

**BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**MEETING OF THE CABINET**

**WEDNESDAY 7TH JANUARY 2026, AT 6.00 P.M.**

PRESENT: Councillors K.J. May (Leader), S. J. Baxter (Deputy Leader),  
S. T. Nock, K. Taylor and S. A. Webb

Observers: Councillor P. M. McDonald and Councillor H. D. N.  
Warren-Clarke

Officers: Mr J. Leach, Mrs. C. Felton, Mr. P. Earley, Mr M. Cox,  
Mr. M. Bough, Mr. D Riley, Mrs. R. Green, Mr. C. Poole,  
Ms. A. Delahunty, Mr P. Bailey, Mr. M Eccles, Mrs B. Talbot and  
Mrs J. Gresham.

56/25

**TO RECEIVE APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

An apology for absence was received from Councillor P. Whittaker.

57/25

**DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no Declarations of Interest.

58/25

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

Prior to consideration of the minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 19<sup>th</sup> November 2025, the Leader announced that there was a typographical error contained within the minutes. The fourth recommendation in respect of the Medium-Term Financial Plan Budget Update and Consultation report had been omitted in the published minutes. However, it was confirmed that the vote was taken on all four of the recommendations included in the report as follows:

**RESOLVED that**

- 1) The updated budget position for the Council is noted in respect of the 2026/27 annual budget and for the Medium-Term Financial Plan up to 2028/29.
- 2) The key assumptions listed in this document are confirmed as accurate for the purpose of projecting an initial budget position.

3) A further report in February will include additional information from the Local Government Settlement to give a final financial position for the Council.

**RECOMMENDED** that

4) The Consultation on the Budget 2026/27 be noted.

The fourth recommendation as detailed above had been subsequently considered and agreed by Council at the meeting held on 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2025.

**RESOLVED** that subject to the amendment, as detailed in the preamble above, that the minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 19<sup>th</sup> November 2025 be approved.

59/25

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD HELD ON 18TH NOVEMBER 2025**

The Leader invited the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Board to present the minutes from the Board meeting held on 18<sup>th</sup> November 2025. In doing so, Members were informed that there were no outstanding recommendations contained within the minutes.

It was explained that there had been a number of reports pre-scrutinised by the Board and the Finance and Budget Working Group prior to this Cabinet meeting, as detailed below:

1. Biodiversity First Duty Report
2. Particulate Monitoring Report
3. Homelessness Prevention, Rough Sleeper and Domestic Abuse Grants Funding 2027/28 and 2028/29 Report
4. Business Rates Discretionary Rates Relief Policy 2026-2027 Report
5. Council Tax Base Report 2026/27 Report
6. Council Tax Empty Homes Discounts and Premiums 2026-27 Report
7. Council Tax Support Scheme 2026/27 Report

No further recommendations had been made as a result of this pre-scrutiny. The Chairman of the Board stated, however that the Board were very keen for Cabinet to agree all of the recommendations included within the reports that had been pre-scrutinised.

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting held on 18<sup>th</sup> November 2025 be noted.

60/25

**APPOINTMENTS TO THE SHAREHOLDERS COMMITTEE**

The Leader presented the Appointments to the Shareholders Committee report for Members' consideration. The report proposed that Members be nominated to sit on the Shareholders Committee following a change to the Cabinet membership which had resulted in a vacant seat on this Committee.

Nominations were received for Councillors S. T. Nock and S. Webb.

On being put to the vote it was

**RESOLVED** that

Councillors S. T. Nock and S. Webb be appointed to the Shareholders Committee for the remainder of the municipal year.

*[Prior to the end of the meeting, Cabinet revisited this report. It was noted by Officers that the number of Cabinet Members required on the Committee was only four. However, Members suggested that the number of Members for this Committee had been amended earlier in the municipal year to five and therefore the nominations remained as detailed above].*

61/25

**HOUSING TASK GROUP FINAL REPORT**

The Leader welcomed Councillor H. Warren-Clarke in his capacity of Chairman of the Housing Task Group to present the Housing Task Group Final Report for the consideration of Cabinet.

Councillor Warren-Clarke stated that he was pleased to present this report and outlined the background to the report for Members and explained that the Task Group had been agreed by the Overview and Scrutiny Board at the meeting held on 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2025.

During the meetings of the Task Group there were several areas discussed including freeholding and allocation of S106 monies.

There had been detailed discussions regarding these matters along with several other areas which had resulted in the recommendations contained within the report.

