

Public Document Pack



BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

TUESDAY 18TH NOVEMBER 2025

AT 6.00 P.M.

PARKSIDE SUITE - PARKSIDE

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

AGENDA

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

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

- 3. To confirm the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board held on 2nd and 28th October 2025 (Pages 7 - 52)**

4. **Strategic Overview of BDHT Services** (Pages 53 - 60)

A presentation will also be provided at the meeting.

5. **Homelessness Prevention Grant and Domestic Abuse Grant - Pre-Scrutiny** (Report to follow)

This report will follow in a Supplementary Papers pack once the report has been published for Cabinet's consideration (due for publication on Tuesday 11th November 2025).

6. **Housing Task Group - Final Report** (Pages 61 - 96)

7. **Worcestershire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee - Update** (Pages 97 - 104)

8. **Finance and Budget Working Group - Membership Report and Update** (Pages 105 - 112)

9. **Cabinet Work Programme** (Pages 113 - 120)

10. **Overview and Scrutiny Board Work Programme** (Pages 121 - 122)

11. **Overview and Scrutiny Action Sheet** (Pages 123 - 126)

12. **To consider any urgent business, details of which have been notified to the Assistant Director 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.**

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

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

Item No	Paragraph
14	3

14. **Windsor Street Site - Pre-Scrutiny** (Report to follow)

This report will follow in a Supplementary Papers pack once the report has been published for Cabinet's consideration (due for publication on Tuesday 11th November 2025).

J. Leach
Chief Executive

Parkside
Market Street
BROMSGROVE
Worcestershire
B61 8DA

10th November 2025

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

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

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Notes:

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



INFORMATION FOR THE PUBLIC

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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.
- A reasonable number of copies of agendas and reports relating to items to be considered in public will be made available to the public attending meetings of the Council, Cabinet and its Committees/Boards.
- You have access to a list specifying those powers which the Council has delegated to its Officers indicating also the titles of the Officers concerned, as detailed in the Council's Constitution, Scheme of Delegation.

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BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

28TH OCTOBER 2025, AT 6.00 P.M.

PRESENT: Councillors P. M. McDonald (Chairman), S. T. Nock (Vice-Chairman), S. Ammar, A. M. Dale, C.A. Hotham, B. Kumar, S. A. Robinson, J. D. Stanley and H. D. N. Warren-Clarke

Observers: K. May – Leader and Cabinet Member for Strategic Partnerships, Economic Development and Enabling and Councillor K. Taylor, Cabinet Member for Planning, Licensing and WRS

Officers: Mr. G. Revans, Mrs. R. Bamford, R Egan, Ms J. Willis, McElliott and Mrs. J. Bayley-Hill and Mrs S. Woodfield

52/25

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES

An apology for absence was received on behalf of Councillor A. Bailes, with confirmation provided that Councillor C.A. Hotham was attending as his named substitute.

Apology for absence was also received on behalf of Councillor R. Bailes as well as Councillor S.R. Colella (who was due to attend as her named substitute).

Members were advised that the Cabinet Member for Finance, Councillor S. Baxter, had also submitted an apology for the meeting.

53/25

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND WHIPPING ARRANGEMENTS

There were no declarations of interest nor of whipping arrangements.

54/25

CITIZENS ADVICE (USES OF GRANT FUNDING)

The Chief Executive of Citizens Advice Bromsgrove and Redditch (CABR) delivered a presentation to the Board.

Members were informed that the charity received strong support from the Council and he expressed gratitude for the opportunity to present to Members on how the grant funding was being used.

The following key points were presented to the Board:

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- The four key support areas provided by CABR were Core Services, Household Support Fund Distribution, Affordability Assessments and Outreach Development Projects.
- The Funding contribution from Bromsgrove District Council (BDC) was £123,400 with Worcestershire County Council (WCC) adding £23,606 per year.
- BDC was the highest funding contributor in Worcestershire to the CABR.
- The national average for funding the CABR was £1.34 per head in 2023/2024.
- CABR provided advice, not just information, which was regulated by the Advice Quality Standard (AQS), Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) and Money and Pensions Service (MaPS).
- The charity was supported by 50–60 volunteers. The call answer rate had improved from 24% in 2020 to 38% in 2025.
- In total, 4,710 households in Bromsgrove District received full advice and 773 households received light-touch advice.
- In addition, £388,601 income had been gained and £676,674 debts had been managed for residents.
- The Household Support Fund (HSF) costed £7,000 per annum to deliver with £50,000 of funds distributed.
- £2,745 had been provided a year to carry out affordability assessments for Bromsgrove District Housing Trust (BDHT) clients.
- In addition, £62,000 had been provided by the Council for an Outreach project over 18 months. To date, regular sessions were held in Charford, Catshill, Rubery, Wythall, Alvechurch, Sidemoor and Clent.
- There were future challenges with increased demand expected, funding sustainability and the Local Government Review (LGR) implications to consider.
- There were potential outsourcing opportunities for the follow-on funding from the HSF Scheme, including discretionary housing payments and tenancy support.

After consideration of the presentation the following discussions were carried out by the Board:

- Various Parish Council contributions were discussed, with Members noting one contribution of £5,000 was provided in the previous financial year.
- There would be a review of the charity's website, however, it was agreed that the Outreach calendar updates relating to the availability of the CABR would be shared with Members as requested.
- There were numerous collaborations with other partners for the Outreach project, including work with food banks and community hubs.
- There were a wide range of discussions with various client age groups at Outreach events with advice offered on issues with pensions and wills to debts and housing.

RESOLVED that the Citizens Advice report be noted.

55/25

LOCAL HERITAGE ACTION LIST (QUARTERLY UPDATE)

The Assistant Director of Planning, Leisure and Culture Services presented the Local Heritage Action List update to Members.

The following key points were discussed.

- Progress on the Local Heritage List had been delayed but there were mitigation steps in place at the application stage, to identify any buildings of local significance.
- The first tranche of parishes had been adopted, with the website updated and owners had also been notified accordingly.
- The draft list for Wythall had been completed and work was ongoing for the Lickey and Blackwell areas.
- There were staffing challenges as two Conservation Officers had resigned. The Principal Conservation Officer remained to cover the work, but they worked part-time. A Consultant had been appointed to assist with the Local Heritage Lists and recruitment was also underway to fill the vacant posts.

After the Local Heritage List update had been provided, Members discussed the following points:

- Backlog concerns were raised and it was explained that priority remained at the planning application stage. However, it was

reiterated that buildings of local significance were mitigated by the application stage checks.

- Details of the cost of consultancy work to assist with the Local Heritage List was requested, which was agreed would be circulated to Members by relevant Officers.
- Members queried the recruitment outlook for the vacant posts. Officers responded that they were hopeful the positions would be filled, citing the flexibility in working hours as a key factor.

RESOLVED that the Local Heritage Action List update report be noted.

56/25

LEVELLING UP FUND PROGRAMME (QUARTERLY UPDATE)

The Regeneration Project Delivery Manager presented an update on the Levelling Up Fund Programme in Bromsgrove to the Board.

Members were informed that there was a typographical error within the report at point 3.8 of the table under 'Risk and fixed price allowance' and that the figure stated should have read £58,151.08 and not £55,151.08 as recorded.

The following key points were discussed with the Board:

Windsor Street

- Brownfield Solutions had completed Phase One of remediation works. The Environment Agency (EA) technical feedback was expected to be completed in October 2025.
- Once feedback from the EA was received, the Council was likely to undertake Phase Two remediation works, with a budget allowance in place to cover the costs. Completion was expected by May 2026.
- Cabinet was due to consider housing delivery options in November 2025.

Nailers Yard

- Works to the culvert had increased to £1.6m, with a provisional sum allowance of approximately £225,000 in the Kier contract. This had increased the overall Levelling Up Programme costs by £165,000. Therefore, an urgent decision was taken in August 2025 to commit a further £500,000 to the Levelling Up Programme, which included an allowance of £335,000 for additional contingency.

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- The completion date was originally expected to be January 2026; however, this had been extended to 4th May 2026.
- There had already been strong commercial interest in the office space and food and beverage units in the commercial building with service charge arrangements in progress.
- The Full Business Case (FBC) to secure the Council's funding from the former Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership (GBSLEP) was in progress.
- The overall funding secured of £16.103 million had increased by £1.093 million to a total of £17.194 million including the additional £500,000 agreed by BDC which increased the total to £17.694 million. The final cost would be an estimated £19.8 million. The GBSLEP bid for £2.425 million was pending. Therefore, the total potential funding pot was £20.118 million.
- There were risks reported with a potential impact on project budget and programme at the Nailers Yard site for culvert works, incoming electrics and the commercial building layout. Potential risks were also highlighted at the Windsor Street site for EA sign off of remediation works and BDC were due to agree future delivery options for the site prior to any works.

Following the levelling up update, Members discussed a number of points:

- Assurance on the completion date was discussed, due to the delays arising from culvert works. It was explained that any delays caused by the client or beyond anyone's control, such as poor weather, would be met by the Council whereas any delay based on contractor performance would be applied to the contractor Kier Construction Limited.
- Service charge explanations and concerns were discussed with the Board. Officers reassured Members that a resolution to secure the leases with incoming tenants would be a priority.
- Clarification on a cost breakdown was discussed for Mechanical and Electrical (M&E) works, prolongation, insurance and overheads. Officers agreed that a more detailed breakdown would be provided to Members.

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- Return on investment was also discussed with the Board and Officers provided details of the six-year payback claim.
- Clarification on the specifics of spend for the GBSLEP funding were also discussed with details provided to the Board.
- Further information about housing density at the Windsor Street site was discussed and Members were informed that a meeting was scheduled with the Principal Conservation Officer to review the options available.
- Members were provided with an explanation of the culvert works as requested. It was noted that the works were deemed necessary to mitigate flood risks and that omitting them would have significantly increased the risks.
- Revenue expectations were discussed, with an estimated annual income of £330,000 to the Council. It was explained that service charges covered building upkeep, while voids liability remained with the Council.
- Members were also given clarification on what service charges entailed and it was explained that it applied to the property management. The Board was informed that the appointment of a property management agent had been delayed due to the procurement process, but progress was being made.
- Homes England funding for Windsor Street was also discussed with Members querying if any restrictions applied. It was explained that additional affordable housing provision could attract funding opportunities.

RESOLVED that the update on the progress of the Levelling Up Fund projects be noted.

(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 that included information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information). However, there is nothing exempt in this record of the meeting).

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57/25

TO CONSIDER ANY URGENT BUSINESS, DETAILS OF WHICH HAVE BEEN NOTIFIED TO THE ASSISTANT DIRECTOR 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 for consideration.

The meeting closed at 7.20 p.m.

Chairman

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BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

THURSDAY 2ND OCTOBER 2025

AT 6.00 P.M.

PARKSIDE SUITE - PARKSIDE

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

AGENDA

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

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

- 3. To confirm the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board held on 9th September 2025 (Pages 5 - 20)**

4. **Local Plan Consultation Methods** (Pages 21 - 30)
5. **To consider any urgent business, details of which have been notified to the Assistant Director 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.**

J. Leach
Chief Executive

Parkside
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B61 8DA

24th September 2025

If you have any queries on this Agenda please contact
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BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

9TH SEPTEMBER 2025, AT 6.00 P.M.

PRESENT: Councillors P. M. McDonald (Chairman), S. T. Nock (Vice-Chairman), S. Ammar, A. Bailes, R. Bailes, A. M. Dale, B. Kumar and S. A. Robinson

Observers: Councillor E. M. S. Gray and Councillor M. Marshall

Officers: Mr. G. Revans, Mrs. C. Felton, Mr S. Parry, R Egan, McElliott, Mrs. J. Bayley-Hill, Ms. T. Ainscough, Mr M. Cox, Mr D Riley and Roche

32/25

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillor J. D. Stanley.

Some Members expressed disappointment that Councillor R. Lambert did not attend this meeting as named substitute for Councillor Stanley.

The Board was advised that Councillor S. Ammar had replaced Councillor R. Hunter as a member of the Board.

33/25

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND WHIPPING ARRANGEMENTS

There were no declarations of interest nor of whipping arrangements.

34/25

COUNCIL TAX RECOVERY

A presentation on the Council Tax debt recovery procedures was provided to the Board by the Revenue Services Manager. This followed a request by the Board for a report to explain the legislative framework governing council tax recovery, outline the procedures applied by the Council for council tax recovery and the use of enforcement agents, and which identified the actions the Council could take to improve the recovery process and the barriers to improvement.

It was noted that the Money and Mental Health Policy Institute (MMHPI) report titled "In the Public Interest?" argued that legislation governing council tax collection required reform and identified four areas of improvement, namely communication with individuals in debt, the speed at which council debt escalated, the over-reliance on automated procedures and lack of flexibility in dealing with debt cases and the

enforcement action used. The report clarified and responded to these areas of concern, detailing how the Council managed its debt recovery process.

After the presentation of the report, the following matters were raised by Members:

- Use of enforcement agents for council tax recovery – It was confirmed that the Council used external enforcement agents to recover debt in cases where the debtor did not engage with the Council and all avenues to obtain deductions (attachment of earnings order, deductions from benefits) had been exhausted with no success.
- The Council used two external debt enforcement agencies (bailiffs), appointed from April 2025, both entities being regulated by the Enforcement Conduct Board (ECB) and with all their enforcement agents having specialist training in identifying and handling vulnerability and mental health issues.
- Concerns were expressed about the publicised case in which one of the enforcement agents appointed by the Council had been overcharging in car parking enforcement cases. Officers clarified that this issue was identified by the company concerned, Marston Holdings, after the Council procured them as an enforcement agency and that this case was an isolated software error relating to car parking charges which was being rectified by the company and which had no effect on the council tax enforcement work carried out for the Council.
- The Revenue Services Manager explained that the Council appointed two enforcement agents in order to monitor and compare the performance of these and for the Council to have more agency in resolving issues through contact with those enforcement agencies.
- Fairness and consideration in using enforcement action – The Revenue Services Manager reiterated that the enforcement agencies contracted by the Council were regulated and professional. All enforcement agents were fully trained in identifying vulnerabilities, including if necessary to support making referrals to support agencies. It was noted that enforcement agents did wear body-worn cameras during enforcement work so that footage could be reviewed independently if required.
- It was reiterated that enforcement agents would carry out credit and address reference checks and would undertake a contact programme (telephone calls/letters/emails) before actual enforcement took place. Prior to enforcement agents being engaged, the Council would also provide opportunities for

taxpayers in arrears to discuss pay term options to suit individual circumstances.

- It was noted that Bromsgrove and Redditch Councils had a shared service for council tax recovery with the same officers employed in the department across the two councils having the same policy and adopting identical recovery processes.
- In referring to the Council's actions to prevent people falling into council tax arrears, it was noted that Bromsgrove District Council applied a discretionary council tax reduction policy of 100 per cent council tax reduction for eligible residents on low incomes.
- Members queried why council tax was demanded in 10 instalments as default and asked whether offering a 12 instalment (monthly) payment option could be more convenient for residents. Officers responded that the default option was payment of council tax in 10 instalments over the year; however, the taxpayer could make a request to pay in 12 instalments if the request was made before 15th April, and if made at a later date, the number of instalments was reduced proportionally.
- It was further explained that payment in 10 instalments allowed more time for the taxpayer to repay any short-term council tax arrears without reminders or notices having to be issued. Officers advised that the Council received 55 per cent of arrears payments over February and March.
- Council tax demand – It was clarified that although the legislation allowed the Council to charge a full year's council tax if, following a reminder notice, the payment of the outstanding amount had not been made within seven days; in practice the Council issued further discretionary reminder notices and would make further attempts to discuss payment options/instalments with the debtor before enforcing a full year's liability.
- Debt Recovery Policy Review – Members remarked that the policy should be reviewed every five years but was last reviewed in December 2016. Members were informed that the delay was due to under-capacity within the revenues team and the need to concentrate on the requirement to deliver the Government's coronavirus funding schemes during the period 2020-2023. The Revenue Service Manager stated that the next review was expected to take place in the 2026-27 financial year.
- Implementing revisions to the Debt Recovery Plan – It was stated that such revisions as introducing a pre-enforcement protocol and revised debt recovery strategy and processes could be introduced. However, this could not be undertaken at this time, due to limited resources within the Council's recovery services team (2.54 FTE staff in post managing Council Tax and Non-

Domestic Rates enforcement across Bromsgrove District and Redditch Borough). It was stated that this resource-level did not allow officers to do the checks in house and there was reliance on the private enforcement sector to carry this out for the Council.

- Finance Department Service Review – It was explained that there was an ongoing service review of the Council's Finance department, which was considering resourcing within teams including the council tax recovery team. This review was expected to be finalised by the end of the 2025/26 municipal year and it was agreed that the outcomes would be reported to the Overview and Scrutiny Board. It was stated that the service review would provide data on whether the in-house council tax enforcement resources required increasing or any changes or restructuring.
- The number of council tax debtors in relation to Bromsgrove District's population and the council tax collection rate – It was explained that the Council had generally had a council tax collection rate of over 99 per cent. As part of its finance planning, the Council assumed a 99 per cent collection rate each year.
- Some Members expressed the opinion that the review of council tax enforcement and debt recovery was not required given this affected less than 1 per cent of Bromsgrove taxpayers. Officers responded by explaining that this was part of a wider service review of the finance team and following the review it might be considered that no changes were required. Conversely, if any increase in staffing was deemed to be necessary, then a budget bid would be prepared by officers for consideration by elected members.
- Information was requested on the monetary value of council tax arrears within Bromsgrove District.
- Members requested that information be provided to Members on the number of people in Bromsgrove on special payment plans to repay council tax debt.
- A further request was received that the table at paragraph 2.31 of the report should be updated with target dates for each action and scoring of proposals by order of priority, with the revised table to be circulated to Members. In addition, there was a request that there be information provided on how the risk of a potential reduction of council tax income through the transitory period of Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) was to be mitigated.
- The concern was raised that LGR also presented a risk in terms of what council tax and other support schemes the new unitary authority would put in place for people on the lowest incomes. It was stated that a new unitary authority might decide to implement

a less generous scheme than that currently in place at Bromsgrove District Council.

- It was suggested that there could be performance measures introduced for council tax recovery, for example in terms of how residents in arrears were assisted prior to resorting to enforcement agents.

RESOLVED that the contents of the report be noted.

35/25

PLANNING ENFORCEMENT

A report on Planning Enforcement was considered by the Board. Members were reminded that the delivery of the planning enforcement was largely transferred to Worcestershire Regulatory Services (WRS) on 1st June 2024, with investigation of cases the responsibility of WRS and input provided from planning officers where their professional expertise was required. It was highlighted that prior to the formal takeover of the planning enforcement function by WRS, there had been assistance provided to the Council's planning officers with the investigation officer role since the beginning of coronavirus pandemic.

