas of savings that were covered in more detail included:

- Finance Vacancies - The Council would not achieve the target saving of £100k in 2023-24.
- Service reviews – It was reported that Bromsgrove Council had £2.9 million worth of vacancies covered by £1.6 million of Agency staff covering vacant posts. Across the shared service (Bromsgrove and Redditch), this amounted to around £5 million of vacancies and £3 million in agency staff cover (£2 million gap). An establishment review was taking place to provide an indication of the number of posts that were required across the Council.
- Engage Capacity Grid (one-off) – This was concerned with recovering Council Tax and Business Rates income from debtors. The Council was on track to deliver target savings.
- Pension Fund – The Council was on track to deliver the savings on this as resulting from the latest actuarial triennial report. The Council would need to monitor the impact at the next revaluation in 2026-27.

7th March 2024

The last meeting of Audit, Standards and Governance Committee in the 2023-24 municipal year at which this Annual Report will be presented. Items to be considered at this meeting include:

- Introduction to Council's new External Auditors (to begin from 2023-24 financial year audit)
- Standards Regime – Monitoring Officer's Report
- Dispensations Report – Individual Member Dispensations Update
- Internal Audit – Progress Report
- Grant Thornton – External Audit Progress Report and Sector Update
- Financial Compliance / Accounting Policies Report
- Quarterly Risk Update

Legal, Democratic and Property Services

Bromsgrove District Council

Parkside

Bromsgrove

Worcestershire B61 8DA

Telephone: 01527 64252 ext 3095

Email: democratic@bromsgroveandredditch.gov.uk

Cabinet
2024

17th July

Bromsgrove Council Plan

Relevant Portfolio Holder		Councillor Karen May
Portfolio Holder Consulted		Yes
Relevant Head of Service		Peter Carpenter
Report Author	Job Title: Policy Manager Contact: Rebecca Green email: r.green@bromsgroveandredditch.gov.uk Contact Tel: 01527 881616	
Wards Affected		All
Ward Councillor(s) consulted		
Relevant Strategic Purpose(s)		All
Key Decision / Non-Key Decision		
If you have any questions about this report, please contact the report author in advance of the meeting.		

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Cabinet RECOMMEND that:-

- 1) The Council Plan attached at Appendix 1 be approved.**

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 The development of the new Council Plan began with sessions supported by the LGA in 2023. The priority areas identified in these sessions were built upon in two workshops in Spring 2024, which brought together the Cabinet and Corporate Management Team to consolidate the learning and direction identified with the LGA, in combination with relevant data, into a new vision for the district, distinct priorities and key objectives for the next four years. These have been articulated in the plan as the overarching vision, which focuses on the quality of life of local communities, and four new priorities:

- Economic development
- Housing
- Environment
- Infrastructure (this priority underpins the ones above)

3. OPERATIONAL ISSUES

3.1 Completion and adoption of a new Council Plan is essential to provide the strategic direction for service delivery for the next four years.

- 3.2 Operationally, the content of the Council Plan will inform the service business planning process, in order for services to deliver against the priorities and objectives identified.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 As the key strategic document for the Council, the plan will steer the financial element of service business plans and will help to determine the Medium-Term Financial Plan.
- 4.2 In order to deliver against the priorities and objectives included in this plan there will need to be appropriate resources allocated.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 There are no legal implications arising directly from this report.

6. OTHER - IMPLICATIONS

Relevant Strategic Purpose

- 6.1 The Council Plan articulates the new priorities for Bromsgrove District Council, which will replace the strategic purposes included in the previous plan.

Climate Change Implications

- 6.2 A green thread runs through the Council plan. Climate change and carbon reduction are key issues within the plan and the relevant measures identified to evaluate performance will help the Council to understand both activities and progress in this area.

Equalities and Diversity Implications

- 6.3 There are no equality and diversity implications arising directly from this report; however, the focus on quality of life and wellbeing, articulated through the vision, is designed to empower officers to meet the needs of the district's diverse communities, which would include specific issues relating to equality and diversity. Specific projects and measures identified in the plan may need individual Equality Impact Assessments as they are developed in order to meet the requirements of the Equality Act.

7. RISK MANAGEMENT

- 7.1 By publishing a Council Plan the strategic direction of the Council will be clear to employees and Members and as such will support the management of risks identified around robust decision making and the accuracy/effectiveness of performance data.

8. APPENDICES and BACKGROUND PAPERS

Appendix 1- Council Plan 2024-2027

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Bromsgrove District Council Council Plan 2024 - 2027



Bromsgrove
District Council

www.bromsgrove.gov.uk

Agenda Item 13a

Foreword from Council Leader Karen May

Our Council Plan helps us to set the strategic direction for this authority for the next three years. Our overarching vision prioritises the quality of life for our residents and businesses, creating an environment where both can belong and in which to flourish.

This plan helps us to spend our money in the areas which our customers have told us matter to them and to tailor our services to make biggest difference in our communities.

We want to provide more affordable houses, create a clean and green environment with an infrastructure to support the growing demand and to breathe life into our economy by focussing on our businesses and developing opportunities for investment across our District.

Of course there are challenges to do this, not least the financial ones, but prudent budgets mean we are in a stable position to explore and deliver our priorities and, in response to national issues, offer support to our more vulnerable residents.

But we are also fortunate to have a head start to realise our vision. We have wonderful green parks and open spaces, we have seen millions of pounds of investment in regeneration projects in our town and have played our part by building a development of 61 new properties, including 18 affordable homes, at the Burcot Lane site. We have the confidence to make bold and creative moves like this and will continue to do so.

To ensure continued resilience we have made sure that the green agenda is realised in this plan and indeed throughout all of our decision making.