Following the presentation the Leader thanked the Task Group Members for the work undertaken on this matter and discussed the recommendations in detail.

- Recommendation 1 – This recommendation proposed that Officers explore the potential of establishing an initiative whereby a basic start up package be provided to residents who were currently on the housing waiting list. This package would consist of essential items for those who did not have them when moving into a new property.
- Recommendation 2 – This dealt with the mix of affordable housing provided within a new housing development. The recommendation proposed that the affordable housing allocation be made up of social rent and shared ownership properties only and exclude outright sales of affordable homes.
- Recommendation 3 – This recommendation proposed an increase in monitoring information for Members to understand the bad debt in terms of non-payment of Council Tax by residents.
- Recommendation 4 – This was concerned with monitoring the numbers of residents claiming Council Tax Support whilst living in housing Bands F, G and H. It was explained that these residents may be 'asset rich but potentially revenue poor' which might result in them claiming this benefit. This recommendation would help the Council to better understand the needs of these residents and any potential areas of support that the Council could provide.
- Recommendation 5 – this proposal would ensure greater engagement with Ward Members during the consideration of appropriate allocation of S106 monies for developments within the District. Members discussed this recommendation in detail and stated that this matter would be relevant at the pre-Planning application stage in a development. It was felt that should Ward Members be interested in the specific allocation of S106 monies then they should attend pre-application meetings. It was reported that there had been some instances when Members had not attended such meetings. Some Members explained that they were invited to comment on the application but not always invited to the pre-application meeting. The Cabinet Member for Planning, Worcestershire Regulatory Services (WRS) and Strategic Housing undertook to look into this matter further with the relevant Officers. It was suggested that one solution might be that a 'read receipt' be included in invitations to pre-application meetings to Members in order for Officers to retain an audit trail of invitations and emails sent on this matter in the future.

- Recommendation 6 – This recommendation dealt with the matter of fleeceholding. Members felt that increased lobbying of central Government was necessary in order to prevent escalating costs for management of developments in the future. Some Members stated that during recent meetings with developers at Parish Council level, that it had been reported that the Council needed to engage more with developers in respect of management of developments. It was reported that during meetings of the Task Group, Task Group Members had been reassured that this engagement was taking place. This was confirmed by Officers at the meeting, and it was reported that developers were sometimes reluctant to engage with the Council in these matters due to the potential costs involved. The Cabinet Member for Planning, Worcestershire Regulatory Services (WRS) and Strategic Housing undertook to look into this matter further with the relevant Officers. Included in this recommendation were details on a consultation proposal by Government to implement aspects of the Leasehold and Freehold Reform Act 2024. The consultation had closed on 26<sup>th</sup> September 2025. Members queried the outcomes of this consultation and whether any information was available. Noting the current timeline for Local Government Reorganisation, Members expressed that this matter would need to be carried forward by the new unitary authority. However, in the meantime, it was suggested that a joint letter be written by the Leader of the Council and Chairman of the Housing Task Group to lobby Government further in this matter.

On being put to the vote it was

**RESOLVED** that

- 1) 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.
- 2) Bromsgrove District Council's preference was 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.
- 3) Officers provide Members with costings of bad debt owed to the Council as a result of non – payment of Council tax by residents.

- 4) 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).
- 5) Where a planning application had a material impact on the local community and there was a consideration for S106 contribution allocation, the Ward Member (and neighbouring Ward Member(s)) 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.
- 6) As part of the Local Government Reorganisation process, the Council:
  - a) Noted that the Government was currently analysing the feedback from the consultation which sought views on proposals to implement aspects of the Leasehold and Freehold Reform Act 2024 and further reform related to the charges leaseholders, and homeowners on freehold estates, pay and services they received, which had closed on 26<sup>th</sup> September 2025.
  - b) Suggests that a new unitary authority continued to lobby Government on the matter of fleeceholding within Bromsgrove District.

62/25

### **CYBER SECURITY UPDATE - INCLUDING WHATSAPP POLICY AND AI POLICY**

The ICT Technical Team Leader presented the Cyber Security Update - including WhatsApp Policy and AI Policy for Members' consideration. In doing so it was noted that the Policy provided a guide to Council Staff and had been developed to ensure the ethical, transparent, and responsible use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies across Bromsgrove District Council. Included in the report were specific examples of appropriate use of WhatsApp. The AI Policy also addressed the use of third-party tools and the importance of training and education for staff in these areas. It was reported that a programme of communications would be rolled out to staff and Members as a result of the policy.

