

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

10TH FEBRUARY 2026, AT 6.00 P.M.

PRESENT: Councillors P. M. McDonald (Chairman), A. M. Dale (Vice-Chairman), S. Ammar, A. Bailes, R. Bailes, J. Clarke, D. J. A. Forsythe, B. Kumar, J. Robinson, J. D. Stanley 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 S.T. Nock – Cabinet Member for Finance
Councillor K. Taylor - Cabinet Member for Planning, WRS and Strategic Housing
Councillor S. R. Colella,
Councillor E. M. S. Gray
Councillor. D. Hopkins
Councillor C. A. Hotham
Councillor M. Marshall
Councillor B. M. McEldowney

Officers: Mr. G. Revans, Ms H. Corredor, Ms R. Egan, Mrs D. Goodall, Mr S. Parry, Ms R. McElliott and Mrs S. Woodfield

Other parties: Mr T. Burton (Representative of Tim Burton Planning), Mr J. Campion (Representative of Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC), Mr D. Coleman (Representative of DAC Planning) and Ms L. Hornberger (Representative of West Mercia Police (joined remotely)

87/25

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES

Apology for absence was received from Councillor R.E. Lambert, with confirmation provided that Councillor D.J.A. Forsythe was attending as the named substitute and apology for absence was also received from Councillor S.A. Robinson, with confirmation provided that Councillor J.W. was attending as her named substitute. Apology for absence was also received on behalf of Councillor P.J. Whittaker as portfolio holder.

88/25

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND WHIPPING ARRANGEMENTS

There were no declarations of interest nor of whipping arrangements.

89/25

TO CONFIRM THE ACCURACY OF THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD HELD ON 6TH JANUARY 2026

The minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting held on 6th January 2026 were considered by the Board.

A Member requested an updated list of the Board's named substitutes which Officers agreed would be provided accordingly.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting held on 6th January 2026 be approved as a correct record.

90/25

POLICE AND CRIME COMMISSIONER (UPDATE)

The representative for the Police and Crime Commissioner, accompanied remotely by a local inspector, provided a strategic update to the Board.

The key points included:

- Policing remained predominantly people based; pay pressures continued to exceed central grant increases.
- West Mercia Police had grown in officer numbers significantly but rising pay scales created budget strains.
- Civilian workforce reductions had been actioned, but frontline focus was being protected.
- Overall crime continued to fall across the District but outcomes of successful investigations remained a key area for improvement.
- Focus centred on prompt investigations, file quality and improving justice outcomes for victims.
- The PCC emphasised the importance of cooperation with District Councils on community safety and early prevention.
- A renewed emphasis was placed on Councils to raise localised concerns directly.

Following the presentation, Members raised the following concerns within the District:

- Increased criminal cross border activity in the West Midlands. - The PCC responded that regular cross-border meetings were underway with the West Midlands Police, including data sharing and planned joint operations. It was suggested that crime within the West Midlands would be greater than in local areas. Vehicle crime and domestic burglaries was being tackled long term.
- Various reports of vigilante-style individuals wearing high-vis jackets, patrolling in school areas. What strategies were in place? - In response Members were advised that specific "vigilante" reports were being investigated in partnership with affected schools.

- Persistent speeding with some fatalities in the Lickey Hills area. – In response it was advised that speed surveys could be commissioned in hotspot areas. It was also advised that the West Mercia Police could get access to additional funds to provide practical solutions i.e. additional signage.
- There was limited availability of TruCam enforcement with only one tool among several enforcement methods. – It was advised that in addition to TruCam there were under resourced Safer Neighbourhood Teams (SNTs) and laser devices. West Mercia Police would continue expanding road policing methods, including motorcycles and specialist teams to assist.
- A perceived rise in shoplifting on Bromsgrove High Street. Members requested that a joint visit with the West Mercia Police and shop owners would be helpful to discuss the issues further. - In response the Board noted that shoplifting had risen slightly year on year but remained relatively stable. The town centre sergeant was leading robust enforcement activity. The Inspector and Sergeant offered to attend site visits with Members.
- Members requested access to location specific data. - In response there were current recording systems which made location extraction difficult; however, work was underway to mirror the West Midlands Police's public reporting model for this financial year.
- Members had received increased reports of cannabis use. – Reported drug offences had increased slightly but West Mercia Police were trying to combat the problem with carrying out more proactive stop-searches.
- Reports of neighbourhood harassment cases. – Members were advised that in these cases the West Mercia Police could use harassment legislation such as Community Protection Notices (CPNs) and Public Order powers.
- Racially aggravated incidents had also been reported to Members. - In response the Board were informed that these cases should receive prompt contact and that individual cases raised would be reviewed.
- Reports of Cross City Line crimes. - It was agreed that knife crime was a problem in these areas. The British Transport Police and West Mercia Police were working collaboratively to combat the issues and active operations were in place to tackle the issues.
- Members received little or no updates from the Council's representative on the West Mercia Police and Crime Panel and requested regular localised policing updates to the Board.
- Rural crime concerns were raised by Members in the Dodford and Grafton surrounding parishes which included vehicle thefts and burglaries. Members requested a reassurance of more police presence in the areas as confidence had been lost. – The rural security concerns were acknowledged; however, it was advised that patrolling was unlikely to deter the issues.
- Some Members expressed a poor perception of the 101 Service. – In response it was advised that operatives worked extremely