Together we are building a Better Bromsgrove for everyone for a district to be proud of.



Leader of Bromsgrove District Council



Foreword from Deputy Council Leader Sue Baxter

I am absolutely delighted to introduce this Council plan especially with my portfolio for town centre and regeneration in mind.

Economic Development is a priority in this Council Plan which means for the next four years we will be continuing to identify and seize opportunities to attract business and investment to the area to create jobs for our residents.

Already we have seen plans approved to create a new commercial and cultural hub in the space of the former market hall and contractors have been approved to start work in Windsor Street soon.

While change can be unsettling, it is vital that we make strides towards establishing a thriving and resilient economy now and for the future.

This plan focusses not just on big investment opportunities but also enabling and supporting our business starts ups and existing entrepreneurs in our eight town and village centres to establish themselves in the communities and beyond.

Exciting times lie ahead and this Council Plan which encompasses our vision and the priorities will help us to ensure our businesses thrive and people prosper now and in the future.

Sue Baxter

Deputy Leader of Bromsgrove District Council



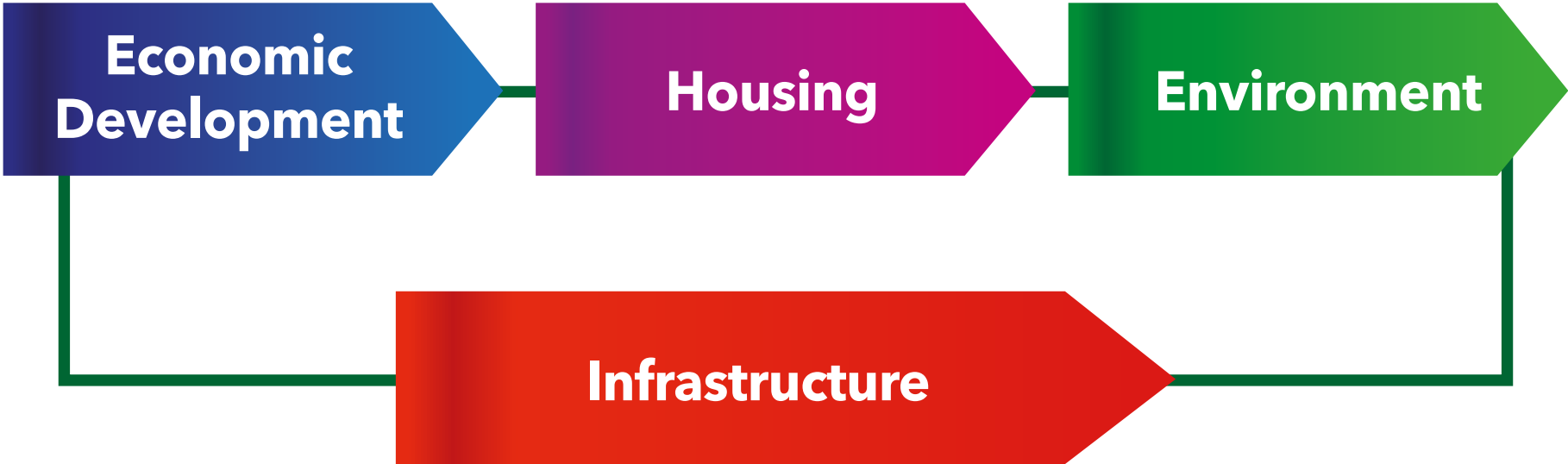
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Our Vision & Priorities

'We aspire to create a welcoming environment that prioritises quality of life, where residents and businesses feel a deep sense of belonging and connection.'

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Agenda Item 13a

Introduction

Delivering for our communities is the driving force of this plan, whether by supporting local businesses, understanding the housing needs across the district or preserving the beauty and biodiversity of the environment. A 'green thread', for how priorities relate to environmental and climate matters, also runs through the whole plan (**indicated in green**).

Our residents and the distinct neighbourhoods are what make Bromsgrove District such a wonderful place to live. The vision places quality of life for our residents at the centre of how we deliver services and plan for the district, creating a thread that relates to our communities and their wellbeing which is integral to all the priorities (**indicated in purple**). In addition to the specific priorities identified within this plan, the Council delivers other services that contribute to quality of life and wellbeing, from financial inclusion and benefits, to Lifeline, sports development and community safety. Safer Bromsgrove, part of the North Worcestershire Community Safety Partnership, works to keep Bromsgrove a safer place to live, work and visit. The Partnership focuses on priorities including anti-social behaviour, neighbourhood crime and protecting vulnerable communities.

The Council Plan will inform annual service business planning and budget setting agreed by full council, ensuring that available resources (both financial & staffing) are used to deliver the council's priorities.

Our Opportunities

The opportunities include:

- The location of Bromsgrove for business; with Worcestershire, regionally and beyond
- The entrepreneurial and community spirit within Bromsgrove District
- Keeping businesses in the district when they grow
- The amazing natural environment of the district
- The creative options provided through new technologies to enhance our services and our customers experiences

Our Challenges

The challenges include:

- The ongoing financial challenge- to both the organisation but also our communities and residents through the real pressures presented by cost of living and the housing market
- Continuing to support those who are most vulnerable, and manage the increasing costs
- Keeping businesses in the District when they grow
- Understanding the different community needs across the district
- The need for enhanced digital and physical connectivity

About Bromsgrove District

Bromsgrove District has an excellent geographic location in north Worcestershire, with excellent links to the rest of Worcestershire, the wider region and nationally. It is a predominantly rural district, with 89% of the land covering 20,000 hectares is designated as Green Belt, although the north of the district is part of the major urban conurbation linked to south Birmingham. The main centre of population is in Bromsgrove Town, with other large centres in Alvechurch, Aston Fields, Barnt Green, Catshill, Hagley, Rubery and Wythall. Around 61% of the district population live in 'urban' areas.

