B R O M S G R O V E   D I S T R I C T   C O U N C I L

MEETING OF THE COUNCIL

25TH FEBRUARY 2026, AT 6.00 P.M.

PRESENT: Councillors S. M. Evans (Chairman), B. Kumar (Vice-Chairman), S. Ammar, A. Bailes, R. Bailes, S. R. Colella, J. Elledge, D. J. A. Forsythe, E. M. S. Gray, C.A. Hotham, D. Hopkins, R. J. Hunter, R. E. Lambert, M. Marshall, K.J. May, P. M. McDonald, B. McEldowney, S. T. Nock, D. J. Nicholl, S. R. Peters, J. Robinson, S. A. Robinson, J. D. Stanley, K. Taylor, H. D. N. Warren-Clarke, S. A. Webb and P. J. Whittaker.

Officers: Mr. J. Leach, Mr. G. Revans, Ms. J. Lorraine, Mrs. C. Felton, Mrs. D. Goodall, Ms. N Cummings and Mrs. J. Gresham.

96\25 TO RECEIVE APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors S. J. Baxter, J. Clarke, A. M. Dale and H. J. Jones.

97\25 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members were reminded that all Councillors had been granted general dispensations by the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee earlier in the municipal year to take part in the debate and vote on the Council's budget and Council Tax.

Councillors S. Ammar and K. Taylor declared an interest in relation to agenda item 13(b) (Minute No. 176/25) – Notice of Motion – Production of a Business Prospectus, in that they both had businesses registered within the district of Bromsgrove.

98\25 TO CONFIRM THE ACCURACY OF THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COUNCIL HELD ON 3RD DECEMBER 2025

The minutes of the meeting of Council held on 3rd December 2025 were submitted.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of Council held on 3rd December 2025 be approved as a true and correct record.

99\25 **TO RECEIVE ANY ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM THE CHAIRMAN AND/OR HEAD OF PAID SERVICE**

The Chairman congratulated two trustees of the Friends of St. John's Church who had raised over £500,000 for restoration works to the Church, as part of a programme of heritage activities. In addition, as part of efforts to commemorate the fourth year of the invasion of Ukraine, the Chairman had visited the Ukrainian Community in Bromsgrove and reaffirmed support for the Ukrainian Community within the District.

Council was also advised that a fundraising event was due to take place on 27th March 2026 which would be raising money for The Basement Project.

The Head of Paid Service confirmed that he had no announcements to make on this occasion.

100\25 **TO RECEIVE ANY ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM THE LEADER**

The Leader wished Councillor S. A. Robinson a happy birthday and updated Council that a letter was due to be sent to the Post Office, in opposition to the branch closing in Bromsgrove, on behalf of the Council.

101\25 **TO RECEIVE COMMENTS, QUESTIONS OR PETITIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC**

There were no comments, questions or petitions from members of the public to be received by Council.

102\25 **URGENT DECISIONS**

Council was advised that no urgent decisions had been taken since the previous meeting.

103\25 **RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE CABINET FROM THE MEETING ON 7TH JANUARY AND 18TH FEBRUARY 2026**

Council considered recommendations arising from the meetings of the Cabinet held on 7th January and 18th February 2026.

Pay Policy Statement 2026/27

The Leader advised that the Localism Act 2011 required English and Welsh local authorities to produce an annual Pay Policy Statement. The Act required the statement to be approved by Full Council and to be adopted by 31st March each year for the subsequent financial year.

The purpose of the statement was to provide transparency with regard to the Council's approach to setting the pay of its employees by identifying;

- the methods by which salaries of all employees were determined;
- the detail and level of remuneration of the most senior staff i.e. 'chief officers', as defined by the relevant legislation; and
- the Committee(s) responsible for ensuring the provisions set out in this statement were applied consistently throughout the Council and for recommending any amendments to the full Council.

The Council's pay and grading structure comprised grades 1 – 11. These were followed by grades for Managers, Assistant Director 1, Assistant Director 2, the Director of Worcestershire Regulatory Services (WRS), Executive Director, Deputy Chief Executive and then Chief Executive; all of which arose following the introduction of shared services between Bromsgrove District and Redditch Borough Councils.

