

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

24TH MARCH 2026, AT 6.00 P.M.

PRESENT: Councillors P. M. McDonald (Chairman), A. M. Dale (Vice-Chairman), S. Ammar, A. Bailes, R. Bailes, D. J. A. Forsythe, B. Kumar, R. E. Lambert, S. A. Robinson and H. D. N. Warren-Clarke

Observers:

Councillor K. J. May – Leader and Cabinet Member for Strategic Partnerships, Economic Development and Enabling

Councillor S. J. Baxter – Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Reorganisation and Climate Change

Councillor P.J. Whittaker, Cabinet Member for Environmental Services and Community Safety

Councillor S.T. Nock – Cabinet Member for Finance

Councillor K. Taylor - Cabinet Member for Planning, WRS and Strategic Housing

Councillor E.M.S. Gray

Officers: Mr. G. Revans, Corredor, Ms J. Willis, Ms. B. Houghton and Mrs S. Woodfield

Other parties: Ch. Insp Dave King and Supt Gareth Morgan (Representatives of West Mercia Police)

102/23

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES

Apologies for absence was received from Councillor J. Clarke. Apologies for absence were also received from Councillor J.D. Stanley and his named substitute was Councillor D.J.A. Forsythe.

103/23

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND WHIPPING ARRANGEMENTS

There were no declarations of interest nor of whipping arrangements.

104/23

TO CONFIRM THE ACCURACY OF THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD HELD ON 10TH FEBRUARY 2026

The minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting held on 10th February 2026 were considered by the Board.

Members were taken through the minutes page by page and several points of clarification or requested amendments were raised as follows:

- A typographical error was highlighted which read, “Councillor J.W. attending as a named substitute” which should have read “Councillor J.W. Robinson attending as a named substitute”.
- An update was provided to Members concerning the Board’s request for the Council’s representative on the Police and Crime Panel to report to the Board following each panel meeting, with the Board being informed that the request was in progress.
- A typographical error was highlighted that the resolution for the Planning Advisory Service (PAS) agenda item should have read, “RECOMMENDED” and not “RESOLVED” (as the Board can only make recommendations and not final decisions).
- A request for further clarity to the bullet point which stated, “The report concluded that a strategic, place-based approach was required to support the Town Centre accessibility and economic activity, with further on-site counts recommended”. It was agreed that further clarification would be provided and circulated to all Members.
- A Member referred to the bullet point which stated, “Members expressed the view that future demands for parking had not been highlighted in the Local Plan”. It was suggested this should instead read, “Members expressed the view that future demands for parking had not been highlighted, in light of the Local Plan housing requirements”. This was to reflect that it was the parking study which had not fully allowed for the additional housing growth in the Local Plan, rather than the Local Plan itself omitting parking. In response the Chairman asked if Members were content to change the wording as suggested. No objections were raised and the Board agreed to amend the wording accordingly.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting held on 10th February 2026 including the preamble above be approved as a correct record.

105/23

CRIME AND DISORDER SCRUTINY - ANNUAL REVIEW OF THE WORK OF THE COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP IN THE DISTRICT

The Community Safety Manager provided an update on the progress of the North Worcestershire Community Safety Partnership (NWCSP) for the period January 2025 to January 2026.

The key priority areas were as follows:

- Public place violence and Serious Violence Duty
- Anti-social behaviour (ASB), nuisance and environmental issues
- Shoplifting and neighbourhood crime
- Protecting vulnerable communities

- Serious organised crime (SOCJAG model)

The key activity delivered were as follows:

- 'Right Path' youth violence intervention with 21 young people supported.
- Respect Programme engaging 250+ vulnerable young people.
- Redeployable Close Circuit Television (CCTV) deployments district-wide.
- Nominated Neighbour Scheme and targeted support for older/vulnerable residents.
- Domestic abuse support through R.U.N Our Space CIC.
- Significant partnership work with the Police on hotspot patrols, knife crime (Op Sceptre Week) and illegal vape enforcement.

Members were informed that overall progress was strong across priority areas, despite reduced Police Crime and Commissioner (PCC) ring-fenced funding of 15%. The Partnership continued to respond to complex ASB, crime prevention needs and safeguarding vulnerabilities.

