

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MEETING OF THE CABINET

WEDNESDAY 26TH MARCH 2025, AT 6.00 P.M.

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

Observers: Councillor S.T. Nock

Officers: Mr P. Carpenter, Mrs. H. Mole, Mrs. R. Green, Ms. G. Harris and Mrs J. Gresham

80/24

TO RECEIVE APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence from Members on this occasion.

81/24

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor K. May declared an Other Disclosable Interest in respect of Minute Item 84 – UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) 2025 – 2026, on the basis that, as Leader of the Council, she would be required to sign off the final allocations of the UK Shared Prosperity Funding. Councillor May remained present for the consideration of the report and took part in the vote thereon.

There were no other Declarations of Interest.

82/24

TO CONFIRM THE ACCURACY OF THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE CABINET HELD ON 19TH FEBRUARY 2025

The minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 19th February 2025 were submitted for Members' consideration.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 19th February 2025 be approved and signed as a true and accurate record.

83/24

DATA STRATEGY (INCL DATA STANDARDS POLICY)

The Business Improvement Manager – Business Transformation, presented the Data Strategy (including Data Standards Policy) report for Members' consideration.

During the presentation of the report, it was highlighted that this Policy provided the foundation and guidance for effective data governance to help safeguard the Council's data assets. It would ensure that data was high quality, accurate and consistent across the organisation. It also provided guidance in respect of legal and regulatory requirements to ensure compliance with the relevant legislation such as UK General Data Protection Regulation (UKGDPR). The following areas were also included in the policy to help provide a robust framework in the future:

1. Data Security
2. Efficiency
3. Interoperability
4. Trust and Transparency

The Governance structure of this Policy consisted of the System and Data (SAD) Governance Group, which met on a regular basis. This Group reported back to the SAD Governance Board, led by the Deputy Chief Executive and Section 151 Officer, who met on a quarterly basis. There were also regular updates provided to the Senior Leadership and Corporate Leadership Teams.

An assessment had been carried out using the Local Government Association (LGA) assessment tool in respect of Data Maturity. This was undertaken by a group of fourth tier managers across the organisation. The results of this assessment indicated a Data Maturity score of 2.7, which meant that the Council was currently working at Level Three and were 'developing their capacity and capabilities in terms of their data'. Ideally, the Council would be at least at Level Four. This Policy would provide the framework in order to attain this level.

There were three projects currently underway that would increase the Data Maturity level the Council was working at. These were as follows:

1. **Data Standards** – there were five systems across the Organisation that held ninety percent of the Council's data. These systems needed to be reviewed, and organisational rules implemented on how to input consistent and accurate data. A Data Dictionary would also be developed as part of this project. In order for this project to progress successfully, there would need to be £50,000 allocated to look at the systems more closely by system providers. This allocation equated to £10,000 per system.
2. **Data Stewards** – Data Stewards would have an in-depth knowledge and understanding of data collected and contained

within the systems. They would be responsible for the quality of the data and undertake regular audits in order to ensure that the data contained within the systems remained accurate and of a high quality.

3. **Systems Procurement** – This project would ensure regulation around the procurement of new systems and due diligence in respect of the numbers of system procured.

These were long term projects and would be carried out over two years.

Following the presentation of the Data Strategy (including Data Standards Policy), the Deputy Chief Executive and Section 151 Officer explained that this Policy provided useful preparatory work prior to the Local Government Reorganisation, currently taking place. It would result in standardisation of the data contained within the Council's data systems and, just as importantly, 'kept clean' going forward. Members welcomed this Policy, as it had been reported that some Local Authorities who had undergone recent reorganisation had not undertaken this type of process. This had resulted in significant issues in respect of the non-alignment of data.

Members queried whether the financial allocation of £50,000 requested within the report had been included in the Medium-Term Financial Plan 2025/2026 to 2027/2028 (following consultation). Members were advised that it had not been included as this part of the approval process needed to be undertaken first. The allocation would be monitored in the Outturn reports going forward.