There were 302 cases of alleged planning breaches in 2024/25 which required WRS to undertake an investigation. Of these, 5 cases were assigned as priority 1 cases as they satisfied the criteria for this set out in the Enforcement Policy. Of the valid cases, 173 out of 175 were closed and resolved by informal compliance or no issue in 2024/25. There were 304 open planning enforcement cases as of September 2025.

It was stated that the backlog in open cases had fallen slightly from 320 to 304 over the most recent period. Progress in clearing the backlog was slowed by the need to establish and embed the team within Bromsgrove since 1st June 2024 and the complexity of some cases where evidence of harm (in planning terms) had been identified. The short-term additional resource available to WRS to work on clearing the backlog would end in June 2026.

In relation to the number of valid cases with Community Protection Warnings (CPWs) or Community Protection Notices (CPNs) served, it was stated that since April 2025, four additional CPWs and two additional CPNs were served.

Officers highlighted that planning policy allowed retrospective applications to be considered (i.e. applications after an action had been taken) which necessitated the maintenance of an informal approach to negotiate compliance with planning rules.

The benefits of the current approach to planning enforcement were set out including that this allowed planning officers to focus on planning matters whilst the investigation and enforcement cases were dealt with by WRS.

After the presentation, Members discussed the content of the report as follow:

A breakdown of planning enforcement cases by priority – It was requested that Members be provided with the breakdown of ongoing / live planning enforcement cases by priority level. A Member explained that currently when residents approached Members for information on how the cases were being addressed, the elected members were unable to provide an indication or timeline of when they might be actioned or resolved. It was further requested that information on the length of time these enforcement cases had been ongoing should also be shared with Members. The Technical Services Manager for WRS advised the Board that legal advice would need to be sought in relation to sharing detail on case priority as providing this information could potentially lead to identification of properties and lead to investigations being compromised.

- Case studies of successes and failures in relation to planning enforcement – A Member commented that more case studies needed to be provided for the planning enforcement cases which resulted in failure, in addition to those of enforcement successes. Officers responded that in many instances it was difficult to define cases in this way as the serving of notices could be seen as a failure where informal approaches could have led to a resolution. It was stated that in planning enforcement the informal approach needed to be maintained to work on resolving any breaches.
- Fieldwork and desktop-based investigations – A question was asked in relation to whether enforcement officers undertook visits on site to assess whether breaches of planning rules had taken place. Clarification was provided that officers liaised with informants prior to undertaking a visit. For priority 1 cases, the enforcement officer would be expected to visit the site immediately after this. For priority 2 cases, the timescales for site visits would be longer. All cases were triaged to determine priority. In each case, what needed to be established was evidence of harm in planning terms.
- Effectiveness of issuing CPNs – Some Members questioned the effectiveness of issuing CPNs in light of examples where action to repair harm had still taken considerable time following the issue of a CPN. It was noted that issuing a CPN was not appropriate in every case and the case file would be reviewed before a decision was taken on whether a CPN was appropriate in a given case. The Technical Services Manager stated that within Bromsgrove,

all CPNs issued bar one was being complied with, these mostly relating to waste-related issues.

- Frustration was expressed by some Members in relation to a perceived lack of action in respect of large-scale planning enforcement breaches within Bromsgrove. The suggestion was made that planning breaches had occurred in recent months where it was deemed that limited monitoring of planning conditions had taken place, or where the Council was not in a position to enforce planning conditions despite having itself set the conditions through the planning process. Concerns were raised that this could result in the Council letting down residents.
- Some Members felt that a review of the planning function (including planning enforcement) needed to be carried out. In response, it was explained that the Council was in the final stages of agreeing the terms of reference for the review with the Planning Advisory Service (PAS). The review was expected to start in October 2025, to commence by requesting feedback from elected members.
- Possible legal tools to address planning condition breaches – A Member queried if it was within Council's remit to prevent organisations from submitting planning applications for a certain period in cases where planning breaches were identified. Officers responded that as each planning application had to be considered on its own merits this was not possible to apply.
- Capacity to monitor compliance with planning conditions / enforcement actions – It was noted that given the volume of cases, WRS did not have the resources to routinely monitor compliance with conditions.
- The Cabinet Member for Planning, Licensing and WRS addressed the Board and reiterated that Members could contact him directly so that cases could be escalated through regular meetings between the Cabinet Member for Planning, Licensing and WRS and the respective Assistant Director.
- Cooperation between planning officers and WRS enforcement officers in dealing with cases – It was explained that the difference of approach since June 2024 had related to the prioritisation of enforcement. This ensured that resources were concentrated on the most serious breaches of planning control, where breaches were escalating or severe harm was being caused.
- In terms of cases, it was explained that investigation of a case would be undertaken and a report compiled by the WRS investigation officers with input from the Council's planning officers where their planning expertise was required. This enabled

the strongest evidence possible to be gathered. In all enforcement situations, the Council's planning officers would attempt to ensure compliance with planning rules through negotiation and persuasion. Where formal action was required, WRS Investigating Officers would complete the steps to confirm the offence and prepare formal notice.

Following consideration of this item, Members agreed that it should be recommended that there should be more information regarding planning enforcement cases including monitoring of the WRS performance through key performance indicators (KPIs). This recommendation was proposed, seconded and, on being put to the vote, approved.

RECOMMENDED that key performance indicators (KPIs) be introduced to measure Worcestershire Regulatory Services' (WRS) planning enforcement performance in Bromsgrove and that the KPIs be incorporated into monthly reporting to Members together with enhanced information on live enforcement cases data.

36/25

TASK GROUP UPDATES

There was no update provided on the Housing Task Group at this meeting as the Chairman of the group, Councillor H. Warren-Clarke, was not present.

37/25

WORCESTERSHIRE HEALTH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - UPDATE

Councillor Kumar provided an update on the meeting of the Worcestershire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC) which took place on 30th July 2025. He explained the subject discussed was routine immunisation and Members were assured that Worcestershire had high immunisation uptake with the rate significantly above the England average. Members had considered the possible implications for Worcestershire residents of travelling to Birmingham where routine vaccination rates were significantly lower than in Worcestershire.

Following the presentation, Members asked whether the views of County Councillors in relation to vaccinations had been addressed at the HOSC meeting. It was clarified that the directors from NHS England were represented on the HOSC which allowed for expert input on the matter to take place and be considered by the Members present.

RESOLVED that the Worcestershire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC) update be noted.

38/25

FINANCE AND BUDGET WORKING GROUP - MEMBERSHIP REPORT AND UPDATE

The update on membership of the Finance and Budget Working Group was discussed and Members were reminded that there were four Councillors currently represented on the Working Group, Councillors A. Bailes, E. Gray, P. McDonald, and S. Nock and there remained three vacant seats. It was noted that since the last meeting of Overview and Scrutiny Board, three Councillors had expressed an interest in joining the Working Group: Councillors S. Ammar, S. Colella, and C. Hotham. The Board considered these requests and on being put to the vote it was agreed that the three Councillors be appointed to the Finance and Budget Working Group.

The Chairman of the Finance and Budget Working Group, Councillor P. McDonald, updated the Board on the recent meeting which took place on 5th September 2025. The matters reported to the Board included the following:

- Members were informed that additional resource was required within the finance department. Officers expressed confidence that the costs arising could be covered from within existing budgets.
- The Council's Statements of Accounts had been brought up to date. The Council expected to receive a qualified opinion on its 2023/24 Accounts which, however, was unlikely to result in financial implications for the Council.
- At Quarter 1 2025/26, the forecast expenditure against the full-year revenue budget was an overspend of £173,000. This was expected to reduce through the year, however, there was some concern at this forecast overspend figure.
- The recharging process between the two shared service councils (Bromsgrove and Redditch) was discussed.
- Budget setting discussion took place and at the meeting Officers were proposing that the Council should revert to doing its budget in one tranche. However, it was felt by Members that undertaking the budget setting in two tranches enabled greater input by elected Members. At the Group Leaders' meeting, it had been suggested that the Council should continue to undertake its budget in two tranches.

RESOLVED that Councillors S. Ammar, S. Colella, and C. Hotham be appointed as Members of the Finance and Budget Scrutiny Working Group for the remainder of the 2025/26 municipal year.

39/25

CABINET WORK PROGRAMME

The Cabinet Work Programme for the period 1st October 2025 to 31st January 2026 was considered by the Board. It was requested as an action that information on the Council's current empty homes discounts and premiums be circulated to Members.

RESOLVED that the content of the Cabinet Work Programme for the period 1st October 2025 to 31st January 2026 be noted.

40/25

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Overview and Scrutiny Board's Work Programme was considered by Members.

A request was made to add to the work programme an item to review the consultation platform that was being used for the current Draft Development Strategy (Local Plan) consultation. Concerns were raised by Members in regard to the quality and ease of use of the platform and it was requested that information on the costs of obtaining the platform, details of testing done prior to release for public consultation, information about the functionality of the platform and the lessons learned from the implementation of the platform should be provided in a report to Overview and Scrutiny. It was requested that this be considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Board at its next meeting.

Members commented that, given the circumstances and importance of the Draft Strategic Development Plan Consultation, an urgent decision should be made to extend the consultation period. In this context, Members proposed that this item should be considered as urgent business at the Cabinet meeting due to take place on 10th September. It was noted that the consultation was currently due to finish on 22nd September and it was imperative that time was allowed for a decision to take place prior to the end of consultation.

The Board received advice from the Monitoring Officer on how urgent business could be reviewed by Cabinet and still comply with access to information rules. Members deliberated on the wording of the recommendation and the Board formulated the proposal that the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Board submit a request on behalf of the Board asking that Cabinet discuss as an item of urgent business whether to extend the current public consultation period for the Draft Development Strategy Consultation. This recommendation was proposed, seconded and on being put to the vote agreed.

RECOMMENDED that the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Board submit a request on behalf of the Board that Cabinet consider, as an item of urgent business, whether to extend the current public consultation period for the Local Plan.

41/25

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY ACTION SHEET

The Overview and Scrutiny Action Sheet was considered by Members.

Members discussed the action regarding the profit share arrangements with Electric Vehicle (EV) charger providers in Bromsgrove, Zest. It was raised by the Chairman that previously the Board was advised that some

authorities had contracts in place where immediate revenue profit sharing took place with the EV charger suppliers and that as per the response provided in the action sheet, this was not the case in relation to the Council's contract with Zest. Members asked Officers to explore further the potential for there to be a profit-sharing arrangement in place in future. The Assistant Director Environmental and Housing Property Services explained that advice would be sought on this matter.

RESOLVED that the Overview and Scrutiny Board Action Sheet be noted.

42/25

TO CONSIDER ANY URGENT BUSINESS, DETAILS OF WHICH HAVE BEEN NOTIFIED TO THE ASSISTANT DIRECTOR 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 for consideration.

43/25

TO CONSIDER, AND IF CONSIDERED APPROPRIATE, TO PASS THE FOLLOWING RESOLUTION TO EXCLUDE THE PUBLIC FROM THE MEETING DURING THE CONSIDERATION OF ITEM(S) OF BUSINESS CONTAINING EXEMPT INFORMATION:-

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

Item No	Paragraph
13	3
14	3
15	3

44/25

EXPANSION OF COMMERCIAL WASTE COLLECTION SERVICE - PRE-SCRUTINY

A report was presented detailing proposals for the expansion of the Council's commercial waste collection service. It was stated that the provisions of the Environment Act 2021, with businesses being required to separate food waste (and microbusiness due to be required to do the same from April 2027), afforded increased opportunities for service growth, as there would be growth in demand for commercial food waste services.

It was highlighted that the Council's Commercial Waste Collection Service had expanded considerably since its inception in 2015 and there was a risk that in excess of £800,000 annual income would be placed at risk if the Council could not provide a compliant service.

The Cabinet Member for Environmental Services and Community Safety addressed the Board and stated that this request for funding was well documented. The Cabinet Member stated that the commercial waste service had been a profit-maker for the Council and only recently saw increased costs as a result of wider fleet and maintenance issues within the service. The recommendations in the report were designed to address this with the purchase of two refuse collection vehicles (RCVs) designed to reduce reliance on hire vehicles in the long term. The requirement for businesses to separate food waste provided an opportunity to expand the commercial waste collection service.

Following the presentation, Members discussed some aspects of the report as follows:

- The effect of Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) on service delivery – It was explained that the duty to collect commercial waste would be unaffected by LGR and a number of neighbouring authorities were also undertaking expansion of their commercial waste services in anticipation of additional requirements on businesses from 2026/27. It was reported that the Council's commercial waste service had built a strong reputation with local businesses and this provided a good starting point for the LGR reorganisation when the independent commercial waste teams operated by District Councils in Worcestershire would be merged into either one or two considerably larger teams.
- It was clarified that the figures included in the report were for Bromsgrove District Council only as of the two shared service authorities (Bromsgrove and Redditch) only Bromsgrove had a commercial waste service.
- The reasons for Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council (DMBC) exiting the commercial waste market – Officers explained that DMBC was geared primarily towards general waste services and their pricing structure was low, meaning it would be unsuitable to replicate in Bromsgrove.
- The space needed for additional fleet vehicles at the Council's Depot – It was reported that Officers had considered how to better utilise space at the Depot and additional space had been found to accommodate the two Refuse Collection Vehicles (RCVs).

Following the consideration of the subject, the recommendations as set out in the report were endorsed by the Board.

RECOMMENDED that

- 1) Capital Funding of £489,760 be added to the Capital Programme for 2026/27 to purchase two Refuse Collection Vehicles (RCV's).
- 2) The Council allocates capital funding of £35,000 annually in the Medium-Term Financial Plan from the 2025/26 financial year to fund wheeled bins for Commercial Services.
- 3) The Council allocate £334,342 Revenue Funding in the Medium-Term Financial Plan to fund operational costs of providing the expanded service from 2025/26.
- 4) The Council allocate £100,000 Revenue Funding in the Medium-Term Financial Plan across 2025/26 and 2026/27 for interim vehicle hire.

(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 that included information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information)).

45/25

WINDSOR STREET (OPTIONS PAPER)

The Regeneration Project Manager presented a report on the options for the delivery of housing on the Windsor Street site in Bromsgrove. This paper was submitted for discussion by Overview and Scrutiny Board prior to consideration of the report by Cabinet in November.

The Regeneration Project Manager recapped on the details in relation to the Windsor Street site development. It was noted that the site had stood derelict since 2014 and that Council had been successful in obtaining £3,490,000 for the redevelopment of the site from various sources. No Bromsgrove District Council funding had been used in the project to date.

It was noted that residential use was considered as most appropriate for the site, and only development opportunities for housing had been considered in this report. The three potential delivery options were set out as follows:

- Option A: Obtain outline planning permission and dispose of the site on the open market
- Option B: Develop through Spadesbourne Homes Ltd and retain market value properties (dispose of affordable units)
- Option C: Enter into partnership with a private developer or a registered social landlord (RSL).

Members discussed and evaluated the three potential delivery options for the Windsor Street site and in doing so commented on the following:

- Option C, to enter into partnership with a RSL, was identified as a preference by the majority of Members present.
- Some Members expressed the opinion that the option to transfer to an RSL would protect the site from being sold off. The option would also secure the most affordable housing units.
- A Member asked if development of mixed housing / entertainment venue(s) was possible on the site. Officers replied that given the size of the site, it would not be financially viable to provide mixed use on the Windsor Street site. However, the Nailers Yard site would be utilised for mixed use.
- The building of flats was considered but it was identified by Officers that the greatest demand in the District was for 2- and 3-bedroom houses.
- Some Members expressed strong disapproval of the proposal to build houses on the site and argued that, given there was a recognised demand for young people to have affordable opportunities to enter the housing market, small flats should be provided on the site.
- A Member noted it was important to verify how many young people with demand for flats or maisonette-type properties were on the Council's housing waiting list.
- Given the site's location in Bromsgrove Town Centre, it was suggested by some Members that this should be a car-free sustainable development as there were transport links available (with Birmingham via train etc.) and car club / car share opportunities.
- A Member expressed the view that the site could deliver 50 dwellings rather than the 29 units as per current calculations if housing was built. It was argued that this development provided an opportunity to encourage town living which was most suited to longer-term sustainability and that this development was an opportunity to shape the Local Plan. Allowing for 50 units would also likely result in more private developers expressing interest in the site.
- Other Members argued that there should be some parking provision allowed for in the development and that there could be a mixture of properties with and without parking.

- The suggestion was made to consider the residents with disabilities on the housing register and to check with the housing associations on the specific needs of people with disabilities and whether this could be accommodated as part of this development.
- It was clarified by Officers that at this stage, the make-up of housing types on the site had not been determined and this report only concerned the preferred delivery option.
- Indicative layout of the site – Members were advised that there was a right of way running through the houses and a listed building near the site and consideration had to be given to the scale and massing of the buildings on site.

RESOLVED that the contents of the report be noted.

[Following consideration of this item, the meeting was adjourned between 9.00pm and 9.07pm].

(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 that included information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information)).

46/25

TO CONFIRM THE ACCURACY OF THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD HELD ON 22ND JULY 2025

The minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board held on 22nd July 2025 were considered.

Councillor A. Bailes asked for the record to be clarified in relation to Minute No. 20/25 – Bromsgrove Town Centre Strategic Framework. Councillor A. Bailes commented that he recalled a recommendation to Cabinet having been agreed in relation to inclusion of town centre living within the Bromsgrove Town Centre Strategic Framework and the Local Plan.

It was agreed that Officers would review the record of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board held on 22nd July 2025 to verify if this recommendation had been tabled and agreed. It was noted that inclusion of town centre living was currently recorded as an action for consideration by Officers.

RESOLVED that, subject to clarification of the query raised in the pre-amble above, the minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting held on 22nd July 2025 be agreed as a true and correct record.

Agenda Item 3

Overview and Scrutiny Board
9th September 2025

The meeting closed at 9.17 p.m.

Chairman

Overview and Scrutiny Board 2025

2nd October

Local Plan Consultation Methods

Relevant Portfolio Holder	Councillor Kit Taylor
Portfolio Holder Consulted	Yes
Relevant Assistant Director	Ruth Bamford
Report Author	Job Title: Mike Dunphy – Strategic Planning & Conservation Manager email:m.dunphy@bromsgroveandredditch.gov.uk Contact Tel: 01527 81325
Wards Affected	All
Ward Councillor(s) consulted	N/A
Relevant Council Priority	Economic Development Environment Housing Infrastructure
Non-Key Decision	
If you have any questions about this report, please contact the report author in advance of the meeting.	

1. **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Overview and Scrutiny Board note the report.

2. **BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 During an Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting held on 9th September 2025, Members agreed to scrutinise the approach to consultation used for the Local Plan, including the use of an online consultation platform, at a future meeting. Members were keen for the Board to consider this matter ahead of the deadline for the extended Bromsgrove Local Plan consultation period, which closes at 5pm on 20th October 2025.
- 2.2 The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the current methods of public consultation for the Local Plan, including the online consultation platform, and to learn lessons for future consultation exercises. These were areas raised by the Board at its meeting on 9th September 2025.