Members welcomed the implementation of both policies for staff. Officers stated that this policy was for staff and it was recognised that a similar policy would be required for Members and that such a policy would be produced in due course.

**RESOLVED**

- 1) To adopt the Artificial Intelligence (AI) Acceptable Use Policy as a formal policy document.
- 2) To adopt the WhatsApp Policy as a formal policy document.

63/25

**BIODIVERSITY FIRST DUTY**

The Climate Change Manager presented the Biodiversity First Duty report for Members' consideration. It was reported that the Environment Act 2021 had placed a legal duty on public authorities to conserve and enhance biodiversity. As a result, Bromsgrove District Council must publish a Biodiversity Duty Report which covered the period up to 1st January 2026 and publish this by 26<sup>th</sup> March 2026.

The Council was taking steps enhance biodiversity across the District and several initiatives were already underway; such as leaving grass verges uncut throughout the growing season. There were areas for improvement that had also been identified through working with services areas across the Council. These included:

- Continued engagement with the Worcestershire Local Nature Recovery Strategy.
- Monitoring and implementing Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) through Planning.
- Enhancing biodiversity on Council-owned land.
- Promoting citizen science and community engagement

Further information was highlighted to Members as follows:

- A new biodiversity report was required every five years.
- Capital investment might be required in the future to undertake future biodiversity projects such as grass verge management equipment.
- Other funding streams would be investigated such as Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA) grants.
- Included in the biodiversity report were several mandatory elements as follows:
  - Policies, Objectives and Actions
  - How Other Strategies Were Considered
  - Future Actions
  - Biodiversity Net Gain Information

- Biodiversity actions contributed to climate resilience, carbon sequestration, and nature-based solutions and therefore were important to consider for the Climate Change Strategy which was currently being prepared.

Following the presentation, Members thanked Officers for the report and outlined that it was important to note that only some of the actions plans would be implemented by the Council prior to Local Government Reorganisation. Therefore, it was important for Officers to track the plans and outcomes and link in with other authorities once a decision had been made in terms of local government structure in the future.

Members were concerned that the planting of trees be carried out following the implementation of the Bromsgrove Route Enhancement Programme (BREP). As Members were aware, a large number of trees had been removed as part of this project, and it had previously been agreed that three thousand new trees would be planted to offset their removal. Members agreed that it was important to understand where these threes were to be planted and that continued maintenance would be carried out once planted. Councillor Taylor undertook to find the information regarding this.

The Leader invited the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Board to comment on this report following its pre-scrutiny at the Board meeting held on 18<sup>th</sup> January 2026. It was reported that the Board had looked at the report in detail and had raised some of the same questions as the Cabinet.

**RESOLVED** that

- 1) the findings of the Biodiversity Duty First Consideration Report be noted; and
- 2) Members agreed to publish the full Biodiversity Duty First Consideration Report to the Council's website.

**PARTICULATE MONITORING**

The Technical Services Manager and Acting Principal Officer (Technical Pollution) from Worcestershire Regulatory Services (WRS) presented the Particulate Monitoring for Cabinet's consideration.

The report had been prepared as a result of discussions at a Bromsgrove District Council meeting where it was agreed an options paper be presented to Members.

Particulate Monitoring (PM) was already carried out by WRS, and three sensors were already in place across the District at the following locations:

- Hanover Street, Bromsgrove
- Gunner Lane, Rubery
- Station Road, Hagley

The sensors measured a range of pollutants including PM in real time and monitoring data was accessible via a public portal on the WRS website. Members were encouraged to access this data if they wished to understand the data that was being collected and monitored.

It was noted that the University of Birmingham (UoB) was already monitoring PM in Worcestershire and this would provide an insight into the PM air pollution in Worcestershire. WRS had approached UoB to assist in the design and implementation of a local source apportionment study of PM in Worcestershire. The study would provide a characterisation of the sources of PM, similar to the UoB study outlined above, utilising the specialist monitoring equipment and expertise available from UoB at this time.

Officers explained that this was an exciting and unique opportunity unavailable to any other local authorities outside of Worcestershire now or at any other time.

Members were informed that there was currently no funding for this project and that agreement to the proposal would need to be considered alongside other competing bids for funding from reserves. It was noted that Worcestershire County Council (WCC) had been approached via email to ascertain if they were able to provide any funding for this monitoring in the future.

The Cabinet Member for Planning, WRS and Strategic Housing invited the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Board to speak on this report as it had been robustly pre-scrutinised at the meeting held on 6<sup>th</sup> January 2026. The outcome of both the pre-scrutiny and consideration of the report by Cabinet was that Members were keen to see this monitoring implemented in the future.