It was also queried whether there were any shared systems across both Redditch and Bromsgrove Councils. It was confirmed that this was the case. It had been agreed at the Executive Committee meeting that took place at Redditch Borough Council on 11th March 2025 that the funding allocation of £60,000 be approved in order to look at the systems. It was explained that the extra £10,000 allocated in Redditch was as a result of the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) system which was not used at Bromsgrove.

In addition to this, Cabinet was advised that Worcestershire County Council (WCC) were also due to implement the TechOne finance system in December 2025. This was the same finance system used by Bromsgrove District Council.

Members queried the control of information and what this meant in terms of cyber security in the future. It was noted that a report would be

considered early in the next municipal year regarding the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) across the Council.

Following consideration of this report, Members extended their best wishes and thanks to the Assistant Director Business Transformation, Organisational Development and Digital Services who was due to retire at the end of March 2025.

RESOLVED that the proposed Data Standards Policy be agreed and implement guidance policy for all employees and Members.

84/24

UK SHARED PROSPERITY FUND 2025 - 2026

The UK Shared Prosperity Fund Manager presented the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) 2025 – 2026 report for the consideration of Cabinet.

In doing so, the background to the UKSPF was explained to Members and that previously the funding had been for three years from 2022 to 2025. The scheme had been extended for one year (2025 to 2026) and the funding allocated to the Council for this period was £917,878.

The UKSPF would continue to focus on three investment priorities of Communities and Place, Supporting Local Businesses and People and Skills. Previously there had been more than fifty interventions which described the intention of the investment priorities. These interventions had been replaced with five themes and twelve sub-themes. Any scheme that had previously been eligible for funding would remain so under the new guidelines.

Potential areas of investment had been discussed by Members at the Cabinet Advisory Group (CAG) meeting held in December 2024. The Investment Plan was then developed with these discussions in mind. It was also reported that the Investment Plan aligned with the Council's priorities as detailed within the Bromsgrove District Council Plan approved in July 2024. The results of the recent Community Survey had also been considered when shaping the Investment Plan.

The areas included within the Investment Plan included infrastructure, buildings, open spaces, cost of living (including fuel poverty) and local centres. There was also support for local businesses and for the upskilling of young people and provision of support in order for them to enter the workforce.

The Bromsgrove Partnership, in its role as Local Partnership Group, for the UKSPF had been consulted on the strategic fit and deliverability of the Investment Plan. For the most part, the Partnership was supportive of the Plan, however there had been some recommendations made following discussions at a meeting held on 12th March 2025.

The Partnership expressed some concern in respect of the allocation of funding for the subtheme 'bringing communities together'. They recommended that the funding should be a forty to fifty per cent revenue allocation rather than a capital allocation. However, it was noted by Officers that there was some flexibility for revenue funding to be used as capital funding under the grant conditions, however capital must be spent on capital expenditure. This meant that the funding as detailed within the Investment Plan for this sub theme could be varied depending on demand and who was likely to need it.

A further recommendation was suggested by the Partnership that capital funding for high streets and town centre improvements should not include Bromsgrove Town Centre as there was already funding available for this location. Officers were not supportive of this recommendation.

The third recommendation was in respect of the funding of County wide projects to avoid a 'postcode lottery' of support. It was confirmed that this was already the approach taken as part of the Investment Plan. However, Members were assured that in taking this approach value for money for Bromsgrove residents had been considered and that all funding allocations benefitted Bromsgrove residents only.

The final recommendation from the Partnership had been in relation to organisations that delivered support across a common theme, such as skills, be encouraged to work in a joined-up way in order to avoid duplication of services. This was already the approach taken when the Investment Plan was developed to ensure cohesion.

Finally, the UK Prosperity Fund Manager advised Members that the second Officer recommendation contained within the report was in order to ensure greater flexibility to re-allocate any outstanding funding that had not been spent towards the end of the scheme.