hard, often dealing with lifesaving critical incidents and an average of 10,000 calls were received a week. Members noted that training had been introduced for control room staff on rural crime indicators and further training was being explored from National Farmers Union (NFU) backed up with specialist teams for areas such as wildlife. However, it was agreed that there was room for some improvement. Further resources were required, however, with funding being minimal it was difficult to deliver the level of service required.

- Members had received regular complaints of burglaries in the Barnt Green area and advised that Ward Members were ill informed of what steps were being taken to tackle the reported issues. To tackle the problem, residents were setting up their own Neighbourhood Watch Groups and employing security to patrol the areas. – In response Members were advised to sign up to “Neighbourhood Matters”, a website dedicated to the local Safer Neighbourhood Team (SNT) for the public to report critical neighbourhood matters. However, some Members had signed up to this webpage but found the information was inadequate for the issues which had been raised.
- A Member took the opportunity to thank the local sergeant for the area of Alvechurch. Issues of harassment had been reported and dealt with effectively, speaking to each party involved to solve the matter.
- The Leader of the Council thanked the PCC and West Mercia Police for their attendance to the meeting. She also reported regular issues in the District with road traffic accidents caused by diversion routes. – It was advised to report the relevant incidents to the local Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) in the areas concerned.
- The Leader also wished to thank the West Mercia Police for the work carried out to tackle the closure of illegal vape shops in the High Street. – Members were advised that Op Machinize was a major, ongoing UK-wide initiative led by the National Crime Agency (NCA), in partnership with the National Police Chiefs Council (NPCC), Trading Standards and other agencies, targeting the criminal exploitation of high street businesses which were helping to tackle the issues.
- The Chairman concluded discussions by requesting that regular updates were provided to the Board by the Council’s representative on the Police and Crime Panel, which was agreed by the Board.

A motion was moved and seconded requesting that the Council’s representative on the Police and Crime Panel provided a report to the Board following each Panel meeting.

RESOLVED that

- 1) The Police and Crime Commissioner update be noted; and

- 2) The Council's representative on the Police and Crime Panel provide regular updates to the Board.

91/25

PLANNING ADVISORY SERVICE (PAS)

The Executive Director commenced discussions by stating that the PAS review had been commissioned to assess governance, relationships, barriers to decision making and improvements required for:

- Development Management
- Local Plan preparation
- Officer-Member working
- Readiness for forthcoming planning reforms

Tim Burton, PAS Planning Consultant carried out a presentation to discuss the Development Management workstream.

The key points were discussed as below:

- Procedures and protocols were generally sound.
- Key issues related to strained Officer–Member relationships.
- There was insufficient early engagement prior to Planning Committee.
- Need for a “reset” of working practices.

Recommendations included:

- Improved collaboration.
- Training on defensible decision making.
- Addressing relationship with Worcestershire Highways.
- Review of enforcement processes.
- Improving Planning Committee focus.
- Reviewing livestream retention.
- Increasing Member involvement at pre application stage.
- Improving attendance at site visits.

David Coleman, PAS Planning Consultant also carried out a presentation to Members and discussed the Local Plan workstream.

The main points discussed were:

- Significant divergence between Members on the draft development strategy.
- Lack of political buy in and sense of “ownership” of the plan.
- Insufficient shared vision for the district's future.
- Evidence base gaps (e.g. Green Belt assessment, infrastructure planning).
- Poor relationships with the Worcestershire County Council (WCC) on transport and education.