After the presentation, discussions were carried out as follows:

- Members referred to the ASB tools table showing planning enforcement cases, where the outcome was recorded as "non compliance" and asked what happened next when someone failed to comply? – In response the Community Safety Manager explained that since Worcester Regulatory Services (WRS) had taken over planning enforcement, they follow a detailed, statutory process. This typically involved repeated contact with the individual who had contravened planning requirements, exploring options to resolve the breach and then considering escalation where necessary. Non-compliance could therefore take time to address. It was agreed that Officers would seek a more detailed explanation from the WRS Planning Enforcement Manager and provide this to Members.
- A Member asked about the Bromsgrove Youth Hub utilisation, specifically whether young offenders or those known to Youth Justice Services attended and whether there was a dedicated mental health worker attached to the Hub? – It was advised by the Community Safety Manager that the Hub was an independent organisation. Some young people attending may be offenders or involved with the Youth Justice Service but for safeguarding and GDPR reasons, this information was not shared. Staff have expertise in special educational needs, mental health and trauma informed practice. The Hub effectively bridged a gap between corporate/clinical mental health services and the support offered by the voluntary and community sector.
- Members expressed the view that the Vulnerable and Older Person Pilot Project in Alvechurch was very worthwhile but queried how

well it was publicised, noting that only residents had signed up despite a large potential audience. It was also queried how awareness and uptake could be improved? – In response it was explained that the pilot faced challenges around attendance and sign up, however, lessons were being used to refine the approach before rolling out to other areas. A key adjustment was shifting promotion to target relatives, friends and neighbours of vulnerable residents. The concept was that a trusted neighbour for example, provided support and early intervention before rogue traders or scammers could reach the vulnerable person. Additional online resources were being created for tech savvy relatives and neighbours to help them support older or vulnerable family members.

A Member from the Alvechurch Ward explained that describing events as being “for vulnerable adults” was off putting for some residents, as many older people did not see themselves as vulnerable. It was suggested that promoting events as a way to avoid scams and rogue traders might be more effective, citing a local case of a resident losing over £50,000 to a roofing scam. It was also queried how the project might link into women’s safety/“Real Women” initiatives? – The Board were informed that the Real Women event, led by the Hub with Safer Bromsgrove funding, had delivered a taster day, including information on personal safety, domestic abuse support and Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG). Further work was planned with the police on VAWG, with the Youth Hub seen as a key venue but additional venues and providers would also be considered to broaden reach.

- A Member involved in the Alvechurch Nominated Neighbour pilot asked whether other target areas in Bromsgrove had been identified and what lessons were being taken forward? – Members were advised that Officers had been in contact with Councillor Ammar about piloting the scheme in their ward. The Housing partner Bromsgrove District Housing Trust (BDHT) had also expressed interest in applying a similar model in some sheltered housing schemes, however, may require further financial outlay, potentially requiring cameras and other security measures.
- A Member requested clear guidance on redeployable cameras, noting there appeared to be two different schemes (for crime/ASB and for fly tipping). The Member asked what situations were suitable or not suitable for redeployable cameras, who operated which scheme and how could Members request cameras? - In response the Community Safety Manager explained that there were two distinct schemes which included a Community Safety redeployable CCTV scheme for crime and ASB and a WRS led environmental crime scheme for fly tipping, where more covert cameras could be used under different legal powers.

It was further explained that the community safety cameras must comply with the Code of Practice for Surveillance and the Information Commissioner's requirements, meaning the following:

- There must be evidence of a crime/ASB problem.
- A consultation with residents and stakeholders was required.
- Signage must be displayed.
- Cameras were usually mounted on County Council lampposts that must be structurally suitable.
- Cameras were typically deployed for 8–12 weeks, primarily as a deterrent but they also captured evidence for police or ASB enforcement.

Members also queried how long the consultation would last, what happened if residents object or if significant ASB or crime was captured during the 8–12 week deployment? – The Community Safety Manager advised that a consultation was typically for a period of 4–6 weeks. Objections did not automatically stop a deployment but significant local opposition might mean a camera couldn't be installed. Decisions to install permanent public space CCTV were separate and would be a matter for the Council, requiring discussion with senior officers, consideration of cost and inclusion in the Council's fixed CCTV scheme. The Police representative also added that from an operational standpoint, it was often better to rotate cameras rather than leave them permanently in one place, to avoid simply displacing the problem. Close collaboration with local Safer Neighbourhood Teams (SNT) was essential to ensure that qualitative and quantitative data supported any bid for a camera.