Members considered the recommendations made by the Bromsgrove Partnership and felt that with the potential exception of the recommendation made in respect of the public realm funding, the Investment Plan as presented captured priority areas of investment effectively and appropriately.

There were some discussions in respect of Economic Development following the Local Government Reorganisation. At this stage there was a significant number of unknowns in this area and that it would need to be considered when decisions were made as part of the Local Government Reorganisation process going forward.

Members queried access to the support for local businesses. It was felt that the Worcestershire Growth Hub website was difficult to navigate and that businesses might not be able to ascertain where to find information on support that was available. The UK Shared Prosperity Fund Manager explained that this had been raised previously. There was an advisor, with specific local knowledge, available who could consult with businesses to provide advice on this matter. Businesses could either contact the advisor directly or contact the UK Shared Prosperity Fund Manager for further information.

RESOLVED that

- 1) The Investment Plan be approved.
- 2) Authority to vary the Investment Plan, in order to maximise the use of the grant, be delegated to the Assistant Director Regeneration & Property following consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Economic Development and Regeneration.

85/24

FINANCE RECOVERY PROGRAMME REPORT

The Deputy Chief Executive and Section 151 Officer presented the Finance Recovery report for the consideration of Members.

It was explained that this report was presented to Members on a regular basis, following the issuing of the Section 24 Notice in November 2023. A version of this report was also considered at the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee meetings throughout the municipal year.

The report included any Key Deliverables, Treasury Indicators and updates on the VAT returns.

Members were informed that the Statement of Accounts for the financial years 2020 – 2021, 2021 – 2022, 2022 – 2023 had been completed and Disclaimer Opinions received and approved. The draft accounts for financial year 2023 – 2024 were out for consultation with some public consultation comments being received, which was positive. It was

reported that there were potential difficulties likely to arise in terms of the Disclaimer Options that had been issued to Councils nationally and the effect these would have on external audits in the future. It was felt that there was a disconnect between the understanding of Disclaimer Opinions between Central Government and auditors and whether time should be spent on 'old' accounts. It was suggested that as long as the opening balances, amount of reserves and grant funding were known this was hopefully sufficient to provide accurate accounts in future years. Furthermore, there was a level of assurance around these balances in that returns were checked and submitted on a yearly basis.

Ernst & Young had been confirmed as the Council's External Auditors. The Deputy Chief Executive and Section 151 Officer thanked Members for their speedy return of the disclosure information that had been provided to the auditors. This was usually a process that might take six to eight months. However, the Council had completed their disclosure information within four months. Due diligence was currently being undertaken by Ernst & Young including looking at Council press releases. It was thought that this process would be completed within four weeks from the time of the meeting. Members were interested to learn that this was part of the due diligence process, and it highlighted the necessity and importance to continue to make decisions in a robust manner following complete analysis.

The Key Deliverables included within the report were as follows:

1. The Accounting Policies report was now considered at each Audit, Standards and Governance Committee.
2. The TechOne system had been upgraded to version 24B in February 2025
3. The approval of the Medium-Term Financial Plan 2025 – 2026 to 2027 – 2028 on 19th February 2025
4. The consultation on the Medium-Term Financial Plan 2025 – 2026 to 2027 – 2028
5. Changes implemented to the Procurement processes
6. Updated Prudential Indicators had been completed.

It was reported that Central Government had announced that capital receipts could be used to fund redundancies as part of the Local Government Reorganisation. Information in respect of this would be circulated to Members following the meeting.

Members queried what the allocation would be from Central Government in order to carry out the Local Government Reorganisation. It was

reported that information had been received that £6.7million had been allocated across Worcestershire for this purpose. At the time of the meeting, it was unknown as to how these funds would be distributed and whether this would be equally or be dependent on the size and complexity of the Council.