Within each grade, there were a number of salary scale points. Up to and including grade 11 scale, at spinal column point 43, the Council used the nationally negotiated pay spine. Salary points above this were locally determined. All Council posts were allocated to a grade within this pay structure, based on the application of a Job Evaluation process. Posts at the level of Managers and above were evaluated by an external assessor using the Hay Job Evaluation scheme. As with the majority of authorities, the Council was committed to the Local Government Employers' national pay bargaining framework in respect of the national pay spine and annual cost of living increases negotiated with the trade unions.

All other pay related allowances were the subject of either nationally or locally negotiated rates. The Council was managed by a corporate leadership team who managed shared services across both Bromsgrove District and Redditch Borough Councils. All of the senior officer posts listed had been job evaluated on this basis, with the salary costs for these posts split equally between both Councils.

The policy also set out:

- The recruitment of Chief Officers
- Additions to the salaries of Chief Officers (Members were informed that there was no performance related pay)
- Termination payments
- Advertisement/publicity of posts

The documentation within the main agenda pack reflected the current year's pay structure agreed with the unions, as the national bargaining process for the current year had not yet concluded. The pay structure would be updated during the year to reflect the nationally agreed position once the national bargaining process had concluded and the new pay settlement was confirmed for April 2026 onwards.

As part of the national bargaining process the Council's lowest pay level would always meet the national minimum living wage levels, which were uplifted annually. The Council's national pay bargaining outcome, if increased, was usually applied in October and backdated to the beginning of the financial year. To ensure the lowest pay level always met the minimum living wage, an adjustment would be made at the beginning of the financial year to ensure that the Council remained compliant with its minimum living wage undertaking

It was noted that for some senior officer posts that were primarily based at Redditch Borough Council, the cost to Bromsgrove District Council was less than 50%. This reflected that these postholders predominantly undertook duties in the Borough of Redditch.

It was further noted that local government reorganisation was due to take place. The Leader set out that a £2.5m Risk and Resilience Budget, as well as £0.5m for years one and two of transition had been budgeted for. This reflected the Council's position that any staff impacted by local government reorganisation could be protected and hopefully obtain roles within the new local authority landscape.

The recommendation was proposed by Councillor K. May and seconded by Councillor S. T. Nock.

RESOLVED that

1) The Pay Policy Statement 2026/27 be approved;
2) The budget setting process confirm the Council's commitment to paying the higher level 'real living wage' for the coming financial year.

Bromsgrove Council Plan Update

The new Council Plan began development with sessions supported by the Local Government Association (LGA) in 2023. The priority areas identified during these sessions were further progressed in two workshops in Spring 2024, which brought together the Cabinet and Corporate Leadership Team to consolidate the learning and direction identified with the LGA, in combination with relevant data, into a new vision for the District, with distinct priorities and key objectives for the next four years. These were articulated in the plan as the overarching vision, which focused on the quality of life of local communities, and four new priorities:

- Economic Development
- Housing
- Environment
- Infrastructure (this priority underpins the ones above

The Council Plan 2024/27 articulated the priorities for Bromsgrove District Council. Following approval by Cabinet in July 2024, the report summarised progress from August 2024 up to December 2025, highlighting areas of work that had contributed to the delivery of priority objectives, projects and visions of the Council Plan.

Economic Development

Economic development was central to delivering the Council Plan, which focused on supporting businesses, creating opportunities for individuals, and strengthening communities.

The economically active population within the District was 83.9%, this was higher than both the West Midlands and Great Britain averages, with the economically inactive figure at 16.1%, considerably lower than the regional and national figures. The District was well positioned to take advantage of regional economic and employment opportunities.

Through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF), numerous grants had been awarded during the period, including Skills Boost Grants and match-funded Business Grants. The UKSPF had also provided funding for Enterprising Worcestershire, Careers Worcestershire, various employability schemes and the Growth Hub.

Support for growing businesses had also been provided through the Elevate programme. Elevate had two strands, one for all businesses, and Elevate Manufacturing which supported the manufacturing sector. These programmes supported businesses that had been trading for more than 3 years to develop their growth plans to scale-up their business.

The new Innovation Lighthouse programme had aimed to drive growth, competitiveness, and resilience in the local manufacturing sector. Participants had received bespoke, one-to-one support from the Warwick Manufacturing Group to develop new products or processes. They were also able to apply for a match-funded grant to deliver their project

Bromsgrove Town Centre had continued to develop, the market had been recognised nationally, and the Town Centre had continued to host events. Work was progressing around a Town Centre Framework, which aimed to support the development of a potential Business Improvement District (BID). Action had also been taken through the courts to close shops that were selling illegal tobacco and vape items.