The district has rich biodiversity, geodiversity and attractive landscape, containing 13 Sites of Special Scientific Interest and 90 local sites (85 ecological and 5 geological).

The 2021 Census shows that Bromsgrove District had a resident population of 92,183 and Mid-Year Populations estimates suggest that the district population has increased to 100,076 in 2022. The population is forecast to reach 117,014 by 2043.

The population of the district is ethnically less diverse than the national picture and residents are typically older than the average for England. The district tends to be relatively affluent compared to the national and local context and Bromsgrove has levels of deprivation significantly below average. However, this can hide pockets of deprivation; there is one lower support output area (LSOA) in the most deprived 20% nationally and a further three LSOAs that are in the most deprived 30% and access to appropriate support can be a challenge for residents in these areas. The rural nature of much of the district can also present challenges, from accessing services to utilising public transport.

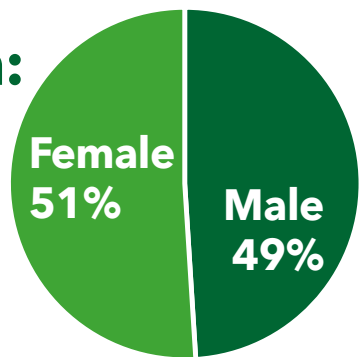


(Row by row, L to R)
Row 1: Bromsgrove & Alvechurch
Row 2: Aston Fields & Barnt Green
Row 3: Catshill & Hagley
Row 4: Rubery & Wythall
Row 5: Rural Bromsgrove

Total population:

100,076

Source - ONS 2022 Mid-year population estimates



Profile:

White British - **90.4%**

White other - **1.7%**

Mixed - **2.5%**

Black - **0.8%**

Asian - **3.2%**

Other ethnic group - **0.4%**

Source - Census 2021



Health:

Life expectancy

Male - **79.8**

Female - **83.8**

Source - Public Health Profile 2022



Describe health as bad or very bad - **3.9%**

Source - Census 2021

significantly less active than recommended - **22,100**

Source- Sport England Active Lives 2023



Deprivation:

The 326 local authority districts in England are ranked for each domain, with 1 indicating the most deprived and 326 the least deprived. Bromsgrove experiences below average levels of deprivation across all domains.

Living environment - **271**

Crime - **160**

Barriers to housing & services - **204**

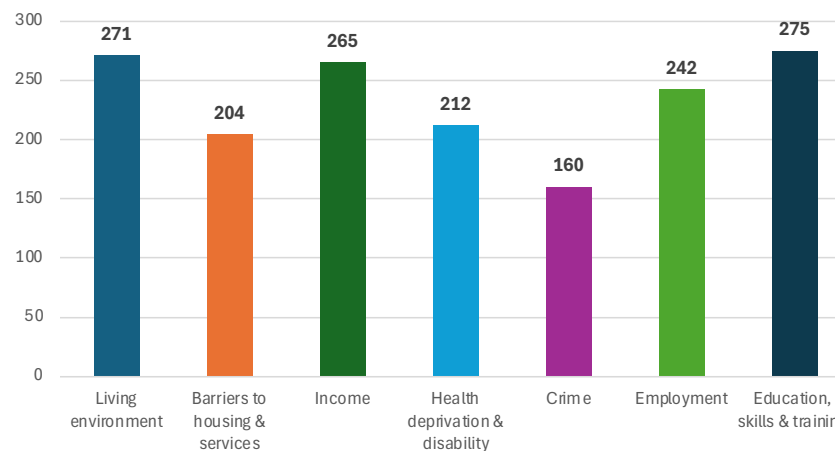
Employment - **242**

Income - **265**

Education, skills & training - **275**

Health deprivation & disability - **212**

Source - English indices of deprivation 2019 (ONS)



Economically active 16 - 64 year olds - **85.9%**

Above national average of **78.8%**

Source- NOMIS Employment & Unemployment (Jan 23 - Dec 23)

Economic Development

Economic development is key for delivering our vision for the district, with the aim of cultivating a thriving and resilient local economy. We will focus on supporting businesses, **enabling individuals, and developing communities.**

By supporting businesses, we seek to create an environment conducive to growth and innovation, offering resources, incentives, and infrastructure to bolster entrepreneurship and job creation. Enabling businesses to grow in the district will help us to retain them, creating more high-quality local opportunities. We will also encourage and support new business start-ups to see Bromsgrove District as a natural place to locate and do business.

Enabling individuals and businesses involves providing opportunities for skills development, education, and employment in order to develop prosperous communities where businesses flourish, **people thrive**, and places prosper. We will support the take-up of apprenticeships both across the district and within our own organisation, developing skills whilst also bolstering the businesses that employ them.

The eight centres across the district need to meet the changing needs of shoppers, residents, and businesses. We will work to improve the vitality and viability of the various centres and to reduce the number of empty shops in the district.



The Bromsgrove Town Centre 2040 Vision focuses on developing an inclusive, vibrant, and resilient town centre which is adaptable and resilient to change.

It looks to provide opportunities for redevelopment and regeneration, whilst preserving and strengthening the town's vibrancy and historic significance. A new Car Parking Strategy will address current and future requirements in order to meet the needs of our residents, businesses, and visitors alike.

A dynamic new team in partnership with Redditch Borough Council will provide enhanced resources and a review of our Economic Development Strategy will help us to implement our priorities, optimise our assets and attract businesses, jobs and investment to the district. Engaging with businesses and the wider communities they are part of, will help the team to understand and respond to the changing needs of the district, its businesses and the communities they serve.