Although the Local Government Reorganisation was inevitably at the forefront of Members' and Officers' minds it was imperative that 'business as usual' continued within the Council and that services still needed to be delivered. As highlighted earlier in the meeting there were processes underway in terms of data and other areas in order to leverage improvements during and following the Local Government Reorganisation. Several models of Local Government could be considered as part of the reorganisation. There had been recent examples of Local Government Reorganisation such as at Peterborough City Council and Cambridgeshire County Council. The Deputy Chief Executive and Section 151 Officer undertook to provide Members with the public documentation available in respect of this matter following the meeting.

It was noted that there would be pressures in terms of pensions, and this would need to be considered in detail as part of the reorganisation process.

Although the Local Government Reorganisation was due to be implemented by April 2028, it was thought that the process would take significantly longer to embed and consolidate following vesting day.

Following consideration of the report, Members thanked and stated that the Deputy Chief Executive and Section 151 Officer had breathed 'fresh air' into the Finance Recovery reports. It was noted that they would be included in a Forward Plan currently being developed in the future to ensure transparency.

RESOLVED that the following be **NOTED**

- 1) Progress made on the financial recovery including:
 - a) Delivery of the Statutory Accounts
 - b) Delivery of Statutory Financial Returns
 - c) Improvements in the Control Environment

- 2) The work still under way to move back to a best practice operation and the associated timetable for completion of this work, as contained in this report.

86/24

QUARTER 3 REVENUE AND PERFORMANCE MONITORING 24-25

The Deputy Chief Executive and Section 151 Officer presented the Quarter Three Revenue and Performance Monitoring 24-25 for Members' consideration.

It was noted that this report along with the Finance Recovery report, also considered at this Cabinet meeting, had been pre-scrutinised by the Finance and Budget Working Group (FBWG) at its meeting that took place on 21st March 2025.

During consideration of this report, Members were informed of the following:

- Currently the Council was forecasting an underspend of £53,000 at Quarter Three which was an improvement of £397,000 reported at Quarter Two. Details of variations of any underspend and overspends were provided and the reasons for these variations were highlighted for Members.
- As of 31st December 2024, the Council had no long-term borrowing and £6million worth of investments.
- The spend on the Capital Programme was currently £2.284million versus a budget of £7million. There was no debt as a result of the Capital Programme as it was funded solely by the Council.
- The Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership (GBSLEP) funding could not be accessed until the 2026 – 2027 financial year. These funds would be utilised for the Market Hall project.
- There had been an increase in costs at the Windsor Street site due to further remediation works being identified. This increase had been covered within the contingency budget. It was noted that this site would be ready for development very soon.
- There were £12.8million in General Fund Reserves and £9.534million in earmarked Reserves (this included the £40,000 which had previously been allocated to the Poverty Truth Commission).
- Members Wards Budget allocations continued to be monitored and currently there had been £46,700 spent of this budget which meant that £15,300 was still to be allocated prior to the end of the financial year.

- The impact of the Local Government Reorganisation and the impact this increase of workload would have on the workload of Senior Officers within the Council.
- The Procurement Pipeline which included details of contracts expected to be reprocured and procured in the future. It was noted that there were currently seventeen contracts between the old key decision threshold of £50,000 and the new key threshold of £200,000, ten contracts over the key decision threshold of £200,000 and four contracts procured by Redditch Borough Council on behalf of Bromsgrove. Any contracts over the new key decision threshold would be included in the Forward Plan.

The Policy Manager presented the performance monitoring information contained within the Quarter Three Revenue and Performance Monitoring 2024 – 2025. It was reported that the suite of measures were aligned with the Council Plan. The information looked different to previous reports as there had been a change to the format following requests received from Members. There were some measures still to be included such as Freedom of Information and Subject Access Request data. This was a result of projects currently being carried out in these areas. They would however appear in future versions of these reports.