- Need for clearer governance of the Strategic Planning Steering Group (SPSG).
- Importance of a 30-month statutory timetable under the new system.
- Emphasis on risk management, programme management and Member training.
- Need to develop a spatial vision and place making objectives.

After the presentations, Members discussed the following:

- The need for joint Officer-Member behavioural, culture, trust and relationship building external training. – In response the Executive Director agreed that building relations for Officers and Members was a good suggestion and highlighted the portfolio's comments about training being designed to be more engaging. The PAS Consultant suggested that some training requirements would be tailored differently for Members and Officers and considerations of roles were advised. It was also suggested that workshops for Local Plan discussions could be a good option to encourage open discussions and also to have better clarity of Officer and Member roles.
- Possible Officer training required for complex subjects i.e. grey belt areas.
- A suggestion that the recommendation to continue active Senior Leadership support should include all Officers and Members who could provide influence.
- Was it expected that all the recommendations would be implemented? – In response the PAS Consultants advised that the recommendations should be implemented, were necessary and valid and the priority was to have an action plan for implementing the recommendations. It was felt that building relations was the overriding issue. The Executive Director advised the Board that the suggested recommendations would go to Cabinet in March along with an action plan.
- Suggestions that cross party working groups should include a chair but not include the portfolio holder, to encourage neutrality.
- Why it had taken so long for a PAS report when individual issues had been raised by Members for some time?
- Urgency of progressing the Local Plan due to speculative applications. – In response the Leader explained that the formula for housing and infrastructure provision had changed since the National Planning Policy Framework rules in 2022. However, this had been challenged with the Minister and therefore the rules would be revisited. There was also a statutory requirement to educate children.
- How would the recommendations be progressed and when would the action plan be published to ensure accountability, transparency and mitigation of risks? – The Executive Director explained that the recommendations and action plan would go to Cabinet in March. In response Members expressed the view that

considerations to Cabinet would delay progress and earlier actions were necessary to meet the statutory deadline. The Leader advised that she was happy to review timelines, however, external advice may also be sought and the first Planning Subgroup was meeting the next day to discuss the recommendations. The Executive Director added that some recommendations could be expedited.

- Clearer communication on enforcement performance was also raised. – Members were informed that this would form part of the action plan, along with timescales.
- Resource and staffing capacity issues, with Members sometimes having difficulties contacting Planning Officers. What plans were being put in place? – In response the Executive Director informed that the medium-term strategies were being explored.
- To review the necessity for Members to contact Planning Officers, prior to planning meetings taking place. – It was agreed that specific training would be put in place to assist with this.
- Why there was a breakdown in relations with WCC and when would a Memo of Understanding (MOU) be in place for transport planning support? – The Leader explained that Officers were working to rectify the issues and would be forming a different approach for this issue.
- Concerns about historic delays and political management of the plan was also raised by Members.
- A requirement for consistent updates and improved engagement mechanisms was also requested. – In response the Portfolio Holder suggested that Members provided details, who would liaise with Planning Officers.
- What was a realistic timescale for the Council to consider the adoption of Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)? – In response the PAS Consultant suggested that it would take 12 months to draft a plan, requiring viability evidence to underpin the plan.
- Some Members had frustrations with past working groups not working collaboratively and lacked inconsistencies in Member attendance. Other Members were frustrated that numerous recommendations had been suggested in group meetings but had not been carried through. It was also suggested that future working group meetings needed to be open and honest and learn from the past to move forwards.
- Stream retention and transparency for public confidence was agreed as recommendation.

Following the above discussions two motions were moved, seconded and agreed.

RESOLVED that

- 1) Joint Officer-Member relationship building training be included as a formal action within the PAS Action Plan; and

- 2) The PAS Action Plan be brought to Cabinet at the earliest possible opportunity (earlier than the provisional date of 26th March 2026, if feasible).

[Between the hours of 8:49pm and 9:00pm the meeting was adjourned for a short comfort break].

92/25

LOCAL GOVERNMENT RE-ORGANISATION (UPDATE)

The Assistant Director of Corporate Services and Transformation presented her report with the following main points raised:

- Worcestershire remained at Stage 3 of the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) process.
- Two proposals had been submitted and the statutory consultation launched the previous week.
- A decision on implementation was expected in July 2026.
- A Countywide Programme Management Office (PMO) had been set up, with Bromsgrove's Transformation Lead as Senior Responsible Officer (SRO). The focus areas included: Finance, Legal, HR, IT and Service Delivery (cross-cutting).
- An internal Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) "LGR Roots" programme was supporting staff through change.
- Externally, District Councils had refreshed the partnership website for TransformingWorcestershire.co.uk.
- A new corporate LGR risk had been added to the Council's risk register.
- Residual risk was assessed as Medium (12), largely due to uncertainties in costings and capacity.
- Corporate risks had been redeveloped and would be reported to the Audit, Standards and Governance meeting held on 17th February 2026.