Key objectives

- Supporting our businesses
- Upskilling the workforce
- Enabling growth & innovation
- Supporting entrepreneurship & job creation
- Vibrant town & district centres

Key projects

- Centres Strategy - Implementation of the yearly Centres Strategy action plan across the 8 centres within the district.
- Regeneration Sites - delivery of projects within the £14.5m Levelling Up Fund including Windsor Street and the Market Hall Site.



Housing

We want to address the diverse housing needs within our District, ensuring quality homes for our residents and families. The challenges, in particular affordability, presented by the housing market across all tenures, means we need to explore innovative solutions for housing provision. We will ensure that affordable options are available, while striving for a balanced mix of housing types to accommodate different demographics and stages of life.

The Bromsgrove 2040 Vision also includes residential opportunities as part of a town centre where people live, work and play.

Our Private Sector Housing Team **support vulnerable residents to live in safe, quality homes** and we will continue to work with Bromsgrove District Housing Trust (BDHT) to support people at risk of homelessness. Prioritising energy-efficient homes will not only **reduce environmental impact** but also contribute to long-term sustainability and cost savings for residents. We aspire to create a **thriving and inclusive community** where everyone has access to safe, healthy, affordable, and environmentally responsible housing options.

We will explore alternative ways of delivering the housing the district needs, whether that is through planning, partnerships or investment. We will also work with our partners across the county to deliver the Worcestershire Housing Strategy 2023-2040 and how **affordable, warm, and healthy homes can contribute to a better quality of life**.

Key objectives

- Affordable & balanced housing
- Energy efficient homes
- Innovative housing provision

Key projects- TBC

- Former Dolphin Centre Car Park - continue to explore different options for housing provision on the Town Centre site.
- New Local Plan- identification of the numbers of new housing that should be provided and where.

Environment

We are committed to safeguarding the natural environment, addressing issues ranging from biodiversity conservation to climate change mitigation, supporting recycling to reducing waste production, all with the goal of enhancing the quality of life for current and future generations.

Increased environmental enforcement will help to protect the beautiful environment of our district and minimise pollution. By maximising penalties, we will send a clear message that we will not tolerate environmental crimes such as fly-tipping and that we will work tirelessly to reduce the impact this has on our communities and businesses. We will work with partners at Worcestershire Regulatory Services, who measure the air quality across the district, to assess the impact of real-time air quality monitoring.

Delivery of the Environment Act signifies our dedication to comprehensive environmental policy and action, in particular how we can reduce waste, increase recycling and improve our waste management systems. We will work with residents, communities and businesses to provide education and awareness around any changes to recycling and the future introduction of food waste collection.

Efforts aimed at safeguarding ecosystems, green spaces, and wildlife habitats all contribute to not only carbon reduction but **improved wellbeing**.



Through these initiatives, whether that is meadow planting or promoting the inclusion of green corridors into developments, the Council strives to foster sustainable practices, promote environmental stewardship, and create **resilient communities in harmony with nature**.

Carbon reduction is essential in order to address the challenges faced by changes in our climate. With our partners, we will support residents and businesses to reduce their carbon emissions. We will review all aspects of our organisation; from the fuel our vehicles use to how energy efficient our buildings and facilities are, we will continue to work proactively towards our Carbon Reduction Strategy objectives.

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Key objectives

- Increased environmental enforcement
- Implementing the Environment Act 2021 (waste)
- Carbon reduction

Key projects

- Low carbon fleet fuel options- continue with the fleet conversion and the electrification of smaller vehicles.
- Bromsgrove District Heat Network- work with partners to develop, design and build the network, reducing carbon emissions.

Infrastructure

Prioritising infrastructure is paramount for our District, as it serves as the bedrock of not only our communities but also growth. This priority underpins the other three, as they can only be delivered with the right infrastructure in place. We will focus on delivering key infrastructure projects such as the new Local Plan, utilising our parks and open spaces, and initiatives promoting active travel.

Delivering a new Local Plan will help us to ensure that local infrastructure meets the needs of our residents, communities, businesses, and visitors alike. This key strategic document will detail the direction and ambition for the district and will set out the infrastructure requirements needed now and into the future, in order to support vibrant and resilient communities that can thrive.

Parks and open spaces link strongly with the Environment priority, **providing green spaces where people and nature can flourish**. But they also provide opportunities for communities to come together, people to get active and for local businesses and initiatives to deliver activities and events. By focusing on the implementation of our Parks and Open Space Strategy, we will seek to increase the investment in these resources and the number of people who can enjoy them.



Active travel is a key driver not only in **reducing carbon emissions** but also in **health and wellbeing**.

Working with Worcestershire County Council we will support the implementation of the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan and the development of Local Transport Plan 5, which will provide the strategic direction for future investment in active travel initiatives across the district.

By investing in these areas, we seek to **elevate the quality of life**, bolster economic development, and ensure the safety and **well-being of our residents**.



Key objectives

- Delivering the new Local Plan
- Parks and open spaces
- Active travel

Key projects

- Behaviour Change (air quality) - utilising real time information, a programme of encouraging community groups to lead on reducing polluting behaviour, which has active travel as a key component.
- Green Flag Awards- develop a rolling programme for achieving the national standard Green Flag Award for priority parks across the district.
- We will also continue to work in partnership on transport and environmental projects locally, regionally and nationally.

Monitoring, Review & Reporting - Our Measures

The measures below, by which we will evaluate this Council Plan, will help us to understand how we are delivering against our priorities.