Work continued to be delivered in line with the Bromsgrove Centres Strategy (2023–2026) and officers had provided support across all district centres as issues or challenges arose. This flexible approach ensured that businesses, community partners and parish councils received timely guidance, practical assistance and specialist expertise. Recent work had included supporting centre-based projects and public-realm improvements, such as the Rubery installation, and had facilitated local enhancements such as efforts to support the introduction of InPost lockers in Alvechurch. Officers had also continued to contribute to planning and delivery for events and activities across the District, including major seasonal events such as the annual Christmas Lights programme, which provided a welcoming centre for residents, visitors and businesses.

There had also been a focus on improved parking, several of the District's car parks had received national Park Mark status, EV charging points had been installed and the annual Free Parking Day at Christmas time had continued to take place.

Housing

The Council Plan set out the Council's aspiration to create thriving and inclusive communities where everyone had access to safe, healthy, affordable, and environmentally responsible housing options.

Bromsgrove District Council, in partnership with Bromsgrove District Housing Trust (BDHT), had carried out research into the supply and demand for temporary accommodation and accommodation for those presenting as homeless. The resulting strategy had recommended that additional static temporary accommodation units were made available for homeless households. The Council had also collaborated with other Districts in Worcestershire to develop a Shared Homelessness Strategy for 2026-2031, in line with the Government's National Plan to End Homelessness.

The Council had also explored a range of options to support and increase the supply of accommodation. The authority had made a grant available from low-cost housing receipts for BDHT to purchase additional units of temporary accommodation and permanent social rented housing to support the homelessness service to move households more quickly out of temporary accommodation into permanent accommodation. In addition, the Council was also developing an Empty Homes Strategy to work with homeowners or landlords of empty properties to bring them back into use.

Support for the private rented sector had continued to develop, the Council had hosted a Private Sector Landlord Forum, which had been an opportunity to share best practice, get practical advice, and build stronger links between landlords and the Council. The Council had also been working with the Citizens Advice Bureau to develop a debt advice service to Private Tenants and homeowners. This new service ensured that where rent arrears and mortgage arrears were putting a home at risk, that households would be able to access support and advice to prevent homelessness. Bromsgrove District Council had been designated the lead constituent authority in Worcestershire for the Renters Rights Act 2025, to ensure consistency for renters and landlords across the county.

Environment
The Council Plan was committed to safeguarding the natural environment, and addressed biodiversity and climate change mitigation measures by supporting recycling and reducing waste.

Increased environmental enforcement had helped to protect the environment within the District and minimise pollution. Since Worcestershire Regulatory Services (WRS) had assumed control of the enviro-crime functions on behalf of Bromsgrove District and Redditch Borough Councils, 11 Community Protection Notices, 47 Fixed Penalty Notices (FPNs) and 1 section 215 notice had been served. The team was committed to educating businesses and the public on waste disposal methods, the reduction of fly-tipping and anticipated the serving of more FPNs when necessary.

The Council Plan also set out the steps the District had taken to comply with the Environment Act and means to reduce waste and increase recycling. The Council was compliant with dry recycling requirements of Simpler Recycling across Domestic and Commercial Waste Services. The Commercial Food Waste service had been implemented, and service expansion had been approved, as such, it was anticipated that additional clients would be secured. In addition, residential food waste collection was due to be implemented in 2026, with capital funding from Central Government.

The Council remained committed to improving the waste management systems; an essential bin-swap programme had been delivered, which had brought the Council in line with national standards. In 2025, Bromsgrove District Council had introduced HVO (Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil) as a renewable diesel alternative across its fleet and machinery; which had resulted in approximately 30% of HVO fuel usage across the fleet and the reduction of carbon output of operating services. The refuse fleet replacement programme had run until January 2026 for 15 new environmentally friendly and efficient vehicles, old trucks had been sold for parts and scrap, proceeds of which had gone back to the public purse.

Infrastructure
The infrastructure priority underpinned all the other priorities, as the other three could only be delivered with the right infrastructure in place.