Members discussed the following:

- How much interest was expected from the public for the Statutory Consultation? – In response it was explained that the consultation was focused on reaching public bodies primarily but was open to all residents and businesses. Parish Councils would be contacted separately also. The Portfolio Holder also urged Members to ensure that the public was aware of the consultation.
- The Portfolio Holder also commented that although it was difficult for the Council to navigate the unknowns, housekeeping would be essential for future implementation, regardless of the decision made.

The Chairman concluded the Board had previously decided on receiving updates at every meeting and options for deeper scrutiny could be revisited once workloads allowed.

RESOLVED that the Local Government Re-Organisation Update be noted.

93/25 **WORCESTERSHIRE HEALTH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE (UPDATE)**

There was no update provided for the reporting of the Worcestershire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC) as the meeting scheduled for 9th February 2026 had been cancelled and re-scheduled for 11th February 2026.

94/25 **FINANCE AND BUDGET WORKING GROUP (UPDATE)**

The Board received an update on information which was in progress for the forthcoming FBWG. Members of the Board agreed to a meeting prior the Cabinet meeting to be held on 18th February 2026 to discuss its recommendations.

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

95/25 **CABINET WORK PROGRAMME**

The Cabinet Work Programme was presented for Members' consideration.

It was requested and agreed by the Board that the cabinet item for the Introduction of Enforcement of Littering from Vehicles be added to the Board's Work Programme.

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

96/25 **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD WORK PROGRAMME**

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

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

97/25 **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY ACTION SHEET**

The Overview and Scrutiny Action Sheet were considered by the Board.

RESOLVED that the Overview and Scrutiny Action Sheet be noted.

98/25 **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.

99/25

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:-

Minute Item No. 100 – Town Centre Parking and ANPR Update
Minute Item No. 101 – EV Charger Profit Sharing Arrangements Update

100/25

TOWN CENTRE PARKING AND ANPR (UPDATE)

The Assistant Director Regeneration and Property Services updated the Board on the Town Centre Parking and Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) update.

It was reported that Town Centre parking capacity remained sufficient, with peak demand significantly below the 1,013 available spaces.

St John Street and Windsor Street car parks continued to experience the highest utilisation, while School Drive, North Bromsgrove and Stourbridge Road remained underused.

The Board noted the following redevelopment considerations:

- Churchfields remained closed due to Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) risks, with high costs required for reopening and ongoing maintenance.
- Stourbridge Road was subject to an existing development agreement and observed usage indicated high weekday occupancy by season ticket holders.
- School Drive was identified as suitable for redevelopment due to consistently low usage and a potentially higher capital receipt.

Even with redevelopment of one or more sites, overall parking demand was predicted to remain comfortably met.

Sanders Park Car Park was being used by Town Centre workers for all day free parking. Options were presented to introduce time limits, charges or MiPermit only operation.

Season ticket usage at Parkside had raised concerns from local businesses. Survey findings indicated most users were season ticket holders rather than Council Staff. Options included amending which car parks accepted season tickets.

ANPR implementation was reported as not viable due to legal constraints, operational requirements for barriers, cost implications and no reduction in enforcement workload.

Out of town enforcement had met the agreed minimum requirement, with between 26% to 29% of patrol time spent outside the Town Centre. Increasing enforcement would require additional staffing at significant cost.

Financial implications were highlighted, including income levels, resurfacing costs and the financial impact of potential car park redevelopments.

The report concluded that a strategic, place-based approach was required to support Town Centre accessibility and economic activity, with further on site counts recommended.

After the presentation the Board made the following comments:

Churchfields Car Park

- Some Members expressed the view that ASB issues would remain if the car park reopened and felt that the brownfield site would be better used for build extra housing for the District. – In response the Leader advised that the primary position would be to carry out remediation works to the car park and address the ASB concerns.
- School Drive Car Park could provide relief but was located quite far away from the Town Centre, however, Churchfields Car Park was more suitably located for people using the Town Centre.
- With the upcoming LGR considerations and to leave a legacy, carrying out remediation works and re-opening the car park would assist with the key issue of parking within the Town Centre.