Progress will be monitored on a quarterly basis (where the data is available), allowing us to adjust, as needed, to keep the plan on track. Reports will be considered by the Cabinet, Overview and Scrutiny and the Corporate Management Team, with the updates being available to the public on the website. The Council Plan will be reviewed annually to ensure that it addresses the key issues for the district and that the measures are telling us what we need to know.

- Monitor the number of jobs created by supported businesses (quarterly)
- Business births, deaths & survival rates (annual)
- Earnings (by residence & place of work) (annual)
- Track the delivery of the Centres Strategy action plan (quarterly)
- Community and business engagement (annual survey)
- Tracking affordability index - house prices, rental costs (quarterly)
- Monitor housing supply (annual)
- Number of private, affordable, and social houses delivered each year (annual)
- Number in temporary accommodation (quarterly)
- Number of homeless preventions (quarterly)
- Number of empty homes (quarterly)
- Grant funding for energy improvements of Private Housing (quarterly)
- Number of enforcement cases, planning and environment (number opened, number closed, number open for investigation) (quarterly)
- Time taken to remove Fly-tipping (quarterly)
- Track delivery of the actions in the Environment Act 2021 project (quarterly)

- Reduction in the amount of waste generated by households (quarterly)
- Percentage of household waste recycled or composted (quarterly)
- Track the delivery of the Carbon Reduction Strategy action plan (annual)
- Energy efficiency improvements in municipal buildings, facilities, and public infrastructure (biannual)
- Increase Community Engagement and Awareness around the environment (Quarters 2 & 4 Corporate Surveys and quarterly)
- Report on the stages of the new Local Plan development & adoption (biannual)
- Monitor the rate of planning approvals and appeals in alignment with the agreed policies and proposals (domestic & business) (quarterly inc by type)
- Track investment in infrastructure projects identified in the local plan (including section 106 monies spent) (annual)
- Track the delivery of the Parks and Open Spaces Strategy action plan (quarterly)
- To Achieve the Green Flag Award for the following parks: Sanders Park, Lickey End LNR, St Chads Park, Rubery and King George Vth Park over the next 10 years (annual)
- Engagement with WCC on the implementation of the Local Cycling & Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) and the development of the Local Transport Plan 5 (biannual)

Organisational Priorities

Financial Stability

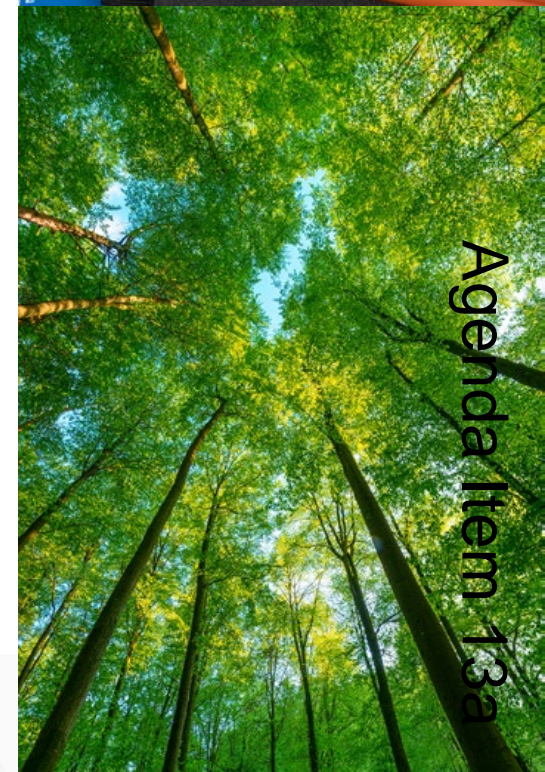
The primary organisational priority is financial stability, from ensuring prudent borrowing, undertaking effective contract management to managing our assets to get the best outcomes for our residents.

Finances have been difficult over recent years, with inflation and interest rates, and the resulting impact to employee costs, combining to make financial planning challenging across all sectors. Responding to these challenges, the organisation is focused on making even better use of existing resources, embedding business improvement, and exploring alternative methods of delivery, available grant funding, or potential income generation. We will use data and intelligence to inform how we deliver and procure services, prioritising the needs of our local communities and customers so that our services continue to be accessible and responsive.

Sustainability

Ensuring that a green thread runs through all the services we design and deliver is essential as we adapt to address the implications of climate change. From the buildings we work from to the vehicles we use, we will continue to review all our services to place sustainability, the environment, and the future generations of Bromsgrove District at the heart of all decision making.

We will also expand the use of digital technologies where appropriate, enabling more automation of services, freeing up capacity to deliver against the priorities of our communities. This will enable greater digital access to our services; allowing customers to book, pay and do things online when they want to 24/7.



Partnerships

We will work closely with our partners in the public sector, such as Redditch Borough Council, Worcestershire County Council, West Mercia Police, and the NHS and parish councils. We will also continue to work with the voluntary and community sector across the district, including through our Employee Volunteering Scheme.

The Bromsgrove Partnership brings together different organisations from the public, private, voluntary and community sectors in its role as the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) for the District of Bromsgrove. Instead of each organisation working separately in isolation, the Bromsgrove Partnership provides a forum for local organisations to come together and address issues that are important to those living, working, and visiting Bromsgrove District in a more effective and cohesive way.

Bromsgrove Partnership's vision is: **"We will make Bromsgrove District the place to live, do business and to visit."** Their three priority themes, which complement the purposes in this plan are: Economic Growth; Balanced Communities; Environment.

Partnership also extends to how we will work with our communities, whether engaging residents and businesses in how services are delivered, what our priorities should be or the wider decision-making processes. Corporate and service level engagement with the public will continue to inform how we design and deliver our services.