The Local Plan provided a guide for how future homes, businesses, and infrastructure be developed across the District. As part of the Local Plan process, a consultation on the Draft Development Strategy had been undertaken for 16 weeks, from 30th June to 20th October 2025, based on the requirements of the Statement of Community Involvement, which identified who and how any consultation should take place. Social media posts had generated 785 engagements and 20 individual consultation events had been delivered across the District to allow residents to access an event near them, including centrally accessible events in Bromsgrove town centre. Approximately 8,000 responses had been received via the various methods of engagement offered which were being reviewed by planning officers

Air quality within the District had continued to be of importance, Clean Air Day was marked each June and the Behavioural Change Officer and colleagues had visited schools across Bromsgrove to promote behavioural change. Several businesses and community groups in Hanover Street and Redditch Road had also been visited to raise awareness of air quality, promote the real time air quality monitoring portal and wider behavioural change. The Council's Air Quality Annual Status Report has been produced and submitted to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. This had led to the revocation of air quality management areas in Redditch Road, Bromsgrove and Lickey End, Bromsgrove due to improved results from air quality monitoring.

Through working closely with employees across the organisation, the Council had identified the '4Ps' as a way of defining organisational culture and the aspirations of everyone who worked for Bromsgrove District Council, namely, Purpose, People, Pride and Performance.

From the comments and questions by members of Council, the following responses were made, and issues highlighted:

- The Leader undertook to provide further clarity related to centre-based projects, including the Rubery Installation to Members.
- The update table assessed progress against the four new priorities using a RAG rating, which determined if workstreams had been graded as either green, amber or red.
- It was noted that updates in relation to the Council Plan were captured using the Power BI dashboard, which linked information from service business plans, quarterly performance and project highlight reports into a single summary of the Council's progress which was updated in live time.
- Further information to support Members to access Power BI would be cascaded to group leaders.
- A cross-party group was due to be formed to progress the Town Centres Framework and Bromsgrove BID workstreams.
- The Bromsgrove 2040 Strategy had been implemented in part and remaining areas had been largely incorporated into the Council Plan 2024/27 to align with local government reorganisation timescales, with work to be further developed.
- The CCTV team had logged 348 CCTV incidents, completed 234 footage reviews and produced 81 videos for evidence. A new camera had also been installed at Bromsgrove bus station, following a successful "Hot Spot" Funding Application through West Mercia Police.
- The Leader undertook to provide further information detailing the Council's preparedness in relation to cyber security and Artificial Intelligence.

- There were no local authorities within Worcestershire which offered a residential food waste collection service, however this was due to be rolled out in Bromsgrove in 2026.
- The new Climate Change Strategy which had been developed during 2025, was due to appear before the Overview and Scrutiny Board, prior to adoption, in 2026.
- UK Shared Prosperity Funding was required to be allocated to recipients by 31st March 2026.
- Further updates would be provided to Council Members on a regular basis.

The recommendation was proposed by Councillor K. May and seconded by Councillor S. T. Nock.

RESOLVED that the Council Plan report and update table be noted.

Medium Term Financial Plan Stage 2 Budget Report 2026/2027 to 2028/2029 (including Capital Strategy, Investment Strategy and Treasury Management Strategy)

The Portfolio Holder for Finance presented the Stage Two of Bromsgrove District Council's Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) for 2026/27 to 2028/29 (including Capital Strategy, Investment Strategy and Treasury Management Strategy) for the consideration of Council.

The tabled report incorporated consultation feedback, settlement certainty, and fees and charges proposed alongside planned capital expenditure, a review of earmarked reserves and a proposed strategy relating to the flexible use of capital receipts.

For the municipal year of 2026/27, Council's determination and setting of the Council Tax was due to take place in two parts. Subject to approval of the Stage Two of the MTFP 2026/27 to 2028/29, it was proposed that Council would approve the final council tax setting position on 6th March 2026. This was to await the determination of external precepts, including the precept from Worcestershire County Council, and therefore enable council tax billing to be generated correctly.

The phased approach represented the Council's commitment to transparency within the changing and complex financial landscape affecting local authorities nationally.

It was highlighted that the proposed budget was balanced for the coming year and was forecast to remain so across the following two-year period of the MTFP, this was indicative of a forecast sustainable financial position across the medium term.

A forecast deficit position had been calculated for 2026/27 at £1.03m, with a further deficit of £399,000 predicted in year 2027/28.

In constructing the proposed budget base assumptions had been used to measure financial resilience and robustness of the Council's position.