Sanders Park

- Some Members regularly visited the park and hadn't experienced problems with parking availability.
- Members were concerned that the potential consideration to introduce charges to the car park could potentially deter some to visit the park. – In response the Leader reassured Members that there were no immediate proposals to introduce parking charges.

School Drive Car Park

- Concerns that parking charges in North Bromsgrove Car Park could be a deterrent for the use of the local gym near the area. A Member suggested season ticket charges to reduce costs for gym membership holders and a consideration for potential revenue for the Council. – In response the Leader reminded Members that the Council did support the Leisure Centre through the Covid pandemic. Although the Leisure Centre had not contacted the Council to discuss season ticket ideas, the suggestion would be explored further if contact was made.
- LGR – Concerns that there would be inadequate car spaces available for North Bromsgrove High School. – In response the Leader informed the Board that the issue had been raised by with the Board of Education.
- Reports of numerous bins in the area which needed to be addressed.

Stourbridge Road Car Park

- Members expressed the view that the Stourbridge Road Car Park was a prime spot for the Town Centre and convenient for Council Staff. – In response Officers explained that there was a development agreement in place and a planning application on the site; therefore the ongoing use of the car park was unlikely and should be excluded when considering future capacity needs.

General Discussions

- Manual checks were encouraged by Members to check the validity for the current car parking usage in the Bromsgrove Town Centre. – In response the Assistant Director Regeneration and Property Services explained that the findings were carried out during the strategic planning review but shared concerns that the use of the car parks within the report were out of date and agreed that a more comprehensive usage strategy were required. Contact would be made with Wychavon Parking Services to discuss costings and it was agreed that further findings would be reported to the Board in due course. During discussions Members also queried how the data analysis checks had been carried out for the car park usage. – In response Officers explained that certain times of the day were analysed.
- Members expressed the view that future demands for parking had not been highlighted in the Local Plan.
- What was the current plans for the agreed extra out of town Civil Enforcement Officers (CEOs)? – The Assistant Director responded that the details would be discussed with Wychavon Parking Services and would be reported back to the Board. The Leader also added that 25% of resources were used for CEOs in the rural areas.

- Exploration of outsourcing to introduce ANPR at Council owned car parks was sought. – However, in response the Executive Director informed the Board that the contract agreement was in place for 5 years (which would run after LGR).

In conclusion the Chairman suggested the following be reported back to a future meeting for remediation costs for the Churchfields Car Park; and an exploration of a business case for parking permits at School Drive Car Park.

RESOLVED that

- a) The update on Town Centre Parking and ANPR be noted;
- b) Remediation costs for the Churchfields Car Park be provided for future reporting; and
- c) Explore a business case for parking permits at School Drive Car Park.

(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 no exempt information contained within this minute).

101/25

EV CHARGER PROFIT SHARING ARRANGEMENTS (UPDATE)

The Assistant Director Environmental Housing and Property Services presented the Electrical Vehicle (EV) Charger profit sharing arrangements update to the Board.

The main points were discussed:

- The Council had sought to utilise its own land to provide Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure (EVCI) for financial viability.
- Zest Eco Limited procured the contract to undertake a further exploration to expand EVCI across land that were not covered by the taxi scheme.
- Three sites were identified as being viable - two sites had completed installation and one site was in progress.
- Following queries from the Board a review had been carried out to explore the income terms and conditions of the contract.
- Barnt Green Parish Council advised that they had used the same Council supplier Equans, as used for the Plug-in Taxi Programme.

- There were legal implications and both parties would need to agree to vary the agreement if seeking early payment. Alternatively, a break notice/termination clause within the contract could be another option, however, compensation may be payable, given the expenditure incurred to date for installations.

After the presentation, Members made the following comments:

- How was the contract procured? – In response the Board were informed that it had been through an open tender process with only one bid received.
- Who dealt with the repair and maintenance on site? – It was advised that this was covered by the common contract clause.
- What happened with the contract when the unitary authority took over? – In response it was advised that the contract would be carried over to the unitary authority and maintained.
- How the Council obtained the current usage of the units? – In response the Board noted that the Council were in the process of seeking to gain access to the contractor's portal to gain this data.

RESOLVED that the EV Charger Profit Sharing Arrangements update 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 no exempt information contained within this minute).

The meeting closed at 10.35 p.m.

Chairman