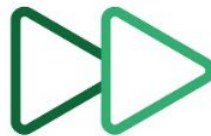
Parish
Councils

Organisational Culture - the 4P's

Through working closely with employees across the organisation, we have identified the '4P's' as a way of defining organisational culture and the aspirations of everyone who works for Bromsgrove District Council.

- **Purpose:** Aligns all actions and decisions with the council's overarching strategic goals, ensuring every task contributes to the collective vision and priorities, whether at a corporate, departmental, team or personal level. It provides a sense of direction, helping staff understand how their roles directly impact the community and reason for their work.
- **People:** This principle showcases the importance of 'our people' as our greatest asset, valuing and empowering staff, as well as recognising other important people or stakeholders that impact our work, from members to communities and partners. This principle aims to create a thriving working environment, supporting our people and offering wellbeing initiatives, development opportunities, flexibility, policies, and frameworks that ultimately enhance morale, productivity and the happiness of our staff.
- **Pride:** Taking pride in our work and our community is a key building block in maintaining high standards and a sense of achievement for our employees. By celebrating our successes and learning from challenges, pride encourages ownership, passion, and integrity in our day-to-day work life.
- **Performance:** By setting clear goals, measuring outcomes, and striving for excellence, we can drive continuous improvement and ensure that our work leads to tangible benefits for the community. This allows us to recognise our successes, set future objectives and identify areas for growth and improvement.

Whilst each principle has its own meaning, they are designed to work in a unified way to ensure a good culture where our staff are dedicated to delivering outstanding public services.



Purpose



People



Pride



Performance

Budget & Resources

Ensuring that we make the best use of our resources, capital and assets is essential in order to balance the books and provide our residents with value for money and confidence in the Council's ability to manage the budget. The priorities detailed within this plan will underpin our medium-term financial planning and financial management expertise informs all of our strategic decision making.

The Council has set its 2024/5 to 2026/7 budget in two tranches, in January 2024, with the second Tranche considered following the release of the final Local Government Settlement figures and approved in February 2024. The position that was approved in February 2024 was an overall £42k surplus in the 2024/5, putting the finances in a position of sustainability.

The revenue budget and capital programme have been formulated having regard to several factors including:

- Funding Available
- Inflation
- Risks and Uncertainties
- Priorities
- Service Pressures
- Commercial Opportunities
- Operating in a Post Covid-19 environment



Risk Management

The Council is committed to managing our risks effectively, efficiently, and proportionally, ensuring that risk management is fully embedded across the organisation. Corporate Risks are set out on a quarterly basis to the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee.

Mitigations for the risks identified are set out in Audit Reports as well as departmental risks that link to these Corporate Risks. An Officer Risk Board continues to take place quarterly to embed processes and validate risks on the register, with each department having a representative. The Corporate Management Team are updated on risk management issues in their monthly "assurance" meeting and a Member Risk Champion is appointed on an annual basis.





Bromsgrove
District Council

www.bromsgrove.gov.uk

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01527 548284 or email equalities@bromsgroveandredditch.gov.uk

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Productivity Plans

Relevant Portfolio Holder		Councillor May – Leader of the Council Councillor Colella – Portfolio Holder for Finance and Governance
Portfolio Holder Consulted		Yes
Relevant Head of Service		Sue Hanley – Chief Executive Pete Carpenter – Deputy Chief Executive
Report Author	Job Title: Business Improvement Manager Contact email: H.mole@bromsgroveandredditch.gov.uk Contact Tel:	
Wards Affected		All
Ward Councillor(s) consulted		No
Relevant Strategic Purpose(s)		All
Non-Key Decision		
If you have any questions about this report, please contact the report author in advance of the meeting.		

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Cabinet RECOMMEND that:

- 1) **The Productivity Plan, as set out in Appendix A, to be approved, the plan to be publish on the Council’s Website and forwarded to the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities before the 19th July 2024.**

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 On the 16th April 2024, The Minister for Local Government Simon Hoare MP wrote to Chief Executives. In this letter he thanked Local Government for the huge amount that it had delivered in recent years to improve productivity and efficiency.
- 2.2 He also set out that Government was reviewing productivity across all public services, including local government, and they were now looking at new ways to go further. These new plans would help the Government understand what was already working well across the whole country, what the common themes are, whether there are any gaps and what more we can do to unlock future opportunities.
- 2.3 The purpose of these plans is to ensure we as a sector, and the Government overall provide value for money for Residents. These plans do not have a formal template to follow or criteria to meet but are limited to 3-4 pages in length. The plans must
 - Set out what Councils have done in recent years, alongside current plans, to transform themselves and their services.

- The plans need to set out how Councils will monitor and assess themselves to assure delivery.
 - Plans must be returned to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) by the 19th July.
- 2.4 The Government guidance suggested that the plans should consider the following themes and if possible should reference work the Council undertakes alongside other public services:
- How you have transformed the way you design and deliver services to make better use of resources.
 - How you plan to take advantage of technology and make better use of data to improve decision making, service design and use of resources.
 - Your plans to reduce wasteful spend within your organisation and systems.
 - The barriers preventing progress that the Government can help to reduce or remove.
- 2.5 Bromsgrove District Councils response, covering these themes, is set out in Appendix A which forms the Councils formal Productivity Plan.
- 2.6 The Key points of these plans are:
- We already undertake significant Shared Service work and have done so since 2008.
 - We are leveraging Levelling Up Funding to regenerate the Town Centre.
 - We are using ICT to drive service efficiencies.
 - Partnerships drive our effective Service Delivery.
 - We link finance and performance monitoring with regular reporting.
 - We are using Benchmarking and data to drive service improvement.
 - Staff, and their skills, are core to delivery.
 - We listen to our communities' requirements.
- 3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**
- 3.1 The initiatives set out in appendix A reflect where the Council is at the moment. Investment will be required, over and above what is in the Capital and Revenue Budgets, to drive transformation at the Council forward. This will be project specific and these requirements will have individual business cases.
- 4. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**
- 4.1 There are no direct legal implications arising as a result of this report. The Productivity Plan has been requested by DLUHC, it is not a statutory requirement.