Tax Base and Corporate Financing Assumptions were:

- That Council Tax would rise by the full 2.99% current allowable increase in year one (estimated increase of £300,000) and in all subsequent years. The tax base growth assumed an increase of 50 properties at £13,000, increasing to 50 properties in 2027/28 at increase values totalling £39,000.
- Business rates had previously assumed growth in the base based on the combined Herefordshire pooling figures. However, due to the Fairer Funding review no increase or growth had been built in as no pooling would take place and no growth was expected above the 10% levy applying to all Councils for 100% of baseline need growth. This was an area which was affected by late adjustments to the funding formula.
- Government Grants and New Homes Bonus were planned to be merged into larger ring-fenced grants to reduce complexity.
- Extended Producer Responsibility for packaging (EPR) of £1,766,905 was required to be spent on waste related services in line with the PACKUK guidance. The Council was reviewing how it could maximise use of the grant to relieve pressure on core budgets.
- Inflation was at 3.4% at December 2025.
- Fees and charges had been reviewed by individual service areas, with a maximum uplift of at least 2% in each area (where statutory caps applied) and an average of 3.8% across all areas.
- The Council was required to implement the new Waste Requirements from April 2026, in 2025/26 £950,000 was budgeted for this, to increase to £1m in 2027/28 on a continuing basis.
- The outcome of the Fairer Funding Review of additional support grant and retained business rates had resulted in a reduction of £2m phased in over three years, as detailed:
    - 2026/27: £500,000
    - 2027/28: £900,000
    - 2028/29: £2m
- Central Government had consolidated several grants together, these included the previous New Homes Bonus and the merger of Homelessness Prevention Grants, Rough Sleeping Initiatives and Temporary Accommodation Support.
- A contingency of £500,000 had been built into the MTFP for the following two years as part of earmarked reserves to support preparation for local government reorganisation. This figure was calculated following discussions with other District Councils and Worcestershire County Council, as well as costs related to estimations around the backfilling of posts.

The Chancellor's Statement had been announced on 26th November 2025, which was later than in previous years. It was a multi-year settlement covering 2026/27 to 2028/29 and was underpinned by the outcomes of the Fairer Funding Review which aimed to distribute resources more equitably based on assessed local need.

A suite of national policy changes had also been announced, whilst most had a limited direct financial impact upon the Council, these policy changes had formed the funding and policy context in which the MTFP must be managed. These policy change included:

- The high-value Property Surcharge from April 2028 required properties worth over £2m to pay an annual surcharge. However, as revenue was to be received by Central Government, this would not generate any additional income for the Council.
- District Councils retained the ability to increase council tax within referendum limits, although no additional local tax-raising powers had been introduced. This meant the ongoing financial stability of the Council was reliant on the maximisation of council tax increases, alongside savings and the maximisation of income.
- The lack of an additional core funding uplift beyond the rate of inflation had placed pressure on the Council's revenue budget, alongside pressures and demand upon services, which had reinforced the need for efficiency savings.
- Investments announced through the Government's 'Pride in Place' programme were targeted at areas of high deprivation and was available to local authorities following a competitive bidding process only.

The Council had entered the 2026/27 budget process sighted on a number of issues to address, these included:

- A deficit balance of £1.03m in the 2026/27 budget.
- An anticipated reduction in funding from the Fairer Funding Review of around £2m phased in over three years.
- The requirement to fund the higher than envisaged 2025/26 pay award at an additional cost of £28,000.
- The limitation on increases to council tax at 2.99% or £5, which was significantly lower than preceding and current rates of inflation.

Whilst it was acknowledged that the Council was facing significant pressures, this was not unique as all local authorities faced them. Stage 2 of the proposed budget had adjusted for the funding provided by Central Government and had reviewed a number of actions to close the gap. This review had resulted in the following actions having been undertaken:

- Work had been undertaken to maximise grants. There had been a large element of work around the Extended Producer Responsibility Grant.
- Work was currently being undertaken by Internal Audit around the Council's use of agency staff to provide assurance around ensuring agency work reflected the income provided for its delivery. Reporting mechanisms had also been put in place internally to review levels of agency staff on a regular basis.
- Finance Business Partners had worked closely with services to undertake reviews of services to identify potential savings opportunities without impacting on service delivery.
- A full review of vacant posts had been undertaken by the Senior Leadership Team in conjunction with HR.
- The review of fees and charges had been undertaken individually instead of through the application of a blanket percentage increase to maximise service income opportunities.
- A review had been undertaken to assess the appropriateness of further capitalisation of salaries.
- A full and in-depth review of earmarked reserves had been completed, this had resulted in the releasing of sums that had previously been set aside that were no longer required. This had enabled available funding to be re-aligned and directed to meet the Council's needs and priorities.
- The District continued to progress work to position services ready for Local Government Reorganisation. Several workstreams had been set up to begin planning for the new unitary based structure.
- Grant funding of £523,000 in 2026/27, £555,000 in 2027/28 and £596,000 in 2028/29 had been received for Homelessness, Rough Sleeping and Domestic Abuse.
- The Council was due to receive £73,000 in 2026/27 and 2027/28 relating to the Crisis and Resilience Fund. This provided funds to support residents facing financial hardship and built long-term financial resilience in communities.
- Additional costs relating to WRS were £25,000 on an ongoing basis relating to the Food Standards Agency. These pressures were salary related.
- Revenue Service pressures and savings had been considered. A total of £68,000 revenue bids had been included in 2026/27 as part of the MTFP, to reduce to £65,000 in future years. A further £566,000 of pressures had been identified in 2026/27, with £545,000 in 2027/28 and £742,000 in 2028/29. There were net savings of £622,000 in 2026/27, with £666,000 in 2027/28 and £690,000 in 2028/29.

The Budget Position 2026/27- 2028/29

Significant financial pressures upon the Council were increasing. At Quarter Two, the overall revenue financial position was a forecast £336,000 overspend position, although this was expected to reduce. Both Members and senior management had worked hard to mitigate pressures during this period and initial projections for Quarter Three indicated that a more balanced year end position was likely.

The total savings identified for delivery in the 2025/26 year period were £1.213m, although £319,000 was yet to be delivered. Of this £1.213m, over £250,000 was made up of departmental efficiencies from the 2025/26 MTFP, £511,000 staff turnover rate (based on 5% of staffing budgets) and an ongoing savings budget pressure of £400,000.

Central Government had also announced that Elected Members would be eligible to rejoin the Local Government Pension Scheme. Whilst no date for this had been confirmed by the date of the meeting, this represented an additional financial pressure upon local authorities which would not be receiving extra funding to support this.

Fees and Charges
A full review had been undertaken of individual fees and charges to identify whether an additional level of charges could be applied. Whilst it was originally assumed that fees and charges would increase by 2%, reflecting a £100,000 increase, this had been revised following a robust forecasting exercise and would result in further income of £152,000 in 2026/27 and £153,000 from 2027/28 onwards.

Impact on Reserves
The Council held a General Fund balance of £13.38m and Earmarked Reserves of £11.27m.

It was recognised that the Council was required to safeguard financial sustainability in the medium and long term by continuing to set balanced budgets. Endeavours to achieve this could require targeted investment, efficiency measures and funding for redundancy costs as a last resort. These actions were a financial priority to enable the Council to adapt its operating model to remain viable, particularly in the context of a potential future North Worcestershire unitary arrangement.

A full review of reserves had been undertaken by the Assistant Director of Finance and Customer Services to ensure that the reserves were still required for their original purpose. This review had identified £5.944m of reserves that were no longer required for their original purpose and were to be transferred to the General Fund.

It was recommended that several new reserves should be created. The proposed reserves were as follows:

- £500,000 in 2026/27 and 2027/28 for work on Local Government Reorganisation. It was proposed that this would contribute towards the setting up of the new unitary council over the following two years.
- A £2.5m Risk and Resilience Reserve to cover the risks identified within the budget relating to recruitment drag, inflation cap, committed savings, and council tax collection rates.

- A £1.25m Community Investment Fund to enable agile investment to meet local community needs to support the council's priorities both directly and through partner organisations and community groups. Criteria for qualifying projects within the Community Investment Reserve funded programme was required to be aligned with the Council Plan and corporate priorities. The programme themes would be supported by a robust governance framework and were to be reported to Cabinet at its first meeting in the new financial year.
- £102,000 for air quality data via Particulate Monitoring.

It was further proposed that the reserves would be utilised to fund the extension of three posts until March 2027, to ensure the continuity of the Innovation Lighthouse Programme after 31st March 2026 and fund costs that were associated with the Tech One licence and AMS support.