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3. OPERATIONAL ISSUES

- 3.1 At an extraordinary Council meeting held in June 2025, Members agreed that the Bromsgrove District Local Plan Draft Development Strategy Consultation be approved, for a period of public consultation between 30th June and 22nd September 2025. A decision was subsequently taken, through the urgent decision process, to extend the deadline for the consultation period to 5pm on 20th October 2025.
- 3.2 For previous iterations of the Local Plan, the Council has held public consultation exercises in line with our published Statement of Community Involvement . On these occasions, residents were able to submit feedback to the Council, in writing via email or post or submitting written feedback in person drop in events. These consultation methods have remained in place in 2025 and have already been used by various residents to submit feedback in the current consultation process.
- 3.3 In addition to the existing consultation methods, following presentations at the Strategic Planning Steering Group, officers arranged for an online consultation platform to be made available. This platform provides residents with an additional way to submit feedback during the consultation period. It complements the previously used methods and offers the public another opportunity to engage with the development of the Local Plan and share their views.
- 3.4 Recent governments have stressed the need for using online engagement tools in plan making. The introduction and greater reliance on digital consultation platforms was mooted through the Government's 'Planning for the Future' White Paper in 2020.
- 3.5 Part of the White Paper's Vision was to modernise the plan-making process, with greater public engagement in the planning process. This would give neighbourhoods and communities an earlier and more meaningful voice in the future of their area as plans are made, harnessing digital technology to make it much easier to access and understand information about specific planning proposals. For plan-making, key aspects of the Vision included the use of new digital engagement processes to make it radically easier to raise views about and visualise emerging proposals whilst on-the-go on a smart phone, for example
- 3.6 This principle was introduced into the NPPF in July 2021:

Para 16 Plans should... (e) be accessible through the use of digital tools to assist public involvement and policy presentation.

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- 3.7 At the Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting held on 9th September 2025, Members raised concerns about difficulties some members of the public had reported to them with accessing the consultation platform. It was suggested that one way to address this issue would be for Members to act as a liaison between the public and Planning Officers, to help facilitate and support effective participation in the consultation process. This approach was something which was stressed at the outset of the consultation at the Strategic Planning Steering Group on the 29th May where officers outlined all the methods of consultation, and encouraged members to take an active role and keep officers informed of any issues being faced. Members have more recently been reminded to notify officers of any specific experiences that were reported to them by residents so that Officers could work with those residents to ensure that their feedback could be submitted prior to the consultation deadline.
- 3.8 Data available to the Council indicates that the online consultation platform is the preferred method for many consultees to submit their responses. At the time of writing, we have had 26,847 unique visitors to the website, which has resulted in 2385 people providing 5811 contributions. This compares favourably to the other methods of consultation. We have had just over 1000 emails to bromsgroveplan@bromsgroveandredditch.gov.uk of which a significant proportion appear to be the same response sent in by objectors to one particular site. We have also had nearly 100 hard copy written letters.
- 3.9 In summary we have had approximately 7000 responses with over 4 weeks still to run at the time of writing, this is considerably more than we have had for any local plan consultation we have held in the past. In fact, it is considerably more than we had for the whole consultation processes for the last local plan which contained multiple consultation events, and a public representation period prior to the Examination in Public.
- 3.10 In addition to the above officers are aware of concerns being expressed that people are being put off responding by the online platform, and as result not responding. The figures below show how the Bromsgrove platform compares with other campaigns being run on the same platform.

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	Visitors	Respondents	Contributions	Conversion Rate	# of contributions per respondent
Bromsgrove Local Plan	26,847	2,385	5,811	9.8%	2.4
A Local Plan in the West Midlands	30,518	1,708	4,825	5.60%	2.8
A Local Plan in South East England	37,248	3,105	11,341	8.34%	3.7
A Local Plan in the East of England	44,186	1,262	3,124	2.86%	2.5
A Local Plan Reg 19 in South West England	7,210	912	2,101	12.65%	2.3
A Local Plan Reg 19 in South West England	7,327	292	503	3.99%	1.7

- 3.11 As can be seen, the results vary and it must be considered the above table is showing figures from the Bromsgrove consultation which hasn't closed, compared to consultations that have closed. The significant figure above is the conversion rate, which shows the % of people who have accessed the platform who then submit a comment. The 9.8% figure for Bromsgrove compares favourably with all but one of the other consultations. The platform provider has assessed our conversion as being good, with a 12-14% rate being exceptional. When looked at over the last month of the current consultation, our conversion rate has risen to 13.33% and up to 15.2 in the week before this report was produced.
- 3.12 Members are asked to note that frequently in public consultation exercises, a significant number of submissions are not received until close to the deadline date. Therefore, the figures provided in this report only relate to submissions received as of 19th September 2025,

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in time for inclusion in a report for publication in the agenda for this meeting.

- 3.13 The conversion rates for websites vary by sector with most sectors having much lower conversion rates than we are experiencing. Therefore with 4 weeks left to run on the consultation, the data is showing that the online platform is performing well, as part of the overall package of consultation efforts, and has propelled the local plan to a level of engagement vastly superior to anything we have seen before.
- 3.14 During the consultation, Officers have also been keeping a log of concerns being raised via emails or phone calls, at the time of writing there have been 11 people reporting issues directly. Of these 11, one was a technical issue which was preventing some files type from being uploaded where the file extension was capitalised (I.e. .JPG rather than .jpg), this issue was reported to the supplier and quickly resolved. Given that the lowercase extensions functioned correctly, there is no evidence to suggest it prevented other people from submitting comments or uploading files. Other issues appeared to be 2 instances of confirmation emails not being received, other reports of this nature have been made but were subsequently found in junk/spam folders. The remaining reports of problems appear to have been users not fully understanding how the system works or differing expectations on functionality. Whilst it is unfortunate that we have had some issues reported to us, it represents only a tiny fraction of those who have used the platform. We continue to stress that if people need assistance they can email or call us and we will help.
- 3.15 In addition to the online platform it cannot be overlooked that between 14th July and 9th September officers carried out 19 different in person consultation events, this represents well over 1000 hours of officer time available to the public to speak with officers and engage with the local plan process. These events have varied, with some being very well attended and others, predominantly in the areas where there isn't development being proposed, being much quieter events. The themes being expressed at these events are very similar, with the main concern being about the infrastructure required to support development. The occasions where people have criticised the online platform have been very limited to only a few isolated incidents out of the thousands of conversations that took place. The Council's communications team have confirmed that on the Council's social media accounts there are also very few instances of people reporting issues with the online platform.

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3.16 A broad communications strategy set out to raise awareness of the consultation, highlight its importance to the district's future, and make it easy to respond. We set out to do this by ensuring 1) it was well represented in the channels available to us (councillors, press/news, public facilities, social media, printed materials, staffed events, mailing lists, stakeholder relationships); 2) it had strong and consistent key messages (planning for future generations, need you to help tell us what you think the issues are, etc); and 3) it had strong calls to action to easily-accessible consultation tools at all times (lots of strong printed materials, e-mailshots direct to subscribers, optimised web journeys and search engine optimisation including heavy use of QR codes, especially to provide respondents with access to the platform which we had identified as having significantly more potential to provide substantially increased accessibility to the consultation for the average user than any of our other traditional paper and/or established digital methods).

3.16 It is helpful to review the use of the online consultation tool because it is likely that the Council will aim to use more ICT tools and software for future consultation activities. Any findings arising from discussions at this meeting will be taken on board for the future.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

4.1 There are no financial implications associated with this report

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 The procurement of the online platform was carried out through the G-Cloud framework, a compliant government route provided by Crown Commercial Service.

5.2 A Data Protection Impact Assessment, has been carried out and the Council's ICT/Information Management teams is satisfied that data storage is fully compliant. It should be noted that the platform provider has been used by a number of Local Authorities and has been held as an example of good practice by the Government's Proptech Innovation programme.

6. OTHER - IMPLICATIONS

Local Government Reorganisation

6.1 As recently as 3rd June, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) wrote to Chief Executives of the

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Worcestershire Councils with an update on Local Government Reorganisation. Included within that letter is the following statement:

‘The Government also recognises that developing proposals could distract councils from their essential day-to-day activities. However, residents and businesses depend on councils to deliver crucial services and to continue the efforts needed to establish successful new unitary councils. This is particularly important for advancing local plans to allocate land for new homes. As mentioned in the invitation letters, the Government expects local planning councils to work towards adopting an up-to-date local plan as soon as possible. Local Government Reorganisation should not hinder this vital work, nor should the introduction of the new legal framework for local plan-making later this year or our strategic planning reforms. Significant financial support has already been provided to eligible councils to aid in plan-making, and we encourage councils to utilise additional support available through the Local Government Association’s Planning Advisory Service.’

- 6.2 The current public consultation exercise should help the Council to proceed with work on the Local Plan in line with the Government’s expectations.

Relevant Council Priority

- 6.3 The Bromsgrove District Local Plan Draft Development Strategy Consultation 2025 is relevant to the following Council priorities:

1. Economic Development
2. Housing
3. Environment
4. Infrastructure

Climate Change Implications

- 6.4 The Local Plan will have significant implications for climate change, shaping the location and nature of new housing, employment, and infrastructure development.
- 6.5 The provision and use of an online consultation platform should have a positive impact on carbon emissions associated with public consultation events. As a consequence, those members of the public who do submit comments electronically, may be less likely to travel to

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attend in person consultation events, thereby reducing carbon emissions.

Equalities and Diversity Implications

- 6.6 The consultation process is open to all to comment in multiple ways, both online and in hard copy. Consultation events have also taken place in a variety of locations and at different times of the day. Every effort is being made to ensure that the Council reaches the widest amount of people and organisations as possible.

7. RISK MANAGEMENT

- 7.1 As stated above, the Government has stated that all Local Government Authorities must have an up-to-date Local Plan. The Council approved its Local Development Scheme in February 2025, which sets out the plan-making timetable in order to achieve an up-to-date local plan. The public consultation is in-line with this timetable.
- 7.2 The risk of not progressing to a new Local Plan is being managed by undertaking this consultation. Should the timetable not be kept to in the future, there is a risk of intervention by MHCLG, as outlined in the report accompanying the Local Development Scheme.
- 7.3 On 16th September the Minister of State for Housing and Planning wrote to Stockport Borough Council in response to them not meeting the targets they had set out in their Local Development Scheme and against a poor backdrop of plan making. This clearly shows that government is not afraid to intervene where necessary the conclusion of this letter is as follows.

For the reasons set out above, I have concluded that to ensure full and effective coverage of Stockport Council area by a development plan, I am justified in using the Secretary of State's powers provided in section 15(4) of the 2004 Act, and I am subsequently directing Stockport Council to amend their Local Development Scheme by 10 October 2025 as follows:

- Regulation 18 consultation should be completed by no later than 24 December 2025;*
- Regulation 19 consultation should be completed no later than 1 September 2026;*

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- *Submission of the plan for examination should be no later than 30 November 2026. An amended LDS should be published by Stockport Council by 10 October 2025.*

I will be asking my officials to liaise with you on this matter on a regular basis and to provide me with updates on your progress. Should you fail to comply with the direction in this letter, or should you delay progress of your emerging draft plan in relation to the amended LDS milestones, I will consider whether I need to take any further action.

8. APPENDICES and BACKGROUND PAPERS

Bromsgrove District Local Plan Consultation Web Pages:

<https://bromsgroveplan.commonplace.is/>

www.bromsgrove.gov.uk/bromsgroveplan

9. REPORT SIGN OFF

Department	Name and Job Title	Date
Portfolio Holder	Councillor Kit Taylor	23/9/25
Lead Director / Assistant Director	Ruth Bamford	24/9/24
Financial Services	Deb Goodall	19/9/25
Legal Services	Claire Felton and Nicola Cummings	23/9/25
Procurement	Carmen Young	19/9/25
Policy Team (if equalities implications apply)	Rebecca Green	22/9/25

Overview and Scrutiny Board
2025

2nd October

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BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

28TH OCTOBER 2025, AT 6.00 P.M.

PRESENT: Councillors P. M. McDonald (Chairman), S. T. Nock (Vice-Chairman), S. Ammar, A. M. Dale, C.A. Hotham, B. Kumar, S. A. Robinson, J. D. Stanley and H. D. N. Warren-Clarke

Observers: K. May – Leader and Cabinet Member for Strategic Partnerships, Economic Development and Enabling and Councillor K. Taylor, Cabinet Member for Planning, Licensing and WRS

Officers: Mr. G. Revans, Mrs. R. Bamford, R Egan, Ms J. Willis, McElliott and Mrs. J. Bayley-Hill and Mrs S. Woodfield

52/25

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES

An apology for absence was received on behalf of Councillor A. Bailes, with confirmation provided that Councillor C.A. Hotham was attending as his named substitute.

Apology for absence was also received on behalf of Councillor R. Bailes as well as Councillor S.R. Colella (who was due to attend as her named substitute).

Members were advised that the Cabinet Member for Finance, Councillor S. Baxter, had also submitted an apology for the meeting.

53/25

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND WHIPPING ARRANGEMENTS

There were no declarations of interest nor of whipping arrangements.

54/25

CITIZENS ADVICE (USES OF GRANT FUNDING)

The Chief Executive of Citizens Advice Bromsgrove and Redditch (CABR) delivered a presentation to the Board.

Members were informed that the charity received strong support from the Council and he expressed gratitude for the opportunity to present to Members on how the grant funding was being used.

The following key points were presented to the Board:

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- The four key support areas provided by CABR were Core Services, Household Support Fund Distribution, Affordability Assessments and Outreach Development Projects.
- The Funding contribution from Bromsgrove District Council (BDC) was £123,400 with Worcestershire County Council (WCC) adding £23,606 per year.
- BDC was the highest funding contributor in Worcestershire to the CABR.
- The national average for funding the CABR was £1.34 per head in 2023/2024.
- CABR provided advice, not just information, which was regulated by the Advice Quality Standard (AQS), Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) and Money and Pensions Service (MaPS).
- The charity was supported by 50–60 volunteers. The call answer rate had improved from 24% in 2020 to 38% in 2025.
- In total, 4,710 households in Bromsgrove District received full advice and 773 households received light-touch advice.
- In addition, £388,601 income had been gained and £676,674 debts had been managed for residents.
- The Household Support Fund (HSF) costed £7,000 per annum to deliver with £50,000 of funds distributed.
- £2,745 had been provided a year to carry out affordability assessments for Bromsgrove District Housing Trust (BDHT) clients.
- In addition, £62,000 had been provided by the Council for an Outreach project over 18 months. To date, regular sessions were held in Charford, Catshill, Rubery, Wythall, Alvechurch, Sidemoor and Clent.
- There were future challenges with increased demand expected, funding sustainability and the Local Government Review (LGR) implications to consider.
- There were potential outsourcing opportunities for the follow-on funding from the HSF Scheme, including discretionary housing payments and tenancy support.

After consideration of the presentation the following discussions were carried out by the Board:

- Various Parish Council contributions were discussed, with Members noting one contribution of £5,000 was provided in the previous financial year.
- There would be a review of the charity's website, however, it was agreed that the Outreach calendar updates relating to the availability of the CABR would be shared with Members as requested.
- There were numerous collaborations with other partners for the Outreach project, including work with food banks and community hubs.
- There were a wide range of discussions with various client age groups at Outreach events with advice offered on issues with pensions and wills to debts and housing.

RESOLVED that the Citizens Advice report be noted.

55/25

LOCAL HERITAGE ACTION LIST (QUARTERLY UPDATE)

The Assistant Director of Planning, Leisure and Culture Services presented the Local Heritage Action List update to Members.

The following key points were discussed.

- Progress on the Local Heritage List had been delayed but there were mitigation steps in place at the application stage, to identify any buildings of local significance.
- The first tranche of parishes had been adopted, with the website updated and owners had also been notified accordingly.
- The draft list for Wythall had been completed and work was ongoing for the Lickey and Blackwell areas.
- There were staffing challenges as two Conservation Officers had resigned. The Principal Conservation Officer remained to cover the work, but they worked part-time. A Consultant had been appointed to assist with the Local Heritage Lists and recruitment was also underway to fill the vacant posts.

After the Local Heritage List update had been provided, Members discussed the following points:

- Backlog concerns were raised and it was explained that priority remained at the planning application stage. However, it was

reiterated that buildings of local significance were mitigated by the application stage checks.

- Details of the cost of consultancy work to assist with the Local Heritage List was requested, which was agreed would be circulated to Members by relevant Officers.
- Members queried the recruitment outlook for the vacant posts. Officers responded that they were hopeful the positions would be filled, citing the flexibility in working hours as a key factor.

RESOLVED that the Local Heritage Action List update report be noted.

56/25

LEVELLING UP FUND PROGRAMME (QUARTERLY UPDATE)

The Regeneration Project Delivery Manager presented an update on the Levelling Up Fund Programme in Bromsgrove to the Board.

Members were informed that there was a typographical error within the report at point 3.8 of the table under 'Risk and fixed price allowance' and that the figure stated should have read £58,151.08 and not £55,151.08 as recorded.

The following key points were discussed with the Board:

Windsor Street

- Brownfield Solutions had completed Phase One of remediation works. The Environment Agency (EA) technical feedback was expected to be completed in October 2025.
- Once feedback from the EA was received, the Council was likely to undertake Phase Two remediation works, with a budget allowance in place to cover the costs. Completion was expected by May 2026.
- Cabinet was due to consider housing delivery options in November 2025.

Nailers Yard

- Works to the culvert had increased to £1.6m, with a provisional sum allowance of approximately £225,000 in the Kier contract. This had increased the overall Levelling Up Programme costs by £165,000. Therefore, an urgent decision was taken in August 2025 to commit a further £500,000 to the Levelling Up Programme, which included an allowance of £335,000 for additional contingency.

- The completion date was originally expected to be January 2026; however, this had been extended to 4th May 2026.
- There had already been strong commercial interest in the office space and food and beverage units in the commercial building with service charge arrangements in progress.
- The Full Business Case (FBC) to secure the Council's funding from the former Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership (GBSLEP) was in progress.
- The overall funding secured of £16.103 million had increased by £1.093 million to a total of £17.194 million including the additional £500,000 agreed by BDC which increased the total to £17.694 million. The final cost would be an estimated £19.8 million. The GBSLEP bid for £2.425 million was pending. Therefore, the total potential funding pot was £20.118 million.
- There were risks reported with a potential impact on project budget and programme at the Nailers Yard site for culvert works, incoming electrics and the commercial building layout. Potential risks were also highlighted at the Windsor Street site for EA sign off of remediation works and BDC were due to agree future delivery options for the site prior to any works.