However, due to no allocated funding for the project there was a slight amendment to the second recommendation contained within the report which noted that the implementation of the project was subject to funding being available either through the budget bid process or any other sources of funding such as WCC.

Therefore, on being put to the vote it was

**RECOMMENDED** that

- 1) additional monitoring of Particulate Matter (air pollution) be delivered as set out in Option E; and
- 2) subject to funding being identified and allocated accordingly a further report be brought back to Cabinet once final costs had been identified.

65/25

**HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION, ROUGH SLEEPER AND DOMESTIC ABUSE GRANTS FUNDING 2027/28 AND 2028/29**

The Housing Development & Enabling Manager presented the Homelessness Prevention, Rough Sleeper and Domestic Abuse Grants Funding 2027/28 and 2028/29 for Members' consideration.

Members were reminded that a report had been approved at the Council meeting held on 19<sup>th</sup> November 2025 where the temporary accommodation element of the Revenue Support Grant was ringfenced to homeless prevention activities for 2026/27, the report advised that this element of Revenue Support Grant was no longer required.

It was noted that from 2026/27, the Government had consolidated existing Rough Sleeper and Domestic Abuse grants into a single Homelessness Prevention Grant. This new grant encompassed funding for prevention and relief activities for three-years.

It was proposed that the funding allocation for the three-year period would be used for the schemes as detailed in the report considered previously. Members were informed that the funding received had been more generous than expected and that a future report would be presented to Cabinet with an update on the outcomes of the projects and any uplift and additional initiatives being implemented.

The report was pre-scrutinised at the Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting held on 6<sup>th</sup> January 2026. At this meeting, Members expressed

that they were pleased with the report and the decrease in the numbers of those who were homeless and rough sleeping which had decreased within Bromsgrove, which was an excellent outcome for the District and testament to the hard work of the Officers at the Council.

**RESOLVED** that

- 1) The initiatives in the table below be approved to receive the Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Grant and Domestic Abuse Grant allocations of funding for 2027/28 and 2028/29, subject to satisfactory performance; with any uplift and additional initiatives being implemented prior to that period to be the subject of a further report to the Cabinet;

<b>Homelessness Grant Allocation</b>	<b>2027/28 £ (up to £620,380)</b>	<b>2028/29 £ (up to £683,063)</b>
Housing Options Service Top Up Staffing Costs	52,475	52,475
Static Temporary Accommodation for an additional 4 units of accommodation	30,688	30,688
Worcestershire Strategic Housing Partnership Co-ordinator – contribution towards county-wide development and delivery of housing initiatives in partnership with other agencies	10,500	10,500
Severe Emergency Weather Provision	18,347	18,347
St Basils Foyer – provides stable accommodation/support for young people - 14 units – fully occupied during last financial year	50,203	50,203
St Basils Crash pad – provides emergency temporary accommodation for 16 and 17 year olds	19,711	19,711
Bromsgrove Home Choice CBL and Homelessness Module	14,600	14,600
St Basils Young Persons Pathway Worker – support to prevent homelessness for under 25's and Crash Pad to provide a unit of emergency accommodation for young people.	41,116	41,116
NewStarts - Provide Furniture and Volunteering Opportunities for Ex-Offenders – supports tenancy sustainment and provides future employment opportunities/reduces risk of reoffending	15,000	15,000

GreenSquare Accord Housing Related Support – helping ex-offenders remain housed/seek employment	31,172	31,172
Maggs Rough Sleeper outreach and prevention service targeting rough sleepers and those at risk of rough sleeping.	35,607	35,607
North Worcestershire Basement Project - Support for young people at risk of homelessness	45,000	45,000
BDHT - Sunrise Project intensive support	46,886	46,886
Mental Health Link Worker (part funded)	21,554	21,554
CAB – Debt Advice for Home Owners and Private Renters	27,611	27,611
CAB – Affordability Assessments	6,021	6,021
Housing First/Housing Led Service	29,563	29,563
Part time Empty Homes Officer	7,680	7,680
Spend to Save Top Up	5,683	5,683
County Rough Sleeper Coordinator	5,500	5,500
Rough Sleeper Access to Accommodation Fund and NFNO/NSNO	1,000	1,000
County Domestic Abuse Co-ordinator	5,112	5,112
County Domestic Abuse Research and Intelligence Officer	4,573	4,573
Top up to DA Housing Options Officer	6,059	6,059
<b>Total committed expenditure</b>	<b>£531,66</b>	<b>£531,661</b>
<b>Underspend</b>	<b>£88,719</b>	<b>151,402</b>

2) Delegated authority be granted to the Assistant Director of Community and Housing Services, following consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Strategic Housing, to use any unallocated grant from this source of grant funding during the year or make further adjustments and uplifts as necessary to ensure full utilisation of the grants, including any mid-year Homelessness Prevention Grant top up, for 2027/28 and 2028/29 in support of existing or new schemes.