Members also queried if a Parish Council could fund a permanent camera of their own, requesting information on costs and equipment specifications, citing ongoing ASB and damage in their Ward and nearby areas. – In response the Police representative advised that historic costings for cameras had been prepared and could be shared with the Members. The police were aware of issues in the related areas and had tactical plans in place, including use of SmartWater at access points and joint work with rangers and other partners. These plans could be shared with the local Members to reassure residents.

- A Member praised an appendix provided as part of the agenda which gave an overview of Police-led ASB and Crime actions for the reporting period as an excellent summary but expressed the view that Members and residents did not usually see this level of detail. It was queried if the data covered her area which fell under a Rubery policing team and if further localised and regular data could be shared to inform residents? – The Police representative advised that the data covered the Bromsgrove District as a whole, inclusive of her ward, even though policing teams were split. The force was working to improve the ability to drill down by ward/area and to focus on more recent data to keep

responses targeted. Officers were also encouraging more use of surgeries, surveys and newsletters to promote positive outcomes to residents who were not online.

Members also praised the brief reported, in particular, with regard to the County Lines Week of Action which highlighted 68 arrests in a week, seizing over £2.5 million worth of drugs and over £21,000 in cash. – In response the Police representative informed Members that since the reporting a new Police Inspector had been recruited, with further improvements carried out for this line of work. Members noted that regular crime action Newsletters were circulated through various methods (social media, medical centres and community centres).

- A Member explained difficulties obtaining crime statistics for South Bromsgrove / Blackwell via West Mercia's online tools, despite being able to access data for North Bromsgrove as residents had requested confirmation of burglaries and attempted burglaries in their area. – It was acknowledged that some online tools were postcode based and could be confusing where policing boundaries crossed areas but encouraged the Member to contact the local inspector.
- The Chairman queried the Safe Places scheme and expressed the view that many participating venues had frequent staff turnover and queried how often Safe Places were revisited and if staff were reminded of their responsibilities? – In response the Community Safety Manager advised that the scheme was coordinated by a Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) organisation based in Wyre Forest. It was aimed to revisit Safe Places approximately every 6–12 months to check arrangements and refresh training. Members were also informed that the scheme was originally developed for people with learning disabilities, who often participated directly in delivering the training to venue staff. There was a recognised challenge in keeping pace with staff changes but the partnership was working to maintain coverage.
- Members referred to the knife detecting poles and questions were raised as follows: what happened if someone walked through with a knife, did the equipment trigger automatically and if there was always a Police Officer present? – The Police representative and Community Safety Manager informed Members that knife arches and poles were only deployed as part of police led operations and informed Members that Police Officers were always present when the equipment was in use (e.g. at the Bromsgrove railway station). The equipment would alert officers if it detected metal and were positioned to intervene immediately. Often potential offenders seeing the arch/pole would try to discard weapons before passing through and these discarded items can also be recovered. The Police also supported national knife amnesty initiatives with surrender bins at police stations and Members were invited to attend future operations as observers.

The Portfolio Holder queried whether knife arches were used routinely

at schools, given national media reports of knife crime? – In response the Police Representative advised that knife arches were not used routinely in schools and would only be considered if there was clear intelligence of a specific issue. It was also advised that routine use risked heightening fear and perception of crime among pupils and parents. The focus was instead on prevention and education, including district schools and police panels bringing all tiers of schools together with police which included youth workers and mentors in schools.

- The Portfolio Holder and other Members raised concerns about social media driven “school wars” (e.g. red vs blue) and associated fears about weapons (including everyday items like scissors or protractors). Questions included: What intelligence existed locally, how were police and partners responding and how was this being tackled across schools and counties? – The Police representative and Community Safety Manager advised that the phenomenon was national, with images and messages generated by anonymous accounts, often outside the local area. Locally, West Mercia Police had worked closely with schools’ safeguarding leads, shared intelligence through school police panels and taken positive action where specific individuals could be identified. However, Members were advised that to date there had not been any reporting of this nature within the local areas.