Following the levelling up update, Members discussed a number of points:

- Assurance on the completion date was discussed, due to the delays arising from culvert works. It was explained that any delays caused by the client or beyond anyone's control, such as poor weather, would be met by the Council whereas any delay based on contractor performance would be applied to the contractor Kier Construction Limited.
- Service charge explanations and concerns were discussed with the Board. Officers reassured Members that a resolution to secure the leases with incoming tenants would be a priority.
- Clarification on a cost breakdown was discussed for Mechanical and Electrical (M&E) works, prolongation, insurance and overheads. Officers agreed that a more detailed breakdown would be provided to Members.

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- Return on investment was also discussed with the Board and Officers provided details of the six-year payback claim.
- Clarification on the specifics of spend for the GBSLEP funding were also discussed with details provided to the Board.
- Further information about housing density at the Windsor Street site was discussed and Members were informed that a meeting was scheduled with the Principal Conservation Officer to review the options available.
- Members were provided with an explanation of the culvert works as requested. It was noted that the works were deemed necessary to mitigate flood risks and that omitting them would have significantly increased the risks.
- Revenue expectations were discussed, with an estimated annual income of £330,000 to the Council. It was explained that service charges covered building upkeep, while voids liability remained with the Council.
- Members were also given clarification on what service charges entailed and it was explained that it applied to the property management. The Board was informed that the appointment of a property management agent had been delayed due to the procurement process, but progress was being made.
- Homes England funding for Windsor Street was also discussed with Members querying if any restrictions applied. It was explained that additional affordable housing provision could attract funding opportunities.

RESOLVED that the update on the progress of the Levelling Up Fund projects be noted.

(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 that included information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information). However, there is nothing exempt in this record of the meeting).

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TO CONSIDER ANY URGENT BUSINESS, DETAILS OF WHICH HAVE BEEN NOTIFIED TO THE ASSISTANT DIRECTOR 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 for consideration.

The meeting closed at 7.20 p.m.

Chairman

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18 November 2025

Briefing Paper – O & S Board - Bromsgrove District Housing Trust (BDHT)

Large Scale Voluntary Transfer

A Large-Scale Voluntary Transfer (LSVT) was a key part of the Governments housing policy at the time. A key motivation was to facilitate investment in improving council housing stock without increasing public sector borrowing. Councils were under strict financial borrowing restrictions and unable to access private finance to meet the 'decent homes' standard of the time.

It involved the council transferring ownership of its homes with the agreement of its tenants to a new or existing Registered Provider (RP). The key feature of a LSVT mainly related to the stock investment programme that can be funding through private finance.

Following a stock options appraisal Bromsgrove District Council undertook a ballot of Council tenants in June 2003 and it was agreed by both the tenants and the Council to a LSVT of its Housing Revenue Account (HRA) stock and land and this was completed in March 2004 and the Council's HRA was closed the following year. The housing stock was transferred to the newly created Bromsgrove District Housing Trust (BDHT). The number of properties is shown below including the price per property and total received by Bromsgrove District Council.

Date of transfer	No. of properties	Price per property (£) (tenanted market value)	Total Received (£m)
29 March 2004	3,096	5,218	16.50

BDHT is a Registered Provider and company limited by guarantee and a registered charity with its principal activities of the development and management of affordable housing in Bromsgrove and Redditch and the surrounding areas. It is governed through a Board. The BDHT Board has ultimate responsibility for governance and the organisation and at least two board members have had experience of being a tenant, leaseholder or shared owner of social/affordable housing. BDHT develops new affordable housing both with and without grant from Homes England.

Regulator of Social Housing

As a Registered Provider of social housing, they are regulated by the Regulator of Social Housing. This regulation provides several standards they are required to meet set into two elements as below.

Consumer standards

Neighbourhood and Community Standard

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/neighbourhood-and-community-standard>

Safety and Quality Standard <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/safety-and-quality-standard>

Tenancy Standard <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/tenancy-standard>

Transparency, Influence and Accountability (including Tenant Satisfaction Measures)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/transparency-influence-and-accountability-including-tenant-satisfaction-measures>

Consumer standards Code of Practice

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/consumer-standards-code-of-practice>

Economic standards

Governance and Financial Viability Standard and Code of Practice

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/governance-and-financial-viability-standard>

Rent Standard and Guidance <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/rent-standard-and-guidance>

Value for Money Standard and Code of Practice

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/value-for-money-standard>

They are required to submit Tenant Satisfaction Measures survey results on a yearly basis. The below link shows there 2024/25 results

<https://www.bdht.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/TSMs-October-2025.pdf>

The following link is the Regulatory judgment on Viability and Governance completed this year.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/regulatory-judgement-bromsgrove-district-housing-trust-limited/bromsgrove-district-housing-trust-limited-lh4415-regulatory-judgement-30-july-2025#:~:text=We%20assess%20the%20performance%20of,than%201%2C000%20social%20housing%20homes.>

Housing Ombudsman

They are also required by the Housing Act 1996 (as mended) to be a member of the Housing Ombudsman Scheme.

A requirement of being a member is that they must have a complaints standard that meets the Housing Ombudsman's complaint handling code and this has to be reviewed annually and they submit an annual complaints performance and

improvement report. Relevant documents can be seen in the following link.

<https://www.bdht.co.uk/complaints/>

As Councillors an effective way to support customers is to support them to make a complaint or raise the complaint yourself if it does not contain personal data relating to a customer. Details of how to complain can be found in the link above. You will note a tenant can appoint a representative to deal with their complaint on their behalf.

Housing Options Contract

The Council has contracted out its statutory functions in relation to housing advice and homelessness (Housing Options Service). BDHT has been providing this service since 2004 and won the latest tender with the contract running from 1 April 2023 and finishes on 31 March 2028.

The purpose of the service is to:

- Provide and manage a Housing Options Service and ensure excellent customer service that will provide a housing pathway for all client groups.
- Deliver comprehensive housing options advice.
- Manage the expectations of customers who are unlikely to be successful in obtaining social housing and assist people to access other housing options i.e. in the Private Rented Sector.
- Undertake homelessness assessments and investigations to discharge the Council's statutory duties.
- Deliver the Council's Prevention Duty by providing a person-centred approach that considers all the reasons and causes of homelessness when developing Personal Housing Plans.
- Deliver the Council's Relief Duty and help to secure accommodation in accordance with relevant legislation.
- Work proactively with customers at an early stage to promote and encourage engagement with specialist services.
- Reduce homelessness from the social and private rented sectors.
- Strive to reduce the number of homeless applications with an emphasis placed on prevention of homelessness.
- Ensure that households accepted as homeless are rehoused into suitable, affordable accommodation in accordance with relevant legislation.

Agenda Item 4

- Ensure as far as is practicable, that no household is accepted as homeless more than once during a two-year period.
- Work with Public Authorities who refer to the Council's Provider any person(s) who is homeless or at risk of homelessness.
- Provide temporary accommodation and services to homeless households including having access to a range of temporary accommodation, for example for families, young people or single homeless applicants where appropriate with a dedicated officer to manage and provide advice and assistance.
- Support the provision of safe temporary accommodation for victims of domestic abuse and No First Night Out/No Second Night Out for rough sleepers or those likely to rough sleep.
- To ensure that time spent in temporary accommodation is kept to an absolute minimum and within legally defined limits where applicable.
- Be a point of access for referrals into supported accommodation services and to ensure that referral pathways into accommodation are implemented efficiently and are fit for purpose.
- Work in partnership with supported accommodation providers to ensure successful move on from the schemes and ensure the pathway for move on from the accommodation is implemented successfully.
- Develop excellent relationships with partner organisations.
- Manage the Council's Housing Register.
- Implement the Council's Allocations Policy and revisions to the Policy within the contract period.
- Administer the Council's Choice Based Lettings (CBL) service or any subsequent allocations system.
- Where required nominate customers for vacancies that arise within Registered Provider (RP) stock in the district, in accordance with new and existing nomination arrangements.
- Ensure the service is accessible to all residents of Bromsgrove District.
- Provide comprehensive information that people can act upon.
- Have a person-centred approach and treat customers with empathy, dignity and respect.
- Complete appropriate monitoring including, but not solely limited to, HCLIC returns.

- Provide an out of hours homelessness service as part of the contract; this will need to be provided in accordance with the relevant legislation and the Code of Guidance.
- Provide information in the response to freedom of information requests.

The Team at BDHT offers housing options interviews for people in housing need and assessment of entitlement to housing for people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness. Temporary and permanent accommodation may be provided in line with homelessness legislation. The team also offers general housing advice and assesses applications for 'Home Choice Plus, the scheme is used to allocate housing association properties in the district.

The Housing Options Team provides a range of services across 4 elements:

- Housing Register,
- Allocations and nominations,
- Housing Advice and Homelessness Prevention Service,
- Statutory Homelessness Service

The Team also maintain links with and understand the local private rented sector market. Liaising and negotiating with private landlords and households to access the sector and help sustain tenancies. They also work with and identify support needs of:

- 16 - 25 year olds
- Mental Health Issues
- Domestic Abuse
- Care Leavers
- Substance Misuse
- Armed Forces
- Older Persons
- Those with financial difficulties

There is a historical agreement between BDHT and BDC that guarantees the availability of up to 39 units of temporary accommodation up until 2033 and a Service Level Agreement (SLA) for 7 units of Static Temporary Accommodation units that replaced the former homelessness hostel. Officers are currently working with BDHT to provide an additional 4 units of temporary accommodation under a SLA.

As part of the transfer agreement Bromsgrove District Council has 75% of nominations to the transferred stock. A nomination is where the Council puts forward

an applicant from the Councils housing register to be housed in a vacant RP property.

Officers have a good working relationship with BDHT staff, and we undertake a contract monitoring meeting quarterly and a monthly performance monitoring meeting in relation to the contracted services and temporary accommodation.

Housing Options Interviews held 24/25	
Period	Number
Quarter 1	160
Quarter 2	114
Quarter 3	116
Quarter 4	166
Total	556

Number of Homelessness Approaches 24/25	
Period	Number
Quarter 1	114
Quarter 2	89
Quarter 3	80
Quarter 4	93
Total	376

Nominations to BDHT properties	
Period	Total 77.5%
QTR 1	74%
QTR 2	78%
QTR 3	83%
QTR 4	75%

It is proposed that an all-Member workshop on Homelessness will be held in the New Year to provide Councillors with a broad understanding of the legislation and processes. This will facilitate support to residents.

Affordable Housing Development

BDHT started with just over 3000 homes and currently owns and manages around 4300 homes. The Large-Scale Voluntary Transfer agreement governing the transfer of the former Council housing stock to BDHT back in 2004 required BDHT not to dispose of any part of the LSVT properties within 30 years without (Clause 3.2):

- 1) Giving the Council 14 days' notice in writing of its intention to make a disposal, and
- 2) Accounting for and giving the Council a claw back sum which is calculated as 50% of the price received from the disposal, less some specified amounts

which included what they originally paid the Council for the property and disposal fees etc.

The Transfer Agreement sets out in Schedule 2 a list of 14 specific circumstances where this obligation would not apply, called 'Exempt Disposals'. This list includes circumstance like the tenants Right To Acquire (a separate claw back applied for a specific period now ended), where compulsory purchase orders apply, where land is needed for highways or utility services and in cases where special consent is received because there is an express direction of a Security Trustee or Mortgagee for the RSL to dispose of a dwelling or where the Council has agreed to a disposal to enable the RSL to trade out of any materially adverse financial difficulty.

It also includes where it can be demonstrated that the net proceeds are to be entirely invested in a specific Social Housing development that meets the needs identified within the Council's approved housing strategy from time to time and the Council gives its approval which shall not be unreasonably withheld in the event that the application is supported by evidence that would have qualified the project for Local Authority Social Housing Grant had such grant still been available.

The Council approved that it would support BDHT's development plans agreeing to the disposal of up to 30 properties or the total income value from the sale up to £4 million. BDHT have disposed of 24 dwellings, and this agreement is now complete. Since 2012 614 new affordable homes have been added to BDHT's stock in Bromsgrove District.

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OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY BOARD

HOUSING TASK GROUP

FINAL REPORT

NOVEMBER 2025



Bromsgrove
District Council
www.bromsgrove.gov.uk

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MEMBERSHIP OF THE TASK GROUP



Councillor Harrison Warren-Clarke
Chairman of the Task Group



Councillor Alan Bailes



Councillor Anita Dale



Councillor R. J. Hunter



Councillor Bakul Kumar



Councillor Peter McDonald

Supporting Officer Details

Sarah Woodfield – Democratic Services Officer – Lead Officer

Jess Bayley-Hill – Principal Democratic Services Officer

Jo Gresham – Senior Democratic Services Officer

Gavin Day - Democratic Services Officer

FOREWORD FROM THE CHAIRMAN

I am incredibly proud to present this report, outlining the findings and recommendations of the Housing Task Group.

From the offset the group had covered a wide range of topics, based upon the concerns of local people, whilst also remaining focused on what we can affect as a Local Authority.

Members of the group, who come from all political parties and none, have all worked together, making contributions and reaching consensus on the contents of this report, its findings and recommendations. We have thoroughly scrutinised the policies of Bromsgrove District Council (BDC) and its partners on topics such as access to social rented housing, 'Fleeceholding', examples of hidden housing need/poverty and more!

I implore the intended recipients of this report to carefully consider the evidence, comments and recommendations from the Task Group and work with us to secure necessary improvements for the people of Bromsgrove.

Councillor Harrison Warren-Clarke
Chairman of the Housing Task Group

Summary of Recommendations

After consideration of the evidence available and interviewing relevant officers the Task Group have proposed the following recommendation(s) (supporting evidence can be found under the relevant chapters within the main body of this report).

Recommendation 1 – Housing Allocations
Officers approach Bromsgrove District Housing Trust (BDHT) and jointly explore a startup crisis package for residents living in social housing including the potential of an increase in housing benefit payment to cover the costs of the crisis package. The findings to be completed in three months and reported back to the Overview and Scrutiny Board.
Financial Implications for recommendations:
There are no direct financial implications in relation to this recommendation.
Legal Implications for recommendations:
There are no direct legal implications in relation to this recommendation.
Resource Implications:
Officer time in preparing the report.
Recommendation 2 – Housing Allocations
Bromsgrove District Council's preference is for the mix of affordable housing contained within a new development be made up of social rent and shared ownership properties only and exclude outright sales of affordable homes.
Financial Implications for recommendations:
There are no direct financial implications in relation to this recommendation.
Legal Implications for recommendations:
There are no direct legal implications in relation to this recommendation.
Resource Implications:
Officer time in preparing the report.
Recommendation 3 – Asset Rich and Potentially Revenue Poor
Officers provide Members with costings of bad debt owed to the Council as a result of non – payment of Council tax by residents.
Financial Implications for recommendations:
There are no direct financial implications in relation to this recommendation.
Legal Implications for recommendations:

There are no direct legal implications in relation to this recommendation.
Resource Implications:
Officer time in preparing the report.

Recommendation 4 – Asset Rich and Potentially Revenue Poor
Officers monitor the number of residents claiming Council Tax Support in housing Bands F, G and H (with metrics built into the performance reporting framework).
Financial Implications for recommendations:
There are no direct financial implications in relation to this recommendation.
Legal Implications for recommendations:
There are no direct legal implications in relation to this recommendation.
Resource Implications:
Officer time in preparing the report.

Recommendation 5 – Section (S) 106 Contributions
Where a planning application has a material impact on the local community and there is a consideration for S106 contribution allocation, the Ward Member (and neighbouring Ward Member(s)) should be informed and consulted with prior to consideration of the application. A follow up consultation with the Ward Member (and neighbouring Ward Member(s)) should also take place.
Financial Implications for recommendations:
There are no direct financial implications in relation to this recommendation.
Legal Implications for recommendations:
There are no direct legal implications in relation to this recommendation.
Resource Implications:
Officer time in preparing the report.

Recommendation - Fleeceholding
As part of the Local Government Reorganisation process, the Council:
a. Includes the proposal that a process be investigated whereby a future unitary authority pursues and seeks to manage contracts in new developments that are causing fleeceholding issues within the District; b. Suggests that a new unitary authority continues to lobby Government on the matter of fleeceholding within Bromsgrove District.

Financial Implications for recommendations: There are no direct financial implications in relation to this recommendation.
Legal Implications for recommendations: There are no direct legal implications in relation to this recommendation.
Resource Implications: Officer time in preparing the report.

Background Information

The potential to review housing was discussed by Members at a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board held on 11th July 2024. This subject was suggested as a topic which was possibly suitable for further investigation when Members discussed key lines of enquiry for a scheduled review of affordable housing.

A report was considered at the Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting held on 23rd July 2024 and was presented by Councillor Warren-Clarke. During consideration, it was outlined that the review would be a Task Group, consisting of a small group of Members for a scheduled review of affordable housing in Bromsgrove. Following consideration of the report, it was agreed by the Board to establish the task group and the terms of reference was approved.

The key objectives of the proposed task group review and included in the terms of reference were agreed to scrutinise the following areas:

Key Objectives

Fleeceholding - Members “to address and influence” to assist residents.

Section 106 monies to support infrastructure rules – Members located in town centres/urban areas could add significant value.

To investigate “asset rich” but “revenue poor” residents and the support available locally to residents - This could involve the task group exploring potential gaps that could be addressed by the Council and partner organisations.

During the Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting held on 10th September 2025 the membership report was discussed, with the purpose of the report to formalise the membership of the Task Group which was agreed at this meeting as Councillors H. D. N. Warren-Clarke, P. M. McDonald, A. Bailes, B.A. Dale, B. Kumar and R. Hunter. It was also agreed that the Chairman would be appointed at the first task group meeting. Councillor Warren-Clarke was subsequently appointed as the Chairman of the review at the first meeting of the Task Group on 31st October 2024.

Following the task’s groups initial meeting held on 31st October 2024, Members agreed an additional item to the terms of reference. The agreed wording for this additional key objective was endorsed by the Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting on 19th November 2024.

Additional Key Objective

To scrutinise the allocations policy and housing register regarding eligibility, qualification and allocations and explore standards of housing let under the policy.

Chapter 1

Housing Allocations – Policy and Process

During the initial Task Group meeting, Members discussed the potential to have an additional objective added to the review. This was in respect of the housing needs for residents currently on the housing waiting list and for officers to provide information on what was driving the need for social housing.

Members were clear that, in terms of housing allocations, residents living locally should have priority for social housing and for this to also be explored further. The Strategic Housing Services Manager explained to Members that the housing register was used as part of the allocations policy and would need to be reviewed.

Mr. John Whitwam, Director of Housing and Communities, Bromsgrove District Housing Trust (BDHT), was invited to the task group meeting held on 13th January 2025.