It was noted that this was the annual report provided to Members and outlined the pay structure for Council staff.

**RECOMMENDED** that

- 1) the Pay Policy 2026/27 be approved.

67/25

**BUSINESS RATES DISCRETIONARY RATES RELIEF POLICY 2026-2027**

The Revenue Services Manager presented the Business Rates Discretionary Rates Relief Policy 2026-2027.

It was reported that historically, discretionary rates relief had been restricted to charities, not for profit organisations, and the occupiers of small premises within rural settlements. However, the Localism Act 2011 and the Non-Domestic Rating Act 2023 removed some of the restrictions on the award of relief and, except in the case of charities and non-profit organisations, the Council could only award relief to any ratepayer where it would be reasonable to do so and was in the interest of the Council's council taxpayers.

Certain types of property situated within a rural settlement and with a rateable value below specific thresholds were entitled to rural rate relief, the properties eligible for rural rate relief were as follows:

- The only post office within a rural settlement
- The only general store within a rural settlement
- The only public house within a rural settlement
- The only petrol filling station within a rural settlement
- A rural food shop

The 'rural rate condition' allowed billing authorities a further discretion to grant relief to any business within a rural settlement provided that the rateable value of the property occupied was less than £16,500, that the use of the property was of a benefit to the local community, and it was in the interest of taxpayers for relief to be provided.

The rural rate condition was removed by the Localism Act 2011 which gave the Council greater powers to award discretionary rate relief.

Members were informed that the revised policy aimed to modernise the framework for awarding relief in line with the Council's strategic Priorities and moved away from the rigid criteria guided by the following principles:

- Community benefit
- Strategic alignment
- Financial need
- Sustainability

The Finance and Budget Working Group had pre-scrutinised this report at its meeting held on 5<sup>th</sup> January 2026. There were no further recommendations made as a result of this pre-scrutiny.

**RECOMMENDED** that

- 1) A non-domestic rates discretionary relief policy be approved and adopted from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2026
- 2) Subject to the removal of Burcot as a settlement from the Lickey and Blackwell Parish, the rural settlement list included in the policy be approved and adopted for use from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2026.

68/25

**COUNCIL TAX BASE REPORT 2026/27**

The Revenue Services Manager presented the Council Tax Base Report 2026/27 for Members' consideration.

The Council Tax Base calculation for 2026-27 this was required as this was the first step in determining the Council Tax for the forthcoming year.

Members were informed that the Council Tax Base was calculated using data held by the Authority as of 30<sup>th</sup> November 2025. This data reflected the number of dwellings in each valuation band and accounts for exemptions, discount and reductions.

The Finance and Budget Working Group had pre-scrutinised this report at its meeting held on 5<sup>th</sup> January 2026. There were no further recommendations made as a result of this pre-scrutiny.

**RESOLVED** that the amount calculated by Bromsgrove District Council as the Council Tax Base for the whole area for 2026/27 be approved at 38,409.8 as detailed below to include the individual parish elements.

	<b>Parish Name</b>	<b>Net</b>
	<b>Whole Area</b>	<b>38,409.8</b>
101/107	Unparished	14,285.3
111	Alvechurch	2,383.1
102	Barnt Green	1,044.8
116	Belbroughton and Fairfield	1,255.8
118	Bentley Pauncefoot	258.9
119	Beoley	474.0
103	Bournheath	222.3
104	Catshill and North Marlbrook	2,352.6
120	Clent	574.6
121	Cofton Hackett	1,280.1
122	Dodford with Grafton	411.6
105	Finstall	320.3
123	Frankley	50.4
124	Hagley	3,237.9
106	Lickey and Blackwell	2,141.1
125	Hunnington	271.8
126	Romsley	667.6
127/131	Parish of Stoke	1,941.3
129	Tutnall and Cobley	407.0
130	Wythall	4,829.3
		38,409.8
	Trent Flood Defence Area	7,102.2
	Severn Flood Defence Area	31,307.7

69/25

### **COUNCIL TAX EMPTY HOMES DISCOUNTS AND PREMIUMS 2026-27**

The Revenue Services Manager presented the Council Tax Empty Homes Discounts and Premiums 2026-27.