It was also advised that through the Respect Programme and the Right Path project, mentors were in every middle and high school in Bromsgrove and the wider area, working with young people at risk of becoming involved in serious violence, they are referred by schools, social workers and the police and detached youth workers and youth providers were feeding intelligence back into multi agency forums.

A Member from the Rubery Ward advised of multiple issues involving noise, ASB, rogue traders, youth behaviour and shops supplying illicit products. It was asked how all of these strands (police, WRS, trading standards, housing etc.) were joined up under one umbrella and how multi agency working was coordinated? – Members were advised of the following: At district level the Safer Bromsgrove group met every 6 weeks, chaired by Community Safety, with attendance from the Police, WRS, housing, fire, parish reps and others with areas of concern were standing items. At North Worcestershire level, the NWCSP met regularly, chaired by the Executive Director, considering cross district issues and commissioning. At County level, the Safer Communities Board brought together North and South Worcestershire CSPs with the County Council and others to ensure learning was shared across Worcestershire. The police chaired a Multi-Agency Task and Enforcement Group (MATES) for the north of Worcestershire, bringing together WRS, Trading Standards, housing, fire and other agencies to tackle complex problems collectively.

- The cease and desist letters listed within the agenda was raised by Members and various questions were asked which included: What types of behaviour these letters were used for, whether they could be

used in a case where a resident was persistently harassed by a neighbour but the neighbour refused to answer the door to Police or Housing Officers and what enforcement options were available if the letter was ignored? – The Police representative advised that cease and desist letters were a low level, early intervention tool in the wider ASB toolkit. Where behaviour continued, the Police and Council could escalate through powers such as Community Protection Warnings and Community Protection Notices and in some cases Criminal Behaviour Orders. Residents experiencing ongoing harassment should ensure issues are reported to the local SNT.

RESOLVED that the progress made by the North Worcestershire CSP be noted.

106/23

LOCAL GOVERNMENT RE-ORGANISATION (LGR) - UPDATE

The Assistant Director Corporate Services and Transformation provided an update on LGR to Members. The report outlined Bromsgrove's position within the Government's seven stage LGR process which was currently at Stage 3 - Statutory Consultation and closed on 26th March 2026.

The key points presented were:

- Worcestershire remained at Stage 3 of The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) process.
- Workstreams on Finance, HR, Legal, IT and Services were progressing.
- The MHCLG "Listening Meeting" took place on 11th March, supported by KPMG.
- The devolution footprint discussions had advanced with Worcestershire Leaders agreeing to a joint position with Herefordshire and exploring alignment with Warwickshire/Gloucestershire.
- Future updates may be limited until Government decisions were carried out, which was due in Summer 2026.
- LGR and Devolution remained key Corporate Risks.
- District involvement in strategic planning spatial development strategies (SDS) would be retained until at least April 2028.

The Portfolio Holder also gave a member level perspective, drawing on a recent two-day LGR training programme for Councillors, emphasising that the period should be seen as an opportunity for Members to define what they want from LGR, particularly if a One Worcestershire option were selected. There was a need to develop a negotiating position, distinguishing what was essential for Bromsgrove's residents and communities from what was less critical. The Portfolio Holder explained she was keen to involve all Members in shaping these priorities and suggested that the Board, rather than an additional Cabinet Advisory Group (CAG), might be a suitable forum.

After the presentation the Board made the following comments:

- A Member expressed concern that the reference within the report to major infrastructure planning across wider geographies, highlighted how far Bromsgrove was behind in its own infrastructure planning and Local Plan work. Specific questions were asked which included what could practically be done to catch up and when Members would see a detailed project plan, including milestones and the role of any shadow authority? – In response the Leader and Executive Director reassured Members that, in relation to Foundation Strategic Authorities (FSA) and Spatial Development Strategies (SDS), Bromsgrove was not behind with progress. Government had not yet defined the precise FSA footprint and SDS responsibilities would initially lie with County/Unitary councils. The immediate priority was ensuring data and assets were in good order, that the Local Plan was progressed and key assets were on a sustainable footing.

Members were also advised that the Council had set aside funding for LGR and had the risk and resilience reserve (£1m in LGR and £2.5m in Risk and Reserve), which would help fund the implementation and sustain services, including staff who may move between organisations, following a government decision. This was recognised at national events as being relatively robust compared to many councils.