5. STRATEGIC PURPOSES - IMPLICATIONS

Relevant Strategic Purpose

- 5.1 The current Strategic purposes are included in the Council's Corporate Plan and guides the Council's approach to budget making ensuring we focus on the issues and what are most important for the borough and our communities.

Climate Change Implications

- 5.2 The Climate Change green thread runs through the Council Plan. Any future options that relate to climate will be individually evaluated.

6. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

Equalities and Diversity Implications

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

Operational Implications

- 6.2 Operational implications have been dealt with as part of the 2023/24 Budget process.

7. RISK MANAGEMENT

- 7.1 Non delivery of savings options (efficiencies as requested by the Minister), depending on their financial magnitude can have either a small or significant effect on the Council's finances. As such mitigations need to be in place to deal changes to what was agreed by Council in February 2024.

8. APPENDICES and BACKGROUND PAPERS

Appendix A – Productivity Plan

Appendix A – Bromsgrove Productivity Plan

1. How have you transformed the way you design and deliver services to make better use of resources?

We are pleased to share our progress in transforming the way we design and deliver services, optimising the utilisation of resources effectively. Through analysis, strategic planning, and innovative approaches, we have embarked on a journey towards enhancing efficiency, transparency, and accessibility across all facets of service provision, namely.

- District Council & Borough Council with Shared Leadership team since 2008.
- Implemented Agile working. We have not imposed targets for being in the Office, work patterns based on business need. This has led to less travel (reduced Carbon footprint).
- Parkside Hub - Sharing of Workspace at Bromsgrove with Worcestershire County Council (WCC) and the Department of Works and Pensions (DWP).
- Everyone Active (Linking to National Health Service (NHS) through development services) outsourced delivery of Leisure Services (except Parks & Green Spaces & Development Services).
- Implementation of an updated Workforce Strategy in the summer 2023 - including updated working culture (4Ps – Purpose, People, Pride & Performance).
- Housing and Community Services – links and partnerships with the NHS, Funding partnerships – homelessness, anti-social behaviour (ASB), community housing, Starting Well fund.
- Set up own housing company (Spadesbourne Housing) in 2023.
- Land and Building Asset Group (LBAG) - looking at the effective use of surplus assets across the Councils brownfield sites.
- Levelling Up (£16.1m) funding and the Bromsgrove 2040 Vision (bringing back 5 Town Centre sites into use) – for regeneration of Bromsgrove Town Centre.
- Selling Commercial Waste Service to other Councils, reducing overall Service costs.
- Data use includes National Fraud Initiative (NFI) and other sharing initiatives with Government Departments.

We measure productivity through: -

- Quarterly Finance and Performance Reporting to Cabinet, linked to Strategic Objectives.
- Members Corporate dashboard is available online.
- Line Management - one to ones - measuring outcomes Vs time.
- MTFP follows a two-tranche process and links finance to strategic direction.
- Services detail methods of operation i.e. Agile, timesheets, workstreams and KPI's are detailed in Service Business Plans (360 view with feedback).

To improve services, we have:

- Joined up/collaboration of enabling services (with Service Protocols for Support Service).
- Increased procurement protocols in around Officer Key Decision Notices, increasing the Key Decision Threshold to £200k, and a fully updated Contract Register.

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- Updating of Members as part of the quarterly Finance and Performance Report on upcoming procurements over the next year.

Our plans for transformation over the next two year are:

- Data Prioritisation Programme- to establish clean data & make effective decisions using data (measure cleanliness pre and post) linking to the new Corporate Plan.
- Digital Improvements through Robotics, AI, and the Customer Portal.
- Progressing the ABCD Community Builder approach.
- Introduce updated Service Business Planning in 2024/5, using the Local Government Association (LGA) Transformation Tool to measure pre & post implementation.
- New Strategic Objectives are being formulated with Cabinet for implementation in 2024.
- Performance reporting review (linked to the above points)- summary sheet & detail behind (Power Bi) (measures) and linkages to how we compare to other Councils.
- Community Engagement Proposal – moving to quarterly targeted surveys & “You said we did” within Performance Quarterly reporting (from a yearly report).
- Full establishment review in May 2024 - with the aim to reduce consultants which the Council is currently reliant at circa 18% of the workforce and establish a workforce that reflects the Council’s needs.
- Monthly Officer Assurance meeting, reviewing Performance and learning from issues.

Looking ahead, our greatest potential for savings is:

- Use of LG Futures and Performance/Benchmarking Data to target high cost services.
- Reviewing housing structures and linking these to productivity gains from using new technology for service improvements.
- Review of the Waste Service considering the impending changes to regulations and use of technology to implement route optimisation / integration of street scene tasks.
- Review of right location for the remaining Leisure Services.
- Reviewing structures of enabling services to ensure cost effective and supporting front line services requirements.
- Reviewing Stores & Garage (workshop).
- Progress Workforce planning.

We have used capital spend to boost growth or improve services; examples are:

- Investing £6m in the Burcot Lane Housing development to kick start Housing development in Bromsgrove.
- Utilising regeneration & Levelling Up funds to regenerate towns and boost growth.
- Investment in the Waste Fleet - once Government requirements have been finalised.
- Use of more Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil (HVO) Fuel in Waste Fleet, which although more expensive, significantly reduces Carbon emissions.