In doing so the current levels of discount to 'second' homes and empty homes were provided. It was noted that empty homes were unoccupied and substantially unfurnished dwellings. The Council applied a graduated discount for these homes. Members were informed that homes that were empty for thirty days or less received a 100 per cent discount, homes empty for more than thirty days were charged the full amount of Council Tax.

For long term empty homes, the Council could apply additional Council Tax, when a home had been unoccupied and substantially unfurnished for twelve months or more. In terms of the 'second home' premium, Local Authorities had been able to apply additional Council Tax for substantially furnished dwellings and were no one's sole or main residence from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2025. Members were informed that the Council did not currently apply premiums to second homes. It was suggested that due to Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) it would be more appropriate for the new structure of local government to make decisions on whether to implement these premiums in the future.

Cabinet was informed that for the 2025/26 tax year the additional Council Tax levied on long-term empty homes was estimated to be £476,000, with Bromsgrove retaining £57,000 shared across precepting Authorities.

Currently there were one hundred and twenty-four 'second homes' within the District. It was noted that this was a snapshot in time as levels could change. The imposition of a 'second home' premium, applied to these homes. If applied, this would lead to an additional Council Tax premium of £300,000 with the Council retaining £36,000. Therefore, it was considered that the application of a 'second home' premium was not financially beneficial for this premium to be implemented currently.

The process of how empty homes were treated during probate or undergoing substantial repair projects was explained to Members. This was a complex process and took into consideration several factors.

Members were keen to understand what the Council did with the funding received from the revenue from long term empty homes and if it was ringfenced. Officers explained that this revenue was accounted for in the Council Tax receipts.

The Finance and Budget Working Group had pre-scrutinised this report at its meeting held on 5<sup>th</sup> January 2026. There were no further recommendations made as a result of this pre-scrutiny.

**RECOMMENDED** that

- 1) the determinations as set out in Appendix A be adopted with effect from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2026.
- 2) The Assistant Director of Finance and Customer Services be authorised to consider, on a case-by-case basis, a

reduction to the long-term empty premium under Section 13A(1)(C) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992.

3) the Council retained the existing discounts for unoccupied and furnished homes, as set out in Appendix A (below) and did not implement additional council tax premiums for unoccupied and substantially furnished homes.

70/25

### **COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME 2026/27**

The Revenue Services Manager presented the Council Tax Support Scheme 2026/27 for Cabinet's consideration.

In doing so it was explained that there was a requirement under section 13A(2) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 (LGFA '92) to have a Council Tax Reduction (CTR) scheme. The scheme must specify the reductions in Council Tax available to individuals in financial need, or to defined classes of people considered to be in financial need.

On 1st April 2021, Bromsgrove District Council introduced an income-banded scheme for working age applicants. The rationale was to future proof the scheme, reduce administrative burdens and align more closely with universal credit. The current scheme included a provision to uprate income bands by an inflation factor determined by the Council, typically aligned with increases in national welfare benefits. The CTR Scheme must be reviewed each year.

It was proposed that for 2026-27 the uprating of income bands should be 3.8 per cent, which was in line with the increase in national benefits.

The Finance and Budget Working Group had pre-scrutinised this report at its meeting held on 5<sup>th</sup> January 2026. There were no further recommendations made as a result of this pre-scrutiny.

#### **RECOMMENDED** that

- 1) The Council Tax Reduction Scheme be retained for 2026-27 tax year, subject to uprating of income bands by 3.8% in-line with increases to national benefits.

71/25

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

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

There was no Urgent Business on this occasion.

72/25

**MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN 2026/27 TO 2028/29 INCLUDING FEES AND CHARGES, WRS BUDGET RECOMMENDATIONS AND OUTCOME OF BUDGET CONSULTATION**

The Interim Finance Manager presented the Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) 2026/27 to 2028/29 including Fees and Charges, Worcestershire Regulatory Services (WRS) Budget recommendations and outcome of the Budget Consultation report. This included information on the Chancellor's Autumn Statement implications, fees and charges proposals, consultation outcomes, and key financial pressures.

This report enabled Officers to prepare for stage Two of the Council's Budget setting process, supported the approach to Fees and Charges and the WRS uplift. In addition to this it confirmed the timetable to February Cabinet and March Council Tax Resolution.