The Portfolio Holder explained also that a route map of the typical LGR stages (integration, then transformation over years 2–4) was available and would be shared with the Board.

- It was queried by Members what contingency plans were in place, should Government choose a single One Worcestershire unitary authority? – The Portfolio Holder and Assistant Director advised that whatever option the Government chose, the preparatory work was still required. Once Government announced its decision, a Joint Committee would be formed for the new unitary area to take legal and structural decisions. Shadow elections were expected in May 2027, with existing District Councillors continuing for an extra year to run their councils until vesting day in April 2028. The shadow authority would focus on establishing the new corporate structure, appointing senior officers and setting the first budget and Council Plan. Bromsgrove's priority would be to ensure its voice was heard in these discussions and to negotiate outcomes that were beneficial for the local residents.

Members expressed concern that a One Worcestershire model could be dominated by County interests and that areas such as Bromsgrove could potentially lose out on funding. Concerns were also expressed that Councillors from other parts of the County would be making decisions on areas they did not know well. - The Portfolio Holder acknowledged these concerns and agreed that

understanding “what we do not want” is just as important as defining what we do want. The need to secure locality-based arrangements and local hubs was emphasised, ensuring decision makers had strong local knowledge and that budgets were allocated fairly across the County.

Members also queried whether Bromsgrove should make a strong case for the new northern unitary headquarters (HQ) (if there was a north/south split) to be located in Bromsgrove and if the Council could negotiate that a certain number of current district staff were taken into the new authority. – In response it was explained that staff would transfer to the shadow authority under TUPE and it would be for the shadow authority to then determine its structure and staffing. The location of any HQ would be subject to practical considerations and to negotiate between Councils and the Government. However, regardless of where any formal HQ might be, it was likely that hubs or local bases would be needed across the area to maintain accessible services.

- Some Members expressed scepticism about the effectiveness of past CAG meetings, feeling they had not delivered visible change and expressed the view that Overview and Scrutiny may be a better, more transparent environment for Member input. The Portfolio Holder and Chairman agreed that Overview and Scrutiny could play a central role and welcomed suggestions on how to involve all Members in shaping negotiating priorities.

After further discussions it was proposed and seconded that a LGR Task Group should be explored. It was also agreed that the Portfolio Holder should play a pivotal role during discussions at the relevant meetings.

It was also agreed that LGR reporting remained a standing item on the Overview and Scrutiny Board agenda, with future reports supplemented by verbal updates from a Chief Officer as required.

A Member also suggested and it was agreed to explore the inclusion of the Corporate Risk Register as part of future LGR reporting, as it had been highlighted in the report that devolution and LGR were listed as a Corporate Risk.

RESOLVED that

- 1) The updates regarding the consultation responses and engagement activity; and
- 2) The overview of the current position and next steps regarding Devolution were noted.

107/23

WORCESTERSHIRE HEALTH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - UPDATE

The Council's HOSC Representative, Councillor B. Kumar provided an update on the meetings which took place on 11th February and 4th March 2026 respectively.

Members were updated with the Annual Review of Public Health, including key population health trends, progress against Health and Wellbeing Board priorities and emerging risks. The Board were also provided with an overview for the West Midlands Ambulance Service, touching on performance, response times, pressures and improvement actions.

RESOLVED that the HOSC update be noted.

108/23

FINANCE AND BUDGET WORKING GROUP - UPDATE

There was no Finance and Budget Group update for this meeting.

109/23

CABINET WORK PROGRAMME

The Cabinet Work Programme was presented for Members' consideration.

RESOLVED that the content of the Cabinet Work Programme be noted as per the preamble above.

110/23

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD WORK PROGRAMME

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

Members requested that the following items to be scrutinised at a future meeting:

- AI (uses and risks for the Council)
- Libraries "Unlocked"

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

111/23

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD ACTION SHEET

The Overview and Scrutiny Action Sheet was considered by the Board. Members highlighted the two actions under the Planning Advisory Service were incorrect and should read as "In Progress" rather than "Completed". It was agreed that the action sheet would be amended accordingly.

RESOLVED that the Overview and Scrutiny Action Sheet be noted as per the preamble above.

112/23

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 7.50 p.m.

Chairman