During the presentation, it was outlined that the strapline for BDHT was “Building Vibrant Communities Together”. Over four thousand homes were owned by BDHT with a mix of social rented, market rent, shared ownership and leaseholders (right to buy properties). Stock transfer was initiated in 2004 and tendered for a five-year period. BDHT was based locally in Bromsgrove with one hundred and sixty employees which focused on the community. It was also explained that BDHT held housing stock for Redditch Borough Council, Wyre Forest District Council and Pershore Town Council. Partnership working such as contractors, were also sourced locally, where possible and support services networks such as 360 Services aided residents, ranging from budgetary advice to complex family support.

Allocations Policy

BDHT adhered to the Home Choice Plus allocations policy, which were approved by the relevant Local Authorities. Housing priority decisions were made by the relevant Local Authority with statutory guidance and legislation in place to assist with the prioritisation process. Most Local Authorities did not own their own housing stock and were usually run by Housing Associations.

Eligibility And Qualification

Local connections to the partnership area (person had lived in the area for at least five years) were a key consideration for the eligibility and qualification process. However, there were some exceptions i.e. if a person was fleeing domestic abuse, part of the armed forces, a care leaver or if there was a genuine housing request and adhered to the relevant threshold requirements. Applicants were required to be over 16, with some special approvals on those under 18, however, the policy was in the process of being reviewed. If applicants had the right to live in the UK and were entitled to claim public funds i.e. if they had the required immigration status. A person was not to cause unacceptable behaviour to the extent that they would get an outright possession order, however, the offence must be serious. If

a person had an Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) case against them, this would be considered as a serious offence and less likely to be given housing entitlement.

Prioritisation

Banding structures ranged from Priority, Gold Plus, Gold, Silver Plus, Silver, Reduced Banding, Bronze Plus and Bronze and were set by the Local Authority's constituency when the initial policies were agreed. When a property became vacant, BDHT advertised the void property for a period of a week. Interested parties then had the opportunity to bid for the relevant property, followed by an automated selection process, based on the highest band structure and who had been on the waiting list the longest.

Reduced Preference

Reduced preference assessments were determined by the Local Authority; however, exemptions were made in exceptional circumstances. Reduced preference assessments could be determined if there was a housing related debt i.e. a possession order or ASB offence. However, these were assessed and after further review, penalisations could be withdrawn.

Letting Standard

All Housing Associations had their own letting standards which were used as a guide for inspecting void properties. As part of the Decent Homes Standard, there was no requirement for carpets (only flooring in the kitchen and bathroom) and no white goods. However, carpets or flooring could remain in properties from a previous tenant but only offered if in an acceptable condition and were considered safe, to avoid any possible liability claims.

BDHT Letting Standard

Health and Safety checks were carried out which included damp and mould, properties cleaned and cleared, repairs completed, if decorating was required and outdoor spaces were checked for any safety issues including trip hazards. A hardship grant funding pot of £30,000 was available for tenants who required carpets, flooring and white goods, subject to an assessment. There were other funding options available such as The Salvation Army and Newstarts, providing free furniture and household supplies.

Following the presentation, Members questioned some areas in further detail which were as follows:

- **Would there be any exceptions if a person was not on the priority list but at risk?**
If a person was at risk, they should already be on the Gold Plus banding structure and would also have the right to appeal through the Local Authority.
- **How was the banding structure formally assessed?**

A signed tenancy agreement determined the number of bedrooms required i.e. if the tenant had dependants and claimed child benefit. A signed declaration was also required as part of the tenancy agreement, which should deter a fraudulent claim. If there was a medical requirement, a general practice letter would be requested.

- **How were local connection determined, if it would be safer for a person to be in another district area?**

There were discretions i.e. if someone was fleeing domestic abuse, or in a witness protection programme, however, a high percentage of claims were normally connected to the local area. The Housing Act 1996, Part 6 statutory guidance rules would also be incorporated into the assessment. The Local Authority within the preferred district area would be required to make a referral on behalf of the claimant to the Council.

- **How was an application assessed if a claimant had a local connection within a specific District area?**

The agreed policy did not apply to specific ward areas, only at a district level. However, there was also a right to appeal the initial decision made.

- **Were there any indicative timescales for banding structures?**

It was difficult to evaluate if the applicant was not on the list as a priority and specific time guidelines were not guaranteed but people were positioned through the bandings depending on their circumstances. The increased high demands were mainly due to the poor turnaround of void properties and new build supply demands were not meeting the estimated proposed targets, also resulting in a higher demand for housing.

- **Could BDHT consider further housing stock i.e. accommodation above units?**

BDHT were unable to pursue the purchase of further housing stock due to increased demands such as rent caps, inflation increases and further legislation commitments for health and safety requirements. Further housing stock requirements were dependant on grant funding through the Affordable Homes Programme.

- **Were assessments carried out to ensure the claimants understood the banding structure requirements necessary, particularly if banding had been assessed and was due to be reduced?**

Claimants were informed prior to their banding being reduced. Also, checks were carried out to ensure the person understood the reasons for the reduction and the requirements necessary for the bidding process. There was always the right to appeal a decision, which could be made through the Strategic Housing Department.

- **If an assessment could be prioritised if a person preferred a particular area and if that person was happy to free up a larger than necessary property?**

BDHT would not generally advise to leave a house as this would be lessening the persons security. However, BDHT were in the process of launching a downsizing project to try and free up larger properties for families. There was also a mutual exchange option whereby tenants could swap properties, providing the option was suitable for both parties. The task group were advised that the scheme was increasing as an option for tenants.

- **If the Hardship grant funding was adequate to assist tenants with the necessary required household items?**

Grant funding did not provide the adequate support necessary to assist all the needs required within the District. However, there were other household support grants available through Central Government and local charities. It was noted that furniture poverty had become an increasing countrywide issue.

- **Had service charges been explored to assist with the necessary household good requirements?**

The option had been utilised in the past but tenants that had benefit privileges withdrawn were sometimes unable to pay the charges necessary. Mutual exchange was an alternative option, however, sometimes caused difficulties if a property was furnished and the other was unfurnished.

- **Was there a communication platform available for donating free of charge household goods?**

Social media platforms were available such as Facebook Market Place for free items to collect. However, such a scheme would be costly to administer and cause possible liability claims to the Council.

- **Could the use of a depot be explored as an option to store free of charge, unwanted household goods?**

The option would be a cause for concern as goods should meet the Health and Safety and British Standard requirements to avoid any liability claims. Also, to administer, would cause financial pressures to Council funding.

- **Had there been difficulties with clashes of BDHT and national policy requirements?**

Most of the policies worked well, however, the reduced preference threshold of a gross household income (including benefits) of more than £38k per annum did cause difficulties but were under review.

- **Was the household income threshold of £38k a BDHT or Council policy?**

The threshold had been agreed by Bromsgrove District Council (BDC) but was under review to assist with the social housing demand.

- **Could BDHT suggest any suitable recommendations to improve social housing difficulties within the District?**

An increase in supply for social housing within the District would assist with the increased demand for temporary accommodation. The Council was working with BDHT to ensure the best use of the housing stock availability, by reviewing that tenants were suitably housed to accommodate the resident to number of bedrooms ratio.

Members also discussed a report that went to Cabinet on 10th December 2024 which revealed a significant increase in demand for temporary accommodation in the Bromsgrove District. In response, it was agreed that the report did highlight the consequence of low social housing stock availability, with people being housed in temporary accommodation for long periods. Members were advised that BDHT assisted with supplying temporary accommodation where possible, with demands increasing in some instances, however, there was an option to source accommodation outside the District

area. Members were also informed that suitable temporary accommodation options were available for people fleeing domestic abuse, with bed and breakfast being an alternative.

After considering all the evidence, Members concluded that an area for improvement for residents allocated social housing was ensuring the provision of essential items for those who did not have them when moving into a new property. Additionally, it was suggested that payments for this kind of package could be offset against any housing benefits claimed by the resident. Members understood that this would need to be investigated further.

After all discussions in respect of the evidence, Members made the following recommendations to the Overview and Scrutiny Board:

Recommendation – Housing Allocations
Officers approach Bromsgrove District Housing Trust (BDHT) and jointly explore a startup crisis package for residents living in social housing including the potential of an increase in housing benefit payment to cover the costs of the crisis package. The findings to be completed in three months and reported back to the Overview and Scrutiny Board.
Financial Implications for recommendations:
There are no direct financial implications in relation to this recommendation.
Legal Implications for recommendations:
There are no direct legal implications in relation to this recommendation.
Resource Implications:
Officer time in preparing the report.

Recommendation – Housing Allocations
Bromsgrove District Council's preference is for the mix of affordable housing contained within a new development be made up of social rent and shared ownership properties only and exclude outright sales of affordable homes.
Financial Implications for recommendations:
There are no direct financial implications in relation to this recommendation.
Legal Implications for recommendations:
There are no direct legal implications in relation to this recommendation.
Resource Implications:
Officer time in preparing the report.

Chapter 2

Asset Rich and Potentially Revenue Poor

One of the key objectives of the Task Group investigation was to gather evidence on the topic of residents considered to be 'asset rich' however potentially 'revenue poor'. Some of this had been considered at a previous Task group investigation into Fuel Poverty. It was therefore included in the Topic Proposal that the work of the Task Group would not be duplicated during investigations. Members reviewed the findings of the Fuel Poverty Task Group and invited the Strategic Housing Services Manager to address any relevant questions. It was agreed that Social Housing sustainability should be discussed in more detail, with the group expressing concerns that some social housing was provided to tenants which were ill-equipped, lacking basic household items such as curtains, carpets and white goods, as detailed in the previous chapter of this report. It was felt that the Council should be seeking to better promote where tenants could source affordable second-hand goods and where the public could donate and recycle relevant items for tenants. The Strategic Housing Services Manager advised Members that the Council did work in partnership with NewStarts to assist tenants to source furniture packs and that a report was due to go to Cabinet regarding the Homelessness Prevention Grant Funding, with NewStarts included within the funding provision.

During the task group meeting held on 6th February 2025 the Strategic Housing Services Manager was invited to a meeting to discuss the Asset Rich and Potentially Revenue Poor item in more detail and provide evidence in respect of the current situation within the District.

In presenting the evidence to Members, they were advised that the terminology "Assets" (wealth a person owned) and "Cash" (wealth a person had available to spend) were typically used to describe older adults and retirees who owned valuable assets, mainly a property but had limited income in the form of cash readily available. There was limited data available to provide on the subject, however, the Council Tax Support data system had been utilised to assist with reporting. From the data produced, it was estimated that over 4,000 residents were receiving Council Tax support within the District. Various Council Tax Bands ranging from A - H were discussed and considered, showing the rise in property value from 1st April 1991 to December 2024 in the West Midlands Region. The average and median house price ranging from one to five bedroomed houses was also discussed. It was reported that a higher percentage of homeowners within the lower Council Tax Bands A – C were receiving Council Tax support. When reviewing the pensionable age, statistics showed that a high percentage were receiving Council Tax support and an average of 50 per cent of homeowners at pensionable age were receiving Guaranteed Pension Credit.

Member Discussions

Following consideration of the presentation it was discussed whether neighbouring Local Authorities experienced similar concerns within their local areas. Although it was suggested by Members that the Task Group could

investigate what measures were being carried out within other areas to address the issues the Strategic Housing Manager advised that Local Authorities did not generally provide statistical information on Council Tax Support claims within their area and that individual Local Authorities would be required to agree to the information being provided.

Members also discussed the potential for the Council to consider providing information to residents in respect of renting a room within their property. Members were advised that information was available on the internet providing advice for homeowners to consider Equity Release or Lifetime Mortgages as available options, however, they were not considered favourable as they could affect inheritance considerations. It was also advised that the Council did not provide formal advice on Equity Release and Lifetime Mortgages but advised individuals to seek independent financial advice.

The group also discussed options available for a person at a pensionable age, owning a larger property, to consider downsizing and were advised that there were limited alternative housing options available. BDC had considered working in partnership with BDHT to make best use of the housing stock available, however, a credible housing option would need to be offered to homeowners before this option were considered. Members suggested that downsizing could be explored through the Local Plan to assist with addressing the lack of social housing within the District. It was explained that housing stock was in limited supply, due to a large population of residents within the District being at a pensionable age. Members were advised that due to the lack of alternative housing options, downsizing a person's property was not a favourable option for consideration from a Council's perspective.

After all discussions in respect of the evidence, Members made the following recommendations to the Overview and Scrutiny Board:

Recommendation – Asset Rich and Potentially Revenue Poor
Officers provide Members with costings of bad debt owed to the Council as a result of non – payment of Council tax by residents.
Financial Implications for recommendations:
There are no direct financial implications in relation to this recommendation.
Legal Implications for recommendations:
There are no direct legal implications in relation to this recommendation.
Resource Implications:
Officer time in preparing the report.

Recommendation – Asset Rich and Potentially Revenue Poor
Officers monitor the number of residents claiming Council Tax Support in housing Bands F, G and H (with metrics built into the performance reporting framework).
Financial Implications for recommendations:

Agenda Item 6

There are no direct financial implications in relation to this recommendation.
Legal Implications for recommendations:
There are no direct legal implications in relation to this recommendation.
Resource Implications:
Officer time in preparing the report.

Chapter 3

Section (S) 106 Contributions

During the initial task group meeting held on 31st October 2024 the group discussed S106 contributions to support infrastructure for housing and communities within the District.¹ Members expressed frustrations that amenities were not being replaced and it was suggested that a meeting to discuss what powers the Council had at a District Council level to ensure S106 contributions were made, would be helpful. It was also suggested that a list of S106 contribution funds which had been formally agreed and if monies were spent, should be explored at a future task group meeting. The Chairman agreed that the Assistant Director of Planning and Leisure Services should be invited to a meeting.

At a task group meeting held on 27th February 2025 the Assistant Director of Planning, Leisure and Culture Services informed Members that S106 monies were not usually received for affordable housing but was generally provided by the developer or the procured registered social landlord. However, there was a S106 legal agreement between the Council and property developers stating that affordable housing would be provided on a housing development and houses built were registered through a social landlord.

Information previously circulated to Members was also discussed which detailed S106 contributions received from 2019 to 2024 through various planning applications providing infrastructure such as Waste and Recycling, Healthcare, Open Space, Play Areas and Sports Facilities.

Several areas of interest were discussed as a result of the evidence provided by the Assistant Director of Planning, Leisure and Culture Services. These were as follows:

- **If developers had not fulfilled their obligation of affordable housing on a development, were the monies provided elsewhere?**
It was predominately housing developers who dealt with the affordable housing element, however, if affordable housing could not be provided on site for a particular reason, the Council would ensure the monies were used off site for the specified purpose.
- **Was there an audit trail of monies spent for S106 contributions?**
The S106 legal agreement between the Council and the property developer demonstrated how the monies were spent.
- **Was it common that housing developers did not always fulfil their obligations to build the required affordable housing?**
The group were advised that if there was a legal agreement via the Viability Assessment, then the necessary housing must be provided.
- **What was the Council's current situation regarding Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) agreements?**
The Council had carried out a levy assessment in the past which revealed that S106 contributions resulted in better mitigation and fund raising than CIL contributions and that there no CIL regime within the District.

- **How significant was it for affordable housing to be provided through S106 contributions?**

Information on the Council's website provided a yearly report of how many affordable houses were built through S106 contributions. However, forty percent must be achieved, as agreed by the planning policy, unless there was scrutinised evidence to the contrary.

- **Had Local Authorities discussed with Government the need for S106 monies to be provided in advance of works carried out?**

Legally the contributions were required to be based on necessity and proportionality. Monies were not necessarily required to be paid until a housing development was completed, depending on the nature of the S106 monies requested.

- **If a development was unfinished and the five-year timeframe for S106 contributions had expired, what happened to the monies owed to the Council?**

If the developer had signed an agreement to build affordable housing with proposals also agreed at Planning Committee the Council monitored all sites and ensured monies were collected and spent in a timely manner.

- **What happened to unspent S106 contribution monies? Was there residual money which could be attributed to BDHT for affordable housing?**

Details were included in the S106 Agreement legal document; therefore, funds could not be spent in other areas outside of that agreement. It was explained that no S106 monies had been lost in the past few years due to the five-year time expiration and that all monies were index linked.

- **What happened to monies if a project had varied, an extension was required and the five-year period had expired?**

The developer could choose to vary the planning application but may be reluctant to pay the fee necessary. However, if there was only a short period before expiration, developers may agree to an extension. Members were advised that participation during Planning Committee meetings was encouraged to discuss the proposed planning harm and necessary mitigation for proposals.

- **Were S106 contributions restricted geographically?**

If the issue was specified at Planning Committee that there was a planning harm identified in terms of a cause and effect, then mitigation via S106 was an option.

- **As part of the adopted Local Plan, forty percent of houses built within housing developments on greenfield sites should be affordable housing. Did S106 contributions form part of the agreement?**

The golden thread requirement for affordable housing was fifty percent (including green and brown belt areas).

- **Could Members be informed of S106 contributions being considered or spent in their area?**

S106 monies received were distributed and reported through the Finance system but would be explored further by Officers.

Following the discussions the Chairman expressed the view that Members should be provided with the details of how and where S106 contribution monies were

being spent in their ward areas. The Chairman also considered the importance of Member participation to ensure housing developments were acceptable i.e. street lighting, which was an important element of a housing development for residents. The Assistant Director of Planning, Leisure and Culture Services agreed that Member participation at the early stages, during the pre-application discussions and at Planning Committees to communicate the specifics required for a site were advisable.

After all discussions in respect of the evidence, Members made the following recommendations to the Overview and Scrutiny Board:

Recommendation – Section (S) 106 Contributions
Where a planning application has a material impact on the local community and there is a consideration for S106 contribution allocation, the Ward Member (and neighbouring Ward Member(s)) should be informed and consulted with prior to consideration of the application. A follow up consultation with the Ward Member (and neighbouring Ward Member(s)) should also take place.
Financial Implications for recommendations:
There are no direct financial implications in relation to this recommendation.
Legal Implications for recommendations:
There are no direct legal implications in relation to this recommendation.
Resource Implications:
Officer time in consulting with relevant ward Members.

¹ Planning obligations are legal obligations entered into to mitigate the impacts of a development proposal. This can be via a planning agreement entered into under [section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990](#) by a person with an interest in the land and the local planning authority; or via a unilateral undertaking entered into by a person with an interest in the land without the local planning authority. Planning obligations run with the land, are legally binding and enforceable. A unilateral undertaking cannot bind the local planning authority because they are not party to it. Planning obligations are also commonly referred to as ‘section 106’, ‘s106’, as well as ‘developer contributions’ when considered alongside highways contributions and the Community Infrastructure Levy. **Source:** [Planning obligations - GOV.UK](#)

Chapter 4

Fleeceholding (Land in new developments not adopted by the Council)

During the initial meeting held on 31st October 2024, Members discussed fleeceholding. Specific locations across the District where residents had raised issues in respect of fleeceholding were discussed and that an investigation would be welcomed by residents in these locations. Members reported that there had been issues raised by residents concerned with repairs and maintenance and management fees. The group also noted that costs were not fixed, with some residents being charged differing amounts. Members requested a presentation for fleeceholding to better understand this area as part of the investigation and to include Council policies regarding the issue. The presentation was also to include if the policy had any impact for residents and if not, how the Council could better promote the specific policies in place. (Following the request, details of the Open Spaces Policy, including the standards and cost calculator were included as part of the agenda for Members' consideration at a meeting held on 16th December 2024).