In terms of the national context Officers explained that Chancellor's Autumn Statement introduced major structural and funding changes for the future. This was underpinned by the outcomes of the Fair Funding Review. The review aimed to redistribute resources more equitably based on assessed local need. Key elements of the new funding framework included:

- Needs-Based Formula - This incorporated an updated demographic and service demand data.
- Resource Adjustment Mechanism - This reflected a Council's ability to raise local income.
- Area Cost Adjustments - This accounted for regional variations in service delivery costs.
- Grant Consolidation - This resulted in multiple small grants merged into larger ring-fenced grants e.g.
  - New Homes Bonus funding would no longer be available, and funding would be redirected to a core settlement.
  - Homelessness Prevention, Rough Sleeping, Temporary Accommodation to be combined.
  - Discretionary Housing Payments and Household Support Fund proposed for consolidation.

In addition to the changes relating to the Fairer Funding Review and Grant Consolidation as detailed above, other key measures should be noted:

- A high-value property surcharge from April 2028 - central Government would retain revenue in the future.
- Council Tax flexibility remained unchanged at 2.99 per cent or £5 cap.
- An £18m national investment for the upgrade of two hundred children's play areas under 'Pride in Place'.
- Rent Convergence would be reintroduced from 2026. This would be in addition to the standard CPI + 1 per cent plus weekly adjustment.

As a result of these changes there would be an impact on Bromsgrove as follows:

- The redistribution under Fair Funding would likely reduce Core Spending Power by 3.4 per cent over three years.
- The simplification of grant funding would reduce flexibility.
- The Council tax ceiling remained unchanged.
- There would be the opportunity to bid for 'Pride in Place' funding.

Members were reminded that Council set a three-year MTFP 2025/26 to 2027/28 in February 2025 in February 2025. The position reflected a balanced budget for 2025/26 with a deficit position of £1.03m in 2026/27 and deficit of £399k in 2027/28. It was noted that the Council was operating in a high-cost environment and an assumption had been made that there would be no growth in business rates given the reset and the end of pooling.

Some of the corporate assumptions were provided to Members as follows:

- Incorporation of a two per cent pay award of £389,000 and a further 1 per cent cost-of-living uplift of £195,000
- The cost of Councillors rejoining the Local Government Pension Scheme at a cost of £54,000.

It was noted that some of the extra costs were offset by the release of £230,000 from the utilities inflation budget and £250,000 corporate savings. Further savings had been generated from a change in forward funding rates for pensions of £358,000 in 2026-27 rising to £380,000 in 2028-29.

Fees and Charges were originally assumed at an increase of 2 per cent reflecting an increase of £100,000. Services have now provided more granular schedules resulting in a further income of £152,000 in 2026/27.

WRS required no uplift in 2026/27 due to pension rate changes, with pressures of £25,000 in 2027/28 and £59,000 in 2028/29 for salary and inflation. It was noted that WRS could not offset these through income generation.

It was reported that the funding gap had been narrowed as a result of the work undertaken as detailed above. However, further work was still being undertaken prior to the Final Settlement.

Following the presentation of the report members queried several areas including the following:

- The proposed two percent pay award and one percent cost of living increase – Members raised that there needed to be careful consideration of the level of pay increase particularly as the Independent Remuneration Panel (IRP) had recommended a higher level of increase to Members Allowances of 4.6 per cent for the next municipal year.
- WRS deficit – Members were surprised at the level of financial burden on the Council and concerned that all authorities included in the Service Level Agreement (SLA) for WRS were responsible for the appropriate amount of deficit. The Interim Section 151 Officer had previously been asked about this matter and at the time of writing a response was to be provided by a member of the Finance Team to the Leader, Cabinet Member for Finance and the Chief Executive. However, Members were reassured that the Interim Section 151 Officer did attend WRS Board meetings. The Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Board explained that this report had been pre-scrutinised at a meeting of the Finance and Budget Working Group on 5<sup>th</sup> January 2026. At this meeting, value for money was discussed in respect of WRS particularly within the context of Planning Enforcement. Members were reminded that the Planning Advisory Service (PAS) review had just been undertaken and it would be prudent to wait until the outcomes of that review had been provided before making any assumptions. It was noted that the Council paid a large amount of funding to WRS which looked to increase to £500,000 by 2028-29 and value for money needed to be established. Officers reminded members that WRS provided bespoke services to the Council which would result in an increase of costs incurred. It was requested that further work be undertaken in looking at value for money in terms of Planning Enforcement and the other services

provided by WRS following the outcomes of the PAS review. It was suggested that the original business case for the establishment of Planning Enforcement by WRS be revisited as part of this work. It was further noted that Planning Enforcement took a considerable amount of time and that the numbers of cases would not decrease immediately due to the complex process.