We have undertaken the following preventative approaches:

- No procurement No order initiative – implemented April 23 to control expenditure.
- Contracts are linked to finance system to monitor spend and only raise orders on approved contracts - April 2023.
- ICT Phishing tests - to increase staff awareness and reduce potential downtime.

- Investment in ICT Cyber Security to reduce downtime and risk of catastrophic failure.

Locally led reforms that help deliver high quality public services and improve the sustainability and resilience of your authority are:

- Joined-up working between District Councils and the County Council.
- Closer collaboration between Council and central government departments such as DWP and Health Services- as many services link closely to each other.
- Promotion of the One Public Estate (OPE) initiative - and ensuring the best decision is made - not requiring all parties to have savings.

2. How you plan to take advantage of technology and make better use of data to improve decision making, service design and use of resources.

We recognise data as an asset and are committed to implementing robust systems for collection, analysis, and interpretation. By leveraging advanced analytics and artificial intelligence, we aim to gain deeper insights into community needs, trends, and preferences. This proactive approach will enable us to make informed decisions, tailor services to meet evolving demands, and allocate resources more efficiently. We plan:

- A new Customer facing interface which ensures that data is input fewer times as possible, increasing efficiency and data quality at the Council and improving the Stakeholder Customer Experience. 20% efficiencies could be made in this area.
- Revised processes to ensure data is clean (single source) and links across the Council and we maximise the functionality of ICT System changes and upgrades.

Our existing plans are to improve the quality of the data we collect:

- The extensive data prioritisation project will identify data quality, programme validation, data cleansing and invest in customer portal to enable "one account."
- Continue with gold standard quality recognition Geographic Information System (GIS), achieved throughout 2023/24.

Barriers we experience from our legacy systems are:

- Configuration restrictions (which are historic but costly to change).
- Reporting - similar systems reporting on same customers in different ways.
- Lack of standardisation of data requirements.
- Updating and data progression is limited and not standardised across the Council.
- Limited budget to invest in quality systems with required capabilities to improve.

We regularly share data with our partners, DWP, HMRC, Police, Cabinet Office. This is useful as it enables collaborative decision making, improved service delivery, resource optimisation (avoiding duplication), enhanced problem solving and transparency and accountability (track progress, evaluate outcomes and hold each other accountable for their actions). Opportunities we are driving forward to use new technology are:

- Data Prioritisation/audit/standards to improve data quality and validity / importance of data, single source, sharing and reducing repetition and promote blended data for better insight and understanding across services and partners.
- Implementation of a new Customer Interface.
- Systems audit - targeted on systems where there are higher risks.

- GIS Gold Standard.
- Robotics and Artificial Intelligence (AI) work programme including:
 - Human Resources / Finance – Establishment accuracy & updating.
 - Housing – communications relating to:
 - Aids & Adaptions, Disrepair Claims, Complaints, Councillor and General Enquiries.
 - Revs and Bens scoping out opportunities for:
 - Council Tax Recovery, eBilling, the National Fraud Initiative.

3. Your plans to reduce wasteful spending within your organisation and systems. (You should set out your plans to reduce wasteful or "gold-plated" spending.)

Our approach to identifying and reducing waste include:

- Performance Dashboard (real time) & Quarterly Performance reporting via Corporate Management Team (CMT) and then Cabinet.
- Updating Performance Indicators/Format reflecting new Corporate Strategy and Business Plans so Officers/Members can see if Services are not delivering and have comparisons to other Councils (Benchmarking/Sector Performance Indicators)
- Revised Strategic Priorities to focus on political necessities.
- Data - Single source data (across multiple systems)

Invest to save:

Only Levelling Up schemes can be seen as "Invest to save"; however, funding is from the Government with tight reporting requirements and a high bar to reach to obtain it.

We moved to Opus platform in May 2023 for hiring agency workers, spend to end March 2024 has been £3,203.453. The number of agency workers more than 12 months placement is 18.

To ensure we have accountability of spend, we have:

- A two Tranche Budget Process, challenged by the cross-party Budget Working Groups.
- Budget managers received training, and refresher training, on the financial systems.
- Formal finance reporting is undertaken quarterly through to Members.
- Full demarcation of duties in the finance system between budget managers, approvers and requisitioners. All transactions, including monitoring delivered online.

4. The barriers preventing progress that the Government can help to reduce or remove.

Examples of service wide barriers preventing us from improving productivity further are:

- Recruitment difficult in some areas i.e.: ICT / Planning/ Housing.
- Silo working with other local authorities and government bodies.
- Lack of flexibility in recruiting competent workforce - consider market supplements etc.
- Limited investment in training & progression /potential incentive for growth and development.
- Capacity / resources (both at the Council and in Worcestershire)
- Capability issues, right people in right job at right time (especially current data skills)

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- Compliance to process.
- Reduced funding (and ensuring investment is cost effective).

To remove these barriers, we will need to:

- Invest in recruiting the right people for the right jobs at the right time, including apprenticeships.
- Invest in opening career and development pathways and opportunities.
- Invest in staff & managerial training & progression training.
- Further embrace automation and AI.
- Ability to have autonomy to change.
- Reduce bureaucracy & some processes while still being compliant.
- Ensure ownership / accountability.
- Use of packages such as Modern.Gov to get members and officers to access data electronically.

To achieve transformation, we must enhance data quality, improve systems and processes, as well as invest in staff training, succession planning, recruitment, and automation, government funds are imperative. Additionally, allocating resources towards AI integration would significantly streamline and enhance processes and accuracy across various services.