The Assistant Director of Planning and Leisure Services provided further information on the matter to the group. It was explained that the formal planning process was to determine planning applications received to approve, refuse or approve with conditions. As part of the submissions process for larger planning applications, it was the requirement to agree the amount of open space, with policies agreed to the acceptable standards of the open space. However, it was not within the planning process to determine the management of open space when granting planning permissions or in seeking if unadopted land was available.

Members were informed that a formal document had been produced which included, subject to the appropriate fees, that the Council could be given the rights to adopt certain land. The group were also advised that the Council had also formally written to Central Government, urging that the situation be reviewed at a national level.

Several residents had submitted their concerns, frustrations and issues to the Council and that several meetings had been arranged along with relevant Council Members who had sympathised with the issues residents experienced.

At a subsequent meeting Members queried the definition of fleeceholding and it was explained that the terminology was used in the popular press over the years. Residents with a freehold property could have the option of private management arrangements, however, leasehold properties would be required to discuss issues through a formal Tribunal process. It was noted that a formal Committee paper had been considered previously and outlined the Council's approach to the adoption of land.

Discussions with the East Works Residents

A task group meeting was held on 16th December 2024 with representatives from the East Works Residents Group to discuss their shared experiences and issues with unadopted land on the Cofton Estate housing development. Several areas were highlighted including fees, management of the land and the requirement for residents to pay both Council Tax and management fees.

Following all discussions in respect of the evidence, Members made the following recommendation to the Overview and Scrutiny Board:

Recommendation - Fleeceholding
As part of the Local Government Reorganisation process, the Council:
a. Includes the proposal that a process be investigated whereby a future unitary authority pursues and seeks to manage contracts in new developments that are causing fleeceholding issues within the District; b. Suggests that a new unitary authority continues to lobby Government on the matter of fleeceholding within Bromsgrove District.
Financial Implications for recommendations:
There are no direct financial implications in relation to this recommendation.
Legal Implications for recommendations:
There are no direct legal implications in relation to this recommendation.
Resource Implications:
Officer time in preparing the report.

Chapter 5

Outcomes

Recommendations

As detailed in this report, once all evidence had been received from witnesses the discussions in respect of the recommendations took place. It was noted that any recommendations should be evidence-based and in line with the usual process, would be shared with Council Officers, so they could provide further details on the suggested recommendations.

The considerations and discussions were carried out with particular focus on the four key aims and objectives as detailed in the task group's terms of reference. These were:

**Housing
Allocations
Policy,
Process and
Standards**

**'Asset rich'
but potentially
'revenue poor'**

**Section 106
monies to
support
infrastructure
rules**

Fleeceholding

Housing Allocations Policy

As detailed earlier in this report, Members discussed in detail the housing allocation policy. As a result of these discussions, a recommendation was suggested; *Officers approach Bromsgrove District Housing Trust (BDHT) and jointly explore a startup crisis package for residents living in social housing including the potential of an increase in housing benefit payment to cover the costs of the crisis package. The findings to be completed in three months and reported back to the Overview and Scrutiny Board.* Following consideration, the Strategic Housing Services Manager commented; *Officers can explore the suggestion of a crisis packaged jointly with BDHT. However, Housing Benefit will not cover the cost of furniture as this is not eligible as part of the Housing Benefit criteria.* A timeframe of three to six months was suggested for this investigation to be completed.

The Housing Benefit allocation process was also discussed to explore the increase of housing benefit support as a means of purchasing household essentials which were sometimes unaffordable items but necessary for new tenants in social housing. It was also suggested that the crisis package should only be allocated and applicable to residents living in social housing.

A Council webpage was discussed as a means of promoting donatable goods. However, it was pointed out that this was discussed in previous Housing Task Group discussions with officers advising that the Council would need to consider the administrative costs to facilitate the webpage and possible concerns of liability claims to the Council.

The suggested recommendation to explore a crisis start up package with BDHT was agreed by the task group; *Planning Officers explore and report back on a new definition of affordable housing for the District, which is limited to rent and shared ownership.* Following deliberation, the Strategic Housing Services Manager commented; *the definition of affordable housing from a planning point of view is set nationally in the NPPF. Options can be explored via the production of the Local Plan but it extremely unlikely that the outcome will be to locally define affordable housing as per the recommendation.*

Following the recommendation suggested and the points raised by Officers the group expressed the view that some housing developments considered as affordable were inconsistent. It was agreed that a clear definition of the term “affordable housing” should be provided in the planning policy, however, properties discounted for outright sale should be excluded from the affordable homes policy. It was also agreed that band structures should be considered when allocating affordable housing within the District.

Asset Rich, Revenue Poor

During the Housing Task Group meeting held in February, which discussed Asset Rich and Revenue Poor in detail, a recommendation was suggested by Members; *Officers monitor the number of residents claiming Council Tax Support in housing Bands F, G and H (with metrics built into the performance reporting framework).* After consideration of the recommendation the Customer Support Manager responded; *yes happy with the CTS measure.*

During discussions the following was also suggested by the Task Group; *Officers provide Members with costings of bad debt owed to the Council as a result of non – payment of Council tax by residents.* After deliberation of the suggested recommendation by Members the Revenue Services Manager commented; *the Finance Department would need more structure around what is expected in terms of the bad debt reporting. We have limited capacity to produce the reports – so the time implication was a factor.*

After considering the proposed recommendations and Officer comments the task group discussed the following:

- Council Tax Band thresholds should be monitored closely when Council Tax support was calculated, particularly in the higher band thresholds, with the view that households could utilise the release of equity in their homes or move to a lower band valued property to meet the additional Council Tax liability. However, the Chairman expressed the view that the Council should not be viewed as encouraging householders to sell their homes and be left vulnerable with possibly running the risk of increasing the need for individuals to be on the housing waiting list.
- The Council Tax support scheme seemed unbalanced, with some householders living in cramped housing conditions compared to others living in larger properties but could equally claim Council Tax Support.

- The view received from Officers stating that the relative reductions in the total costs of Council Tax would be less than 0.5 percent of the total costs of Council Tax within the higher tax bracket was discussed further by the group, with some Members expressing the view that cost savings would be minimal. However, other Members urged that there could be a possible increase in Council Tax support claims, due to the Government's aim to increase social and affordable housing.
- Additional support could be concentrated to households claiming Council Tax support in the lower band bracket. It was also suggested that the Council Tax banding could be evaluated on a band-by-band basis and the task group should seek further analysis from Officers of how banding for F, G and H were individually calculated (to exclude any residents with ill health implications).
- Alternative support to Council Tax benefit could be explored for Bands F, G, and H.
- Larger families should be a consideration, who could only claim limited Council Tax support (for up to two children), with the additional penalty charges of bedroom tax.
- The Council should explore bad debt owed to the Council for non-payment of Council Tax.

Section (S) 106 Contributions

S106 contributions discussions were considered further by the group and Members reiterated, as discussed in previous task groups, that Members should be informed of S106 contribution considerations early in the Planning Application process. It was also agreed that Members should be consulted on S106 contribution considerations in their ward areas and neighbouring areas to enable Members to advise Planning Officer of the potential use of the monies to be utilised effectively. It was therefore agreed that the discussed considerations were to be included as a recommendation in the Housing Task Group Final report.

The recommendation suggested was; *where a planning application has a material impact on the local community and there is a consideration for S106 contribution allocation, the Ward Member (and neighbouring Ward Member(s)) should be informed and consulted with prior to consideration of the application. A follow up consultation with the Ward Member (and neighbouring Ward Member(s)) should also take place.* Following consideration of the suggested recommendation the Assistant Director of Planning, Leisure and Culture Services responded; *The weekly list of all applications received into Planning Services is already sent to all members and is on the website. Officers can provide an additional list so that members can identify major residential applications anticipated to trigger section 106 agreements. S106 are uploaded to public records. Once a decision is issued on a planning application, a legal agreement is uploaded to public access and visible for all parties.*

Fleeceholding

Members revisited discussions held during the Housing Task Group meeting on 16th December 2024 with the East Works Residents, where fleecing issues were considered. It was agreed that the Council had a duty of care to Council Taxpayers within the District who experienced fleecing issues and should be actively approaching individuals to assist and provide further advice.

The suggested recommendation was; therefore, *the Council should actively pursue and seek to take over contracts that are causing fleecing issues within the District.* In response the Assistant Director Finance and Customer Services commented; *the cost to the Council of setting up a separate trading company would require consideration of upfront costs (such as legal costs to ensure compliance with company registration and other costs such as governance, IT systems etc). It would also require an initial cash injection to cover initial staffing and operational costs during the period before it was able to trade successfully. There are several key financial risks that would need to be considered carefully before undertaking this, such as whether the company would generate enough revenue to cover costs, whether the council would underwrite any losses, procurement issues and market uncertainty. A full business case should be undertaken to consider the options available and review the risks and costs that could impact on the Council. The MTFP for 2025/26 currently does not reflect any budget for the costs identified above. A further consideration is the long lead in time which would be required and whether such a process could be completed before the Local Government Reorganisation (LGR).*

The Legal Department's Solicitor commented, in conclusion that; *Members can take some assurance from the fact that legislation is due to be introduced to bring in regulation of estate management fees/ companies, and it is hoped that this will assist affected homeowners. In the meantime the advice of Officers regarding the legal implications of competing for maintenance contracts is that to do so would not be possible without complex work to set up a company for which there is no budget or business case. Further, even if set up there is no guarantee that such a company would be able to take over the maintenance contracts as this would be down to market forces.*

Further Considerations

Following officer's responses to the recommendations, it was agreed by Members to hold a further meeting which was held on 17th September 2025 to consider the recommendations.

Members were particularly keen to look at the allocation of affordable homes on new developments in the future. It was suggested that a preferable allocation would include opportunity to access to social rented housing and shared ownership properties on these new developments rather than properties for outright purchase. Officers advised that this approach could potentially limit housing developments in the District and that the Council's current approach of offering more options of affordable housing provided greater flexibility.

However, following the discussions Members suggested that the recommendation be amended from:

Recommendation 2 - Planning Officers explore and report back on a new definition of affordable housing for the District, which is limited to rent and shared ownership and amended to:

Recommendation 2 - Bromsgrove District Council's preference is for the mix of affordable housing contained within a new development be made up of social rent and shared ownership properties only and exclude outright sales of affordable homes.

During this meeting Officers also presented detailed advice in respect of fleec holding. Members were advised that there were legal complications in respect of competing for maintenance contracts on private land by the Council and it was a complex legal process to establish an arm's length company in order to do this. It would also require a significant amount of time and budget to investigate this option as a possibility due to the requirement of a business case and legal investigations. Local Government Reorganisation was currently underway, and the timelines were extremely tight. Therefore, to carry out these detailed investigations at this time would put significant pressures on officer time and Council finances.

Members were reassured that legislation was to be introduced by Government to bring in regulation of estate management fees and companies in the future.

Therefore, following the discussions, Members suggested a new recommendation from:

Recommendation 6 - The Council should actively pursue and seek to take over contracts that are causing fleec holding issues within the District and amended to:

Recommendation 6 - As part of the Local Government Reorganisation process, the Council:

- a) Includes the proposal that a process be investigated whereby a future unitary authority pursues and seeks to manage contracts in new developments that are causing fleec holding issues within the District; and**
- b) Suggests that a new unitary authority continues to lobby Government on the matter of fleec holding within Bromsgrove District.**

The remainder of the recommendations were unchanged.

Areas to Note

During the investigation there were several areas to note. These were as follows:

Recommendation Suggestion

During discussions in various housing task group meetings concerning the housing allocation policy and procedures process, a recommendation was suggested by Councillor Dale, *Local connections to the area are to be a key consideration for the eligibility and qualification process for housing allocation.*

However, during the course of task group discussions, it was explained that local connections to the partnership area (person had lived in the area for at least five years) were a key consideration for the eligibility and qualification process for housing allocations.

Appendix 1

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY TOPIC PROPOSAL

This form can be used for either a Task Group or a Short Sharp Review topic proposal.

Completed forms should be returned to scrutiny@bromsgrove.gov.uk – Democratic Services, Bromsgrove District Council.

Name of Proposer: Councillor H. Rone-Clarke	
Tel No:	Email: h.rone-clarke@bromsgrove.gov.uk
Date: 11.07.24	

Title of Proposed Topic (including specific subject areas to be investigate)	Housing Task Group
Background to the Proposal (Including reasons why this topic should be investigated and evidence to support the need for the investigation.)	The potential to review housing was discussed by Members at a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board held on 11th July 2024. This subject was suggested as a topic that was possibly suitable for further investigation when Members discussed key lines of enquiry for a scheduled review of affordable housing, due to be considered at the meeting of the Board scheduled to take place on 23rd July 2024. There are particular areas relating to housing that would be of interest to Members. Some of these subjects may just involve sharing information whilst other aspects may benefit from a more detailed review. For this review, it is suggested that the following should be noted: • 'Fleeceholding' – in terms of the definitions of fleeceholding and the local context in respect of this national matter. • The report in respect of affordable housing due to be considered at the

	Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting on 23rd July 2024 will provide useful background information for Members of a Task Group. • Revisiting the findings of the Fuel Poverty Task Group, for information, to avoid duplicating the work of that earlier investigation. • Infrastructure considerations, in respect of Section 106 agreements. This should not duplicate the work of the Strategic Planning Steering Group and it is noted that Members cannot scrutinise specific planning applications. • The difficulties experienced by residents who are asset rich but are struggling financially and the extent to which this is a particular issue in Bromsgrove District.
Links to national, regional and local priorities (including the Council's strategic purposes)	Housing has been agreed as a Council priority in the Council Plan 2024 – 2027.
Possible Key Objectives (these should be SMART – specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and timely)	1. Based on background information provided to the group, to identify the extent to which “fleeceholding” is a challenge in Bromsgrove District and whether there are any actions to address or influence this locally. 2. To scrutinise information about the rules with respect to providing Section 106 monies to support infrastructure for housing and communities in the District. 3. To investigate the extent to which there is an issue locally for residents who are considered to be “asset rich” but potentially “revenue poor” and the support available locally to residents in this position. This should involve the group exploring whether there are any gaps in provision that could be addressed by the Council or partner organisations.

Anticipated Timescale for completion of the work.				
Would it be appropriate to hold a Short Sharp Inquiry or a Task Group? (please tick relevant box)	Task Group	X	Short Sharp Inquiry	

OFFICE USE ONLY - TO BE COMPLETED WHEN THE TOPIC PROPOSAL IS ACCEPTED

Evidence	
Key documents, data, reports	
Possible Site Visits	
Is a general press release required asking for general comments/suggestions from the public?	
Is a period of public consultation required?	
Witnesses	
Officers	
Councillors (including Portfolio Holder)	
Any External Witnesses	

Appendix 2

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY BOARD

Housing Task Group

Terms of Reference as at September 2024

Looking at Housing Provision within Bromsgrove District Council's Operations Task Group has been set up by the Overview and Scrutiny Board to carry out detailed scrutiny/pre-scrutiny of the above topic.

1. The Task Group be made up of 5 Members with a quorum of 3. The Task Group will meet throughout the next six months at intervals to be decided by the Group.
2. Meetings will be restricted to 1.5 hours in order for the Group to remain focused (with the option to extend should it be deemed necessary).
3. The Task Group agreed that if Members missed more than 2 meetings then they would no longer be on the Task Group.
4. The Task Group will be a standing item on the agenda of the Overview and Scrutiny Board and either a verbal or written report will be provided at each of the Board's meetings.
5. The Task Group is able to make recommendations to the Overview & Scrutiny Board who will then put forward its recommendations for consideration by Cabinet or directly to Cabinet/Council.
6. The Task group is expected to complete the investigation in six months and provide its findings and recommendations to the Overview and Scrutiny Board in a written report at that time.
7. Should the Task Group not complete its work within that timescale, then an interim report will be presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Board with a request for further time to complete the investigations.

Aims and Objectives of the Task Group

The Task Group will undertake a scrutiny investigation into Housing Provision within Bromsgrove District Council's Operations and will cover the following areas:

- 1 Based on background information provided to the group, to identify the extent to which "fleeceholding" is a challenge in Bromsgrove District and whether there are any actions to address or influence this locally.
- 2 To scrutinise information about the rules with respect to providing Section 106 monies to support infrastructure for housing and communities in the District (*this should not duplicate the work of the Strategic Planning Steering Group and it is noted that Members cannot scrutinise specific planning applications*).
- 3 To investigate the extent to which there is an issue locally for residents who are considered to be "asset rich" but potentially "revenue poor" and the support available locally to residents in this position. This should involve the group exploring whether there are any gaps in provision that could be addressed by the Council or partner organisations (*Members to revisit the findings of the Fuel Poverty Task Group, for information, to avoid duplicating the work of that earlier investigation*).
- 4 To scrutinise the allocations policy and housing register regarding eligibility, qualification and allocations and explore standards of housing let under the policy.

Appendix 3

WITNESSES

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

Internal Witnesses:

Ruth Bamford, Assistant Director for Planning, Leisure and Culture Services

Debra Goodall, Assistant Director of Finance and Customer Services

Matthew Bough, Strategic Housing Services Manager

Nicola Cummings, Principal Solicitor (Governance)

External Witnesses:

John Whitwam, Director of Housing and Communities, Bromsgrove District
Housing Trust (BDHT)

Mike Pattison, East Works Residents

David Dixon, East Works Residents

Legal, Equalities and Democratic Services

Bromsgrove District Council, Parkside Offices, Market Street
Bromsgrove, Worcestershire B61 8DA
Email: democratic@bromsgroveandredditch.gov.uk

Health Overview Scrutiny Committee – 8th September 2025

Engaging Neighbourhoods and Communities in Health Improvement

1. Purpose and Strategic Context

- Embedding community engagement into health improvement.
- Aligned with NHS Neighbourhood Health Guidelines, Local Government reforms, and Worcestershire Joint Local Health & Wellbeing Strategy (2022–2032).
- Public Health nationally recognised for pioneering work.

2. Priority Neighbourhood Development (PND)

- 14 deprived neighbourhoods targeted based on high emergency admissions.
- Residents and VCSE groups shape local solutions via grants.
- NHS integration through Primary Care Networks (PCNs).
- Case Study: Westlands Estate (Droitwich): youth bike repair, after-school club, wellbeing centre, outdoor reading spaces.
- Outcomes: 7% fall in emergency admissions, 13% reduction in child social care referrals, 95% users reporting better wellbeing.
- Expansion planned for Wyre Forest, Redditch, and children's services.