Members access to these measures would increase over the coming months due to the introduction of the Power BI system, which would provide up to date and more dynamic data. This software also allowed greater interrogation of the data included in the system and a summary sheet would also be available in order to see where there were any trends in particular areas. This would ensure that any areas of positive or negative change could be identified more easily and quickly.

The performance measures not only aligned with the Council Plan they were linked to the Service Business Planning process which had recently been undertaken by Officers. It was hoped that this approach would provide greater clarity on how the Council was performing versus the Council Plan.

The Deputy Chief Executive and Section 151 Officer explained that at the meeting of the FBWG on 21st March 2025, Members had some queries and areas to look at further in future reports. These included:

- Information on the direction of travel from Quarter to Quarter in order to better understand what the issues were prior to them becoming more serious.

- The timeline of the inclusion of all measures in future reports. This was identified as being in September 2025.
- Workforce Strategy was identified as an area of significant concern particularly the high 10 days of lost time per Full Time Equivalent (FTE)
- More information to be provided on Enforcement including action taken by Environmental Services and Worcestershire Regulatory Services (WRS).
- A full reconciliation of the Market Hall project.

Members expressed that this was a really good report, and the data was presented was much improved and more transparent way.

Concerns were raised regarding the increased number of new houses that needed to be built within the District per annum in line with the new National Planning Policy Framework.

Members requested that further information be provided in future reports such as:

1. Disability Facilities Grants – the average length of the process from the first enquiry to the delivery of the project.
2. Enforcement – how long enforcement cases had taken and the outcomes of any enforcement, whether there had been no further action or if the enforcement had resulted in a prosecution.
3. Number of lost telephone calls to the Council because of long waiting times.

Members were interested in the process regarding the GBSLEP monies and whether Birmingham City Council had the authority to withhold monies in this way until the 2026 – 2027 financial year. It was stated that there had been a bid submitted to access these funds, and the outcome of the submission would be known over the coming months.

Following the presentation of the report Members thanked the Deputy Chief Executive and Section 151 Officer for all his hard work over his time with the Council and wished him every success in the future.

RESOLVED that

- 1) The current Revenue underspend position of £53k and actions the Council were taking to mitigate this position be noted.

- 2) The current Capital spending of £2.284m against a budget of £7.070m be noted.
- 3) The Ward Budget allocation position to date is 23 approved allocations at £33,137.
- 4) The updated procurements position, with any new items over £200,000 to be included on the forward plan.
- 5) The Quarter Three Performance data for the period October to December 2024 be noted. This is in the new format.
- 6) The Council submit a bid for £2.425m to Birmingham City Council for funding allocated to Bromsgrove by the former Greater Birmingham & Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership (GBSLEP) to support the completion of the Market Hall regeneration initiative.

RECOMMENDED that

- 7) That the Balance Sheet Monitoring Position for Quarter Three be noted – which is the Treasury Monitoring Report and required to be reported to Council.
- 8) In the event that the bid be successful, the budget be amended to reflect that the GBSLEP funding was being applied to the Market Hall development.

87/24

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD HELD ON 11TH FEBRUARY 2025 AND 17TH FEBRUARY 2025

The minutes of the meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Board held on 11th February 2025 and 17th February 2025 were submitted for the Cabinet's consideration. It was noted that there were no outstanding recommendations contained within these minutes.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Board held on 11th February 2025 and 17th February 2025 be noted.

88/24

TO CONSIDER ANY URGENT BUSINESS, DETAILS OF WHICH HAVE BEEN NOTIFIED TO THE ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF LEGAL, DEMOCRATIC AND PROCUREMENT SERVICES PRIOR TO THE COMMENCEMENT OF THE MEETING AND WHICH THE CHAIRMAN, BY REASON OF SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES, CONSIDERS TO BE OF

SO URGENT A NATURE THAT IT CANNOT WAIT UNTIL THE NEXT MEETING

There was no Urgent Business on this occasion.

The meeting closed at 7.39 p.m.

Chairman