The Policy Manager provided an update on the Budget Consultation which had closed on 2<sup>nd</sup> January 2026. It was reported that there had been a disappointing response to the consultation. A total of two hundred and twenty-three valid surveys had been received (one hundred and thirty-eight from the Community Panel and eighty-five from the general public). Members queried whether this might be an opportunity to look at the membership of the Community Panel for future years and contact neighbouring authorities to understand the results their consultation had received. There had been no responses received from the local school who had been contacted. A longer lead in time for the consultation might have provided an increased response and this should be looked at for the future. Engagement sessions had been carried out in the usual way. In speaking to residents in the District there were new areas that had been highlighted in face-to-face discussions such as immigration, housing, funding and taxes. These areas had not been highlighted as strongly when the survey was carried out previously.

It was reported that there seemed to be disillusionment from the public in respect of local government. However there were some clear indications that residents were interested in what was taking place in the local area with traffic congestion, public transport, increased numbers of houses and environmental damage to the local areas being identified as areas of concern.

In terms of Council Priorities Infrastructure and Environment had been the top priorities identified at 55 and 52.7 per cent respectively. The top three most important Council services were as follows:

1. Environmental Services - 78.2%
2. Planning & Leisure Services - 68.6%
3. Regeneration & Property - 63.2%

Fees and charges were included in the consultation and 37.4 per cent of respondents felt that fees and charges (such as hire costs) should rise by four per cent to keep them in line with inflation and rising staffing costs.

The demographic of respondents was similar to previous years with the top three respondents ages as follows:

1. 60-69yrs - 26.6%
2. 70-79yrs - 23.9%
3. 80+ years - 7.3%

Suggestions for improvements to increase prosperity within the District were varied however the top three themes were the importance of infrastructure (roads, public transport, amenities, impact of development), Bromsgrove Town Centre, and supporting businesses. These topics had also been in the top three in the previous survey, suggesting consistency in both the publics priorities and areas of concern. These themes had many cross overs, from the impact of traffic (in particular the BREP), encouraging a diverse range of businesses into the town and reducing costs to businesses.

Further suggestions from respondents for increased prosperity within the District were as follows:

- Reducing business rates / relief
- Reducing parking costs (or make it free)
- Supporting independent retailers
- Bringing in key major retailers
- Larger variety of shops on offer on High Street
- Utilise empty shops
- Improve the market
- Make the town vibrant, attractive & distinctive - develop attractions, encourage visitors
- Improve the appearance & maintenance of the high street
- Improved public transport
- Ensure a district-wide view

Other comments were sought from residents on other budget ideas for reducing costs or increasing income to ensure Council services remained sustainable. These were suggested as detailed below:

- Stop expenses (in particular Councillors)
- Review staffing & wages (in particular management)
- Reduce waste
- Effective procurement
- Focus on essential services
- Effective maintenance

- Do more online.
- Utilise technology, including AI.
- Measure effectiveness and VfM.
- Explore alternative methods of delivery e.g. partnerships, consolidation of services, VCS, franchises.
- Reduce use of consultants.
- Commercial opportunities e.g. better events.
- Reduce events.
- Promote events better to increase revenue.
- Community use of buildings
- Increase enforcement e.g. fly tipping & littering.
- Better coordination around highways and roadworks.

Following the presentation of the consultation responses, the Policy Manager explained she would distribute the information to Members for their information.

Members were disappointed with the response rate and with such a small sample size it was difficult to ascertain what areas within the district were interested in which priorities and issues. This information could be circulated to Members following the meeting.

**RECOMMENDED** that

- 1) Members take account of any feedback from the Consultation on the Budget 2026/27.
- 2) Members endorse the further work / proposals being undertaken on the Medium-Term Financial Plan to produce a balanced position for 2026/27 – 2028/29 including the initial set of savings proposals and pressures including fees and charges increases.
- 3) The recommended increases relating to Worcestershire Regulatory Services of £25,000 for 2027/28 and £59,000 for 2028/29 be approved.
- 4) The updated three-year capital programme 2026/27 – 2028/29 along with available funding for further capital projects to be undertaken going forward and the proposed projects for funding along with revenue implications.

The meeting closed at 8.12 p.m.

Cabinet  
7th January 2026

Chairman