3. Empowering School Communities

- Schools, nurseries, and colleges can access £3,000 grants.
- 270+ projects funded (forest schools, therapy pets, sensory rooms, balance bikes).
- Feedback: improved focus, behaviour, resilience; staff valued resources.

4. Wider Community Development

- Projects in all districts promoting social connection, youth engagement, healthy lifestyles.
- Examples: youth hubs (Malvern), bereavement groups (Wychavon), men's groups (Redditch), wellbeing hubs (Wyre Forest).
- Grant mapping tool identifies underserved areas.

5. Harnessing Assets – Green Spaces, Libraries, Volunteering

- Country parks and reserves (1.5M+ visits annually) host Park Run, Nordic walking, and conservation volunteering.
- Health Walks provide free, accessible exercise.
- Libraries as health hubs host NHS checks, wellbeing sessions, and digital cafés.
- 350+ volunteers contribute 8,000–10,000 hours yearly.

6. Community Voice and Partnerships

- People and Communities Voices Report gathers insights from carers, rural residents, young people, seldom-heard groups.
- Worcestershire Engagement Network (WEN) shares learning across NHS, council, VCSE.
- Experts by Experience panels shape services (substance misuse, recovery, domestic abuse, patient forums).

7. Volunteering in Healthwatch & Hospitals

- Healthwatch Worcestershire volunteers gather patient voice (pharmacy access, digital inclusion).
- Hospital volunteers support discharge, patient feedback forums, and morale.
- Volunteering builds employment pathways and strengthens community ties.

8. Innovative Models of Integrated Care

- Wyre Forest Accelerator: frailty, dementia, and mental health services integrated in PCN (73,000 patients).
- Outcomes: 19.4% fall in emergency admissions.
- Challenges: digital exclusion, workforce gaps, partnerships.
- Adult Social Care: Moving Social Work supports disabled residents; Building Together Forum co-produces strategy.

9. Conclusion & Next Steps

- Worcestershire is a national leader in community health improvement.
- Key success factors: data-led targeting, resident co-design, strong partnerships, and asset use (schools, green spaces, volunteers).

Health Overview & Scrutiny Committee – 10th October 2025 Report

Two items on the agenda.

1. **Pharmaceutical Needs Assessment (PNA)**
2. **Winter Planning**

Pharmaceutical Needs Assessment (PNA)

Purpose & Legal Role

- The PNA is a statutory document produced by the Worcestershire Health & Wellbeing Board to assess local pharmaceutical service needs and provision.
- It informs NHS England when considering new pharmacy applications and guides commissioning decisions.
- The 2025 PNA is the fourth such assessment for Worcestershire, published on 1 October 2025.

Key Findings

Pharmacy Landscape & Access

- As of 2025, 109 contractors serve the county: 88 community pharmacies + 21 dispensing GP practices.
- This represents a 6 % decline in provider numbers since 2022.
- Recent regulatory changes allow “100-hour” pharmacies to reduce core hours (from 100 → 72), leading many to cut evening and weekend hours.
- Several pharmacies have reduced or withdrawn supplementary (non-core) hours, particularly in evenings and weekends.
- Despite these reductions, nearly all residents are within a 20-minute drive of a pharmacy; 86 % can reach one via public transport within 30 minutes.

Gaps, Barriers & Inequalities

- No *major* service access gaps are identified overall, though rural areas (especially Malvern Hills) have faced pharmacy closures.
- Worcestershire has fewer pharmacies per capita than the national average.
- Survey respondents cite limitations in opening hours, transport difficulties, and low public awareness of services beyond dispensing.
- Vulnerable or “lesser-heard” groups (e.g. persons with sensory impairments, those in substance-use services) report barriers such as stigma, privacy concerns, communication difficulties, and lack of tailored materials.

Service Opportunities & Health Needs

- Worcestershire has higher rates of chronic conditions (asthma, hypertension) than national averages; its ageing population increases demand for robust pharmaceutical support.
- There is appetite among stakeholders to expand pharmacy roles into chronic disease management, screenings, vaccinations, and harm reduction services.

Key Conclusions & Recommendations

Conclusions

- No systemic access gaps, though rural areas are vulnerable to service contraction.
- Evening and weekend access has diminished; no late-night services remain.
- Public awareness of non-dispensing pharmacy services is low.
- Some populations continue to experience disproportionate barriers.

Recommendations

1. Increase public awareness and trust in pharmacy services (beyond dispensing).
2. Align pharmacy services with local health priorities and support staff wellbeing.
3. Explore improved evening/extended access (e.g. via commissioning rotas) and simplify contracting/commissioning processes.

4. Enhance privacy, communication, and accessibility, especially for marginalized groups.
5. Ensure respectful, private care for supervised medicine users.
6. Monitor and reduce health inequalities related to pharmaceutical access.

Impacts & Next Steps

- The PNA process included broad engagement: public surveys, contractor feedback, and focus groups with underrepresented groups, to triangulate quantitative and qualitative evidence.
- An Equality Relevance Screening found no significant equality issues requiring further legal consideration in implementation.
- The Health Overview & Scrutiny Committee will review and comment on the PNA findings, request further information if needed, and make recommendations to relevant decision-makers (e.g. Health & Wellbeing Board, ICB).

Concerns raised by me and fellow members

- **Access and Opening Hours**
“Many residents, especially shift-workers and older people, struggle to find a pharmacy open in the evenings or weekends. What assessment has been made of gaps in out-of-hours access, and what can be done to encourage pharmacies to extend their hours in areas with greatest need?”
- **Rural and Transport Inequality**
“Some rural and semi-rural wards have lost pharmacies or face poor bus links. What is being done to ensure residents without cars can still access essential pharmacy services, including prescriptions and health advice?”
- **Expanding Clinical Services ('Pharmacy First')**
“How well prepared are Worcestershire’s pharmacies to deliver the new ‘Pharmacy First’ and chronic-condition support schemes, and what training or funding will they receive to do this safely and effectively?”
- **Public Awareness and Engagement**
“Many residents are unaware that pharmacies can provide health checks, vaccinations, and minor-illness advice. What communication or outreach plans are in place to raise awareness and improve uptake of these services?”
- **Workforce and Sustainability**
“With ongoing reports of pharmacist shortages and financial pressures, what actions are being taken locally to support the pharmacy workforce and prevent further closures or reductions in service?”

2. Winter Planning

Current Performance & Situation

- The system has made **notable improvements** in key UEC performance metrics ahead of winter:
 - The average time for ambulance handover (i.e. transfer of patient from ambulance to Emergency Department) was 31 minutes in August 2025, a 21-minute improvement from April 2025.
 - The proportion of patients waiting over 12 hours in the ED has reduced: in April 2025 it was ~17 %, while in August 2025 it was 11.8 %.
- Nonetheless, challenges remain. The system acknowledges that more work is needed to reduce delays, improve flow, and ensure capacity across the UEC journey.

3. Winter Planning & Key Priorities

- The system commenced winter planning in **summer 2025**. The joint **Winter Plan 2025/26** was submitted to NHS England in August, with subsequent assurance visits and stress testing in September.
- Regulators observed that the winter plan is “comprehensive, multi-agency” and well aligned with national UEC priorities.
- The **key priorities** for winter 2025 are:
 1. Further reductions in ambulance handover delays (with a target that no ambulance waits more than 45 minutes).
 2. Improved Emergency Department waiting times and Emergency Access Standards (EAS) performance.
 3. Reducing use of “corridor care” (i.e. patients waiting in hallways).
 4. Enhancing the patient experience, particularly for frail or end-of-life patients requiring urgent/emergency care.
- These priorities are underpinned by several interventions and capacity expansions planned across partner organisations.

4. System-Level Interventions & Capacity Measures

4.1 Capacity Enhancements & Alternative Pathways

- **Virtual Wards**: capacity to be increased from 9 to 45 beds, focussing particularly on respiratory and frailty cases.
- **Urgent Community Response (UCR)** teams will be expanded (by ~4 %) to treat more patients at home or in community settings.
- **Single Point of Access (SPA)**: further development to triage more referrals (e.g. from NHS 111) and direct patients to appropriate care rather than defaulting to ED.
- **Acute trust reconfiguration**: assessment areas will be restructured to support flow.
- **Earlier discharge / rehabilitation pathways**: models to move patients into community rehab beds sooner, and ensure all discharge capacity (domiciliary care, community beds) is fully utilised and able to surge.

4.2 Demand Management & Prevention

- Primary care investment: over **130,000 additional appointments** between October 2025 and March 2026, of which ~30,000 are same-day urgent access.
- Immunisation programme (flu, COVID-19 etc.): delivered via 75+ sites, pharmacies, outreach vehicles, with extended hours and efforts to reach underserved groups.
- **Pharmacy First** service expansion: more consultations in pharmacies to treat minor illnesses (e.g. sore throats, UTIs) to relieve pressure on GPs and ED.
- Dental care: ~12,970 additional urgent dental appointments across the region from April 2025 to March 2026.
- Targeted vaccination outreach pilot (Oct–Dec 2025): home-based vaccinations for high-risk patients (e.g. COPD, asthma) who missed prior flu vaccinations, along with clinical review and self-care advice.

4.3 Flow, Discharge & Hospital Efficiency

- Within hospitals, focus is on **Same Day Emergency Care (SDEC)** to reduce burden on ED by redirecting appropriate patients to day units or outpatient settings.
- Internal process improvements: better discharge planning, documentation, and a “zero tolerance” approach to internal delays.
- Re-introduction of “discharge to assess” model: patients discharged home or to reablement settings as soon as it's safe, with assessment of support needs afterwards.
- A system-wide length-of-stay reduction campaign is being relaunched ahead of winter, aiming to reduce unnecessary inpatient stays.
- Integration of bed management across acute & community settings (so that all beds are managed via a consistent, joined process).
- The “out-by-day 5” initiative (encouraging patients to be discharged or moved by Day 5 where clinically feasible) is already showing positive results.

4.4 Ambulance and Handover Interventions

- Existing initiatives such as **Ambulance “Pit Stop”**, **call before conveyance**, and SPA triage aim to reduce unnecessary hospital conveyances and align ambulance deployment to clinical need.
- The **Ambulance Pit Stop** process (clinical review upon arrival) is designed to redirect ambulances to more appropriate settings when ED is not required; it has been nationally recognised.
- As these measures reduce pressure on EDs, it supports more efficient handovers, fewer delays, and better throughput.

5. Demand Trends, Challenges & Targets

- ED / MIU activity: In August 2025, ED and Minor Injury Units saw over 9 % more attendances compared to August 2024, though recent months have shown plateauing of growth.
- Many patients continue to self-present to ED/MIU without prior contact with alternative services.
- SPA is being used to triage patients referred by NHS 111, redirecting some to MIU or community services instead of default ED.
- Worcestershire has **five MIUs** operating daily across Bromsgrove, Evesham, Kidderminster, Malvern, and Tenbury (with varying opening hours) to offer treatment for minor injuries and illnesses.
- Kidderminster MIU was closed overnight since March 2020 due to low overnight attendance; the reallocation of resources led to improved triage times during daytime hours.
- The plan includes maintaining current MIU opening hours to manage capacity across the system.

Performance targets and ambitions:

- **Emergency Access Standard (EAS)**: current performance ~64 %, up from 57.2 % in January 2025. The system hopes to reach **78 %** by March 2026.
- The system aims to reduce the proportion of patients waiting >12 hours in ED to ≤10 % by March 2026.
- The percentage of ambulance handover delays and paramedic lost hours continues to improve (i.e. reduce) and these efforts are central to winter resilience.

6. Communications & Public Engagement

- A **local winter communications strategy** has been co-produced with partners. Key aims:
 - **Prevention**: helping people stay well during winter
 - **Where to go for help**: signposting public to the most appropriate services (e.g. pharmacy, NHS 111, GP, as alternatives to ED)
 - **Supporting workforce**: ensuring consistent messaging across organisations and encouraging staff engagement

- The campaign will encourage use of alternatives to ED such as NHS 111 (online/phone), pharmacies, and the NHS App.
- Other message themes include vaccinations (flu, COVID, RSV), self-care, mental health, cancer awareness, and coping strategies (physical, mental, financial) during winter.
- Campaign materials will be made available online; Members of the Committee are asked to share messaging with constituents.
- Supporting digital presence: Worcestershire “Winters Well” website is a resource hub.

7. Summary & Actions Requested

- The report concludes that performance against many UEC metrics is improving, and the system is more resilient going into the winter season than was the case previously.
- Nevertheless, winter pressures remain a significant risk, and success depends heavily on delivery of the planned capacity, transformation, and communication interventions.

Questions asked by me and possible problems envisaged

Performance Area	2024 / Winter 2023-24 Actuals	2025 Plan / Target	Improvement Required	Realism / Commentary
Emergency Access Standard (4-hour ED waits)	~57.2 % (Jan 2025), year outturn ~62.9 %	78 % by March 2026	+15 % (approx)	<i>Stretch but plausible:</i> requires consistent daily discharge, faster triage, full SDEC use. Success depends on staff stability & SPA efficiency.
> 12-hour ED waits (proportion of attenders)	18 % (Apr 2024) → 11 % (Jan 2025)	≤ 7 % by March 2026	–4 p.p.	<i>Achievable:</i> continuing trend suggests feasible reduction if corridor care and rapid flow zones operate as planned.
Bed occupancy	~100 % (acute beds), constant surge beds in use	< 92 % sustained occupancy	–8 p.p.	<i>Unrealistic in practice:</i> occupancy rarely below 95 % even in spring; would require sustained community capacity and no surge.
Hospital discharges (per week)	+10 % YoY (Dec 2024 vs Dec 2023)	Further 5–10 % uplift + earlier discharge (Home by Lunch)	+5–10 %	<i>Achievable if social care aligned:</i> prior success gives confidence, but dependent on external partners.
Flu/COVID/Norovirus impact	150 beds lost to flu peak Dec 2024	Pre-emptive surge & vaccination drive; maintain isolation zones	—	<i>Uncertain:</i> success depends on timing of viral peaks, not purely planning.

Prepared by Cllr Bakul Kumar

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Overview and Scrutiny Board 2025

18th November

Finance and Budget Working Group

Relevant Portfolio Holder	Councillor S. Baxter
Portfolio Holder Consulted	No
Relevant Head of Service	Claire Felton, Assistant Director of Legal, Democratic and Procurement Services
Report Author: Jane Oyenuga	Job Title: Trainee Democratic Services Officer Contact email: jane.oyenuga@bromsgroveandredditch.gov.uk
Wards Affected	N/A
Ward Councillor(s) consulted	N/A
Relevant Council Priorities	Sustainability
Non-Key Decision	
If you have any questions about this report, please contact the report author in advance of the meeting.	

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Overview and Scrutiny Board is asked to:-

- a) Agree the Membership of the Finance and Budget Scrutiny Working Group for the municipal year 2025/26.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Finance and Budget Scrutiny Working Group was set up by the Overview and Scrutiny Board to carry out detailed scrutiny of a number of Financial Reports (listed in the Terms of Reference) and to assist in scrutiny of the Council's budget setting.
- 2.2 Due to recent changes to the membership of the Board, following changes to the political balance at the Council, and following agreement at the previous meeting of the Board to consult with Board Members who were not in attendance at the meeting; the purpose of this report is to formalise the membership of the Group for 2025-26.

Overview and Scrutiny Board 2025

18th November

3. OPERATIONAL ISSUES

Chairman

- 3.1 Historically the Chairman of the Working Group has been the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Board. It was agreed at a previous Board meeting held on 17th June 2025 that Councillor P. McDonald be appointed as the Chairman of the Finance and Budget Working Group for the ensuing municipal year 2025/26.

Membership

- 3.2 It has been agreed within the terms of reference that the Working Group be composed of the Chairman of the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee and 6 Members of the Board with a quorum of 3. Scrutiny Working Groups are not required to be politically balanced, although it would be good practice to have each political group represented.
- 3.3 Current Members of the Board who have been confirmed as Members of the Working Group are: Councillors P.M. McDonald (Chairman), S. Ammar and S.T. Nock. Councillor E. M. S. Gray, as Chairman of the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee has also been confirmed as a Member of the Working Group.
- 3.4 At the meeting of the Board held on 17th June 2025, Councillor Hunter, who was also a Member of the Board, expressed an interest in being appointed to the working group. Councillor Hunter subsequently confirmed in writing that he no longer wished to be appointed to serve on this group in 2025/26.
- 3.5 At that same meeting of the Board, Councillor S. Ammar confirmed that she would like to be appointed to the Working Group (at the time, Councillor Ammar was a Member of the Board). However, following changes to the political balance agreed at the Council meeting held on 19th June, Councillor Ammar was no longer a Member of the Board and therefore not automatically eligible to serve on the group.

Overview and Scrutiny Board 2025

18th November

-
- 3.6 At the Board meeting held on 17th June 2025, Councillor C.A. Hotham, who was attending the meeting as a substitute, expressed an interest in serving as a Member of the Finance and Budget Working Group, should there be a relevant vacancy available.
- 3.7 Councillor S.R. Colella (who was not a Member of the Board) expressed an interest in serving as a Member of the Working Group by email on 10th August 2025.
- 3.8 Councillors S. Ammar, C. A. Hotham and S. R. Colella were appointed as Members of the Finance and Budget Working Group for 2025/26 at the Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting on 9th September 2025.
- 3.9 On 21st October 2025, Councillor A. Bailes confirmed in writing that he no longer wished to be appointed to serve on this Working Group and submitted his official resignation from the Working Group by email.
- 3.10 Councillor S.R. Colella subsequently submitted his official resignation from the Working Group by email on 22nd October 2025.
- 3.11 Also on 22nd October 2025, Councillor C.A Hotham submitted his official resignation from the Working Group by email.
- 3.12 Following the resignations of Councillors A. Bailes, S. R. Colella and C.A. Hotham, there are 3 vacancies on the Finance and Budget Working Group.
- 3.13 Members are asked to choose the membership of the Working Group (Cabinet Members cannot be represented). It should be noted that the Terms of Reference for the group state that Members must be Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Board, (with the exception of the Chairman of the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee where s/he is not a member of the Board). However, the Terms of Reference for the working group also state *“should a vacant post remain after Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Board had been approached, Members of the Overview and Scrutiny “pool” (i.e. those who do not sit on the Scrutiny Board and are also not Cabinet Members) may be appointed to fill the vacancy.”*

Overview and Scrutiny Board 2025

18th November

- 3.14 For any Member wishing to sit on the Working Group, meetings have been scheduled for this year as per below, although there may be a need for extra meetings when the need is identified, particularly during the budget setting period. Conversely, meetings may be cancelled if there is no business to be considered on a particular date.