Forecasts indicated that following the review of reserves, the Council would hold General Fund balances of £12.402m and Reserves of £12.245m.

Capital Programme
The projected carry forward positions as set out in the Quarter 3 Monitoring Report were £552,000 which would be carried forward to 2026/27.

The priority in capital terms was for the Council to spend its grant funding of £3.4m. The Council held the following:

- £2.5m Levelling Up Funding (LUF) to utilise on the Windsor Street Redevelopment.
- £0.8m Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) funding.
- £0.1m Warm Homes Grant funding which was a Government initiative to improve the energy efficiency of properties.

Several capital bids were included within the budget. These amounted to £4.738m over 2026/27 and 2027/28. The key areas of investment were as follows:

- £0.801m Infrastructure
- £2.580m Buildings
- £1.000m Play Audits
- £0.170m Parks
- £0.020m Biodiversity
- £0.025m IT / Cyber
- £0.142m Other

The Capital Programme was closely linked to the Asset Strategy, Treasury Management Strategy, Minimum Revenue Provision Policy and Asset Investment Strategy. These strategies set out how the Council invested and borrowed funds and with which parties.

The opinion of the Section 151 Officer was that the risks contained in the 2026/27 proposed budget estimates had been minimised as far as was possible.

The Council had well established phased budget and council tax setting arrangements, this included ongoing scrutiny engagement via an established Finance and Budget Working Group, and Members were well sighted on and engaged with the progress of budget setting. These arrangements had been followed when compiling the 2026/27 budget and medium-term forecasts. In addition, an appropriately prudent approach had been taken to the estimates and assumptions used in the preparation of the MTFP. The MTFP set out the key estimates and assumptions used, including those related to future inflation, interest rates on investments and borrowing, Government funding, business rates and Council Tax.

In line with Section 25 of the Local Government Act 2003, the report of the Chief Financial Officer (CFO) set out the robustness of estimates included in the budget and the adequacy of the Council's reserves. The Chief Financial Officer's opinion was that the estimates were robust.

Attention was drawn to the following:

- There was significant uncertainty remaining in relation to the impact of local government reorganisation on the Council.
- There was significant inherent risk posed by the previous years' disclaimed financial statements, and continued progress of all matters pertaining to the section 24 recommendations was essential. This was an area which would require the Section 151 Officer, in consultation with the External Auditors, to agree their programme to ensure all recommendations were met.
- It was proposed that progress against the agreed programme would be overseen by the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee.
- Previously, the Council had not had a detailed plan in place to underpin financial sustainability in the event of significant unforeseen financial pressures. The Section 151 Officer had undertaken to address this, and the matter had been added to the Cabinet Work Programme for forward planning purposes and would be reported thereafter to Members.
- The Council's internal borrowing levels were indicative of an underlying borrowing requirement and the consequent impact on cashflow was compounded by the outstanding VAT recovery sums, which were being progressed with the support of an independent external tax specialist. Capital financing arrangements and the treasury policy were subject to a comprehensive independent review, this would be overseen by the Section 151 Officer and aimed to conclude by the end of quarter one of the following financial year.

- The Council was operating under no overall political control, as such, deliverance of the budget outcomes relied on continued political collaboration and cooperation.

Members in attendance noted that the Council set its budget as an integral part of a 3-year MTFP annually, with the final Council Tax Resolution due to be approved by Council in March 2026, following County Council determination of their precept.

The recommendations were proposed by Councillor S. T. Nock and seconded by Councillor K. May.

In accordance with the Local Authorities (Standing Orders) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2014, the decision in respect of this matter was taken by holding a formal recorded vote and the results were as follows:

Members Voting FOR the Medium Term Financial Plan 2026/27 to 2028/29:

Councillors S. Ammar, A. Bailes, R. Bailes, S. R. Colella, J. Elledge, S. Evans, D. J. A. Forsythe, E. M. S. Gray, D. Hopkins, C. A. Hotham, R. J. Hunter, B. Kumar, R. E. Lambert, M. Marshall, K. J. May, P. M. McDonald, B. M. McEldowney, D. Nicholl, S. T. Nock, S. R. Peters, J. W. Robinson, S. A. Robinson J. D. Stanley, K. Taylor, H. D. N. Warren-Clarke, S. A. Webb and P. J. Whittaker. (27)

Members Voting AGAINST the Medium Term Financial Plan 