- 14th November 2025
- 5th January 2026
- 6th February 2026
- 23rd March 2026

- 3.15 All meetings are due to start at 6.00pm and will be held remotely (on Microsoft Teams). Any meetings held on Friday will commence at 1.00pm.

Terms of Reference

- 3.16 The terms of reference are reviewed at the beginning of each municipal year since the inception of the Finance and Budget Scrutiny Working Group. The Overview and Scrutiny Board approved the current terms of reference for the working group at the Board meeting held on 17th June 2025.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 There are no direct financial implications in respect of the recommendations this report. Although it should be noted that there are resource implications in respect of officer time in attending and preparing for the meetings.
- 4.2 Detailed scrutiny of the Council's budget forms an important part of the budget setting process at the Council and helps to enhance accountability and transparency.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 There are no direct legal implications relating to this report, other than those in respect of the Overview and Scrutiny function as a whole. The Working Group is currently not constituted, but merely an arrangement set up by the Overview and Scrutiny Board to improve its work going

Overview and Scrutiny Board 2025

18th November

forward in respect of scrutinising the budget and finances of the Council.

6. OTHER – IMPLICATIONS

Local Government Reorganisation Implications

- 6.1 There are no implications for Local Government Reorganisation.

Relevant Council Priority

- 6.2 The work of the Finance and Budget Scrutiny Working Group contributes towards ensuring that the Council continues to provide sustainable services to its residents.

Climate Change Implications

- 6.3 There are no climate change implications in respect of this report.

Equalities and Diversity Implications

- 6.4 There are no direct customer/equalities and diversity implications in respect of this report.

7. RISK MANAGEMENT

- 7.1 No specific risks have been identified.

8. APPENDICES and BACKGROUND PAPERS

Appendices - Terms of Reference of the Finance and Budget Scrutiny Working Group (last amended 09/06/25).

Background Papers – Finance and Budget Working Group report to the Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting held on 9th September 2025.

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OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY BOARD **Finance & Budget Scrutiny Working Group**

Terms of Reference

This Terms of Reference shall apply from the start of the 2025/26 Municipal Year

The Finance & Budget Scrutiny Working Group has been set up by the Overview & Scrutiny Board to carry out detailed scrutiny/pre-scrutiny of a number of Financial Reports (listed below) and the setting of the Council's budget.

1. The Working Group shall comprise 7 Members, to be made up of 6 Members (who are Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Board) plus the Chairman of the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee. The quorum shall be 3. The Working Group will meet throughout the year at intervals dependent upon the reports to be considered. It is anticipated that this will be most frequent during the budget setting period.
2. Should a vacant post remain after members of the Overview and Scrutiny Board had been approached, members of the Overview and Scrutiny "pool" (i.e. those who do not sit on the Scrutiny Board and are also not Cabinet Members) may be appointed to fill the vacancy.
3. The update on the Working Group will be a standing item on the agenda of the Overview & Scrutiny Board and either a verbal or written report will be provided at each of the Board's meetings.
4. The Working Group is able to make recommendations in one of two ways (dependent on the timescales of its meetings and the reports it considers); by reporting back to the Overview & Scrutiny Board, which will then put forward its recommendations for consideration by Cabinet or directly to Cabinet/Council.
5. The work of the Working Group will be reviewed as part of the Overview & Scrutiny Board's annual report process.

The Working Group will scrutinise the following reports, which had previously been part of the Overview & Scrutiny Board's Work Programme:

- Finance Monitoring Report (on a quarterly basis)
 - Write Off of Debts Report (received annually)
6. No substitute will be permitted to sit on the Finance and Budget Working Group, other than in exceptional circumstances, such as planned absence.

Budget Scrutiny

Scrutiny of the budget will cover the following areas, although this list is not exclusive.

- Full review of the cost centres for actual spend, involving comparable figures for consecutive years.
- Assessing income levels.
- Considering the quarterly budget monitoring report.
- Reviewing the capital programme and borrowing costs.
- Commenting on the report format for budget reports to Committee.
- Considering links to the strategic purposes.
- Scrutinise business cases in respect of investment opportunities identified by the Council.
- Investigating new pressures on savings.
- Reviewing reserves and balances.
- Assessing any sources of external funding that has been received.

CABINET LEADER'S WORK PROGRAMME

1 DECEMBER 2025 TO 31 MARCH 2026
(published as at 3rd November 2025)

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

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

- (i) result in the Council incurring expenditure, foregoing income or the making of savings in excess of £200,000 or which are otherwise significant having regard to the Council's budget for the service or function to which the decision relates; or
- (ii) be significant in terms of its effect on communities living or working in an area comprising two or more wards in the district;

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

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

CABINET MEMBERSHIP

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

Decision including Whether it is a key Decision	Decision Taker Date of Decision	Details of Exempt information (if any) and information explaining why items have been postponed (where available)	Documents submitted to Decision Maker / Background Papers List	Contact for Comments
Homelessness Prevention Grant and Domestic Abuse Grant Key: Yes	Cabinet 19 Nov 2025 Council 3 Dec 2025		Report of the Assistant Director Community and Housing Services	Amanda Delahunty, Strategic Housing Officer Tel: 01527 881269 Councillor S. A. Webb
Medium Term Financial Plan Budget Update and Consultation Report 2026/2027 to 2028/29 Key: No	Cabinet 19 Nov 2025 Council 3 Dec 2025		Report of the Assistant Director Finance and Customer Services	Debra Goodall, Assistant Director Finance and Customer Services Tel: 01527 64252 Ext 3070 Councillor S. J. Baxter
Quarter 2 2025/26 Finance and Performance Monitoring Report (including Financial Savings and Half Yearly Treasury Management Report) Key: No	Cabinet 19 Nov 2025 Council 3 Dec 2025		Report of the Assistant Director Finance and Customer Services	Debra Goodall, Assistant Director Finance and Customer Services Tel: 01527 64252 Ext 3070 Councillor S. J. Baxter

Decision including Whether it is a key Decision	Decision Taker Date of Decision	Details of Exempt information (if any) and information explaining why items have been postponed (where available)	Documents submitted to Decision Maker / Background Papers List	Contact for Comments
Council Tax Support Scheme 2026/27 Key: No	Cabinet 7 Jan 2026 Council 26 Jan 2026		Report of the Assistant Director Finance and Customer Services	David Riley, Revenue Services Manager Tel: 01527 64252 Councillor S. J. Baxter
Cyber security update (including WhatsApp and AI Policy) Key: No ** (New !!) **	Cabinet 7 Jan 2026		Report of the Assistant Director of Legal, Democratic and Procurement Services	Claire Felton, Assistant Director of Legal, Democratic and Procurement Services Tel: 01527 881429 Councillor S. J. Baxter
Discretionary Council Tax Reduction Policy 2026/27 Key: No	Cabinet 7 Jan 2026 Council 21 Jan 2026		Report of the Assistant Director Finance and Customer Services	David Riley, Revenue Services Manager Tel: 01527 64252 Councillor S. J. Baxter

Decision including Whether it is a key Decision	Decision Taker Date of Decision	Details of Exempt information (if any) and information explaining why items have been postponed (where available)	Documents submitted to Decision Maker / Background Papers List	Contact for Comments
Permission to Revoke the First Homes Policy Key: No ** (New !!) **	Cabinet 7 Jan 2026		Report of the Assistant Director Community and Housing Services	Amanda Delahunty, Strategic Housing Officer Tel: 01527 881269 Councillor S. A. Webb
Climate Change Strategy 2026 to 2031 Key: No	Cabinet 11 Feb 2026 Council 18 Feb 2026		Report of the Assistant Director Community and Housing Services	Matthew Eccles, Climate Change Manager Tel: 01527 881259 Councillor B. M. McEldowney
Medium Term Financial Plan Stage 2 Budget Report 2026/2027 to 2028/2029 (including Capital Strategy, Investment Strategy and Treasury Management Strategy) Key: No	Cabinet 11 Feb 2026 Council 18 Feb 2026		Report of the Assistant Director Finance and Customer Services	Debra Goodall, Assistant Director Finance and Customer Services Tel: 01527 64252 Ext 3070 Councillor S. J. Baxter

Decision including Whether it is a key Decision	Decision Taker Date of Decision	Details of Exempt information (if any) and information explaining why items have been postponed (where available)	Documents submitted to Decision Maker / Background Papers List	Contact for Comments
Council Tax Resolutions 2026/27 Key: No	Cabinet 18 Feb 2026 Council 18 Feb 2026		Report of the Assistant Director Finance and Customer Services	David Riley, Revenue Services Manager Tel: 01527 64252 Councillor S. J. Baxter
Quarter 3 2025/26 Finance and Performance Monitoring Report (including Financial Savings) Key: No	Cabinet 25 Mar 2026 Council Not before 1st Jun 2026		Report of the Assistant Director Finance and Customer Services	Debra Goodall, Assistant Director Finance and Customer Services Tel: 01527 64252 Ext 3070 Councillor S. J. Baxter

Appendix – Explanation of Items on the Cabinet Forward Plan

Homelessness Prevention Grant and Domestic Abuse Grant

The purpose of the ringfenced Homelessness Prevention Grant and Domestic Abuse Grant fund is to give local authorities control and flexibility in managing homelessness pressures and supporting those who are at risk of homelessness.

Medium Term Financial Plan Budget Update and Consultation Report 2026/27 to 2028/29

The Council proposes to set its budget in two Tranches for 2026/27 to 2028/29 Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) process. This Tranche 1 report is the initial budget proposal to be considered for approval in Autumn 2025, after consultation.

Quarter 2 2025/26 Finance and Performance Monitoring Report (including Financial Savings and Half Yearly Treasury Management Report)

To provide a current financial position in relation to Revenue Budgets for the period July to September 2025 (2025-26). The report also provides a position on the organisational performance measures, as of Quarter 2 (up to end of September 2025).

Biodiversity First Consideration Plan

The Biodiversity First Consideration Plan helps BDC demonstrate how we're meeting our legal obligation to protect and enhance nature locally, aligning with national goals and ensuring transparency, accountability, and long-term progress every five years.

Business Rates - Discretionary Rates Relief Policy 2026/27

Section 47 of The Local Government Finance Act 1988 [the act] provides Local Authorities with the power to award discretionary rate relief, to charitable and other non-profit making organisations that meet certain criteria. This policy also provided Council's framework for delivering discretionary relief – including retail relief and supporting small business relief.

Council Tax Base Report 2026/27

To consider a report on the Council Tax Base for 2026-27.

Council Tax – Empty Homes Discounts and Premiums 2026/27

Details the Council's policies regarding reduction or removal of the discount for unoccupied dwellings and, in the case of long-term empty homes, regarding policies on imposing a council tax premium.

Council Tax Support Scheme 2026/27

The council is required by section 13A(2) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 (LGFA '92) to make a council tax reduction (CTR) scheme specifying the reductions in council tax that will be provided to people who are in financial need, or to classes of people who are in general in financial need.

Cyber security update (including WhatsApp and AI Policy)

This is being considered at Audit, Standards and Governance Committee on 24th November 2025.

Discretionary Council Tax Reduction Policy 2026/27

The council has the power under section 13A(1)(C) of The Local Government Finance Act 1992 (LGFA '92) to reduce the amount of council tax that a person is liable to pay. The section 13A(1)(C) power may be exercised on a case-by-case basis or by determining a class of case in which the liability will be reduced.

Permission to Revoke the First Homes Policy

This policy sets out the Council's approach to delivery First Homes in accordance with national guidance and in compliance with the Council's adopted Local Plan policies on the delivery of Affordable Housing.

Climate Change Strategy 2026 to 2031

The Climate Change Strategy is building on the existing 3-year carbon reduction strategy which comes to an end in 2025. The new strategy is to coincide with BDC's commitment to have reached 50% net zero by 2030 and looks to highlight progress and actives on other aspects of climate change mitigation, such as Biodiversity and supporting our residents on the wider net zero journey across the District.

Medium Term Financial Plan Tranche 2 Budget Report 2026/27 to 2028/29 (including Capital Strategy, Investment Strategy and Treasury Management Strategy)

The Council proposes to set its budget in two Tranches for 2026/27 to 2028/29 Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) process. This Tranche 2 report is the final budget proposal to be considered for approval in February 2026.

Council Tax Resolution 2026/27

To approve the calculated Council Tax base for 2026-27 and approve the Council Tax requirement (Council approval).

Quarter 3 2025/26 Finance and Performance Monitoring Report (including Financial Savings)

To provide a current financial position in relation to Revenue Budget for the period October to December 2025 (2025-26) and a position on the organisational performance measures, as of Quarter 3 (up to end of December 2025).

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD WORK PROGRAMME

2025-2026

ITEMS FOR FUTURE MEETINGS

Date of Meeting	Subject	Lead Officer / Member
6 th January 2026	<u>Substantive Items</u>	
	<u>Information items</u> Local Heritage Action List (Quarterly Update)	Mike Dunphy, Strategic Planning and Conservation Manager
	Levelling Up Fund Programme (Quarterly Update)	Rachel Egan, Assistant Director Regeneration and Property Services
10 th February 2026	<u>Substantive Items</u>	
	<u>Information Items</u> Crime and Disorder Scrutiny (Yearly Update)	Bev Houghton, Community and Safety Manager
24 th March 2026	<u>Substantive Items</u> Update on Heatwaves Preparedness (Yearly Update) (Impact of Heatwaves Task Group Recommendation).	Guy Revans, Executive Director
	<u>Information Items</u> Levelling Up Fund Programme (Quarterly Update)	Rachel Egan, Assistant Director Regeneration and Property Services
	Local Heritage Action List (Quarterly Update)	Mike Dunphy, Strategic Planning and Conservation Manager
14 th April 2026 (meeting reserved for consideration of O&S Annual Report and Review of 2025-26)	<u>Substantive Items</u> Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2025-26	Chairman of the Board

ALL MEMBER BRIEFINGS

Date of Meeting	Subject	Lead Officer / Member
2 nd March 2026	Anti-Social Behaviour (Tools and Powers)	Bev Houghton, Community Safety Manager

FUTURE ITEMS FOR SCRUTINY

Date of Meeting	Subject	Lead Officer / Member
	Capacity of the Minor Works Team (Requested 2/7/25 by Cllr McDonald) (TBA)	Rachel Egan, Assistant Director Regeneration and Property Services

BDC Overview and Scrutiny Board - Action Sheet (2025/26)

22 July 2025 Meeting

Subject	Action Required	Action Taken	Officer(s) Responsible	Other Comments	Status
Bromsgrove Town Centre Strategic Framework	Officers to consider an elected Member to be part of the Town Centre Steering Group.	31/7/25 – Emailed Lyndsey Berry 1/8/25 – Chased for a response 3/9/25 – Chased a response.	Lyndsey Berry, Bromsgrove Centres Manager		Completed Response 05/09/25 - “Cllr May as Portfolio Holder will sit on the group until a formal appointment is made through the external appointment board in 2026”.
	A promotional video to be produced to communicate the ‘vision’ to the public.	31/7/25 – Emailed Lyndsey Berry 1/8/25 – Chased for a response 3/9/25 – Chased a response	Lyndsey Berry, Bromsgrove Centres Manager		Completed Interim response 05/09/25 “This will be progressed through the Town Centre Strategic Group to gain their input”.
	Suggestion to include town centre living (residential development above shops etc.) within the Bromsgrove Town Centre Strategic Framework,		Lyndsey Berry, Bromsgrove Centres Manager		Completed Officers have advised that the strategy now states “ <i>Encouraging more people to live in the heart of the town is central to Bromsgrove’s regeneration. A growing residential population will support local businesses, boost town centre activity throughout the day and evening, and foster a greater sense of safety and vibrancy. By promoting high-quality housing, accessible services, and enhanced cultural and leisure provision, the town can develop a more liveable, people-friendly centre.</i> ” This emphasis on town

Subject	Action Required	Action Taken	Officer(s) Responsible	Other Comments	Status
					centre living is also included in the vision in the strategic framework.

9 September 2025 Meeting

Subject	Action Required	Action Taken	Officer(s) Responsible	Other Comments	Status
Council Tax Recovery	Information on the value of council tax arrears (in monetary terms) within Bromsgrove District.	12/9/25 – Emailed David Riley	David Riley, Revenue Services Manager		Completed 17/10/25 Response circulated to Members
	Information on the number of people in Bromsgrove on special payment plans to repay council tax debt.	12/9/25 – Emailed David Riley	David Riley, Revenue Services Manager		Completed 17/10/25 Response circulated to Members
	Table at paragraph 2.31 of the report be updated with target dates for each action and scoring of proposals by order of priority. Revised table to be circulated to Members	12/9/25 – Emailed David Riley	David Riley, Revenue Services Manager		Completed 17/10/25 Response circulated to Members
	Information on how Council sought to mitigate the risk of a potential reduction of council tax income through the transitory period of the Local Government Reorganisation (LGR)	12/9/25 – Emailed David Riley	David Riley, Revenue Services Manager		Completed 17/10/25 Response circulated to Members
Update on Planning Enforcement	Breakdown of ongoing / live planning enforcement cases by priority including information on the length of time these cases ongoing.	12/9/25 – Emailed Mark Cox	Mark Cox/Nicola Cummings		Completed This will be progressed through Cabinet Working Group on 5 th November 2025.
Cabinet Work Programme: Council Tax – Empty Homes and Discounts	Information on the Council's current empty homes discounts and premiums be circulated to Members	12/9/25 – Emailed AD Finance and Customer Services	Debra Goodall, Assistant Director Finance and		Completed Relevant information circulated for Members' consideration on 16/9/25.

Subject	Action Required	Action Taken	Officer(s) Responsible	Other Comments	Status
and Premiums 2026/27			Customer Services		
Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme – Commonplace Platform	Report on the Commonplace platform for Local Plan consultation to be considered as an item at the next Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting	10/9/25 – Emailed Strat	Mike Dunphy Strategic Planning and Conservation Manager		Completed
Installation of EV chargers	To ascertain whether it was possible for the Council to renegotiate with Zest to include immediate revenue share arrangements, or to cancel the contract if not	12/9/25 – Emailed AD Environmental and Housing Property Services 27/10/25 – Chased a response 30/10/25 Chased a response 10/11/25 Chased an update/response	Simon Parry, Assistant Director Environmental and Housing Property Services	Response to initial question 21/7/25 – “With regards to the revenue/profit share in relation to the contract with Zest, under the terms of the contract it states: The Profit Share shall be payable by the Supplier to the Buyer on the first anniversary of the date of the Lease of the relevant Site. This occurs when "Following calculation of EVCI Income and Costs for the relevant Calculation Period..., the Profit shall be established.	Outstanding

Subject	Action Required	Action Taken	Officer(s) Responsible	Other Comments	Status
Local Heritage Action List	To provide consultancy costs for consultancy work on the Local Heritage List		Ruth Bamford		Completed 29/10/25 - An email with cost information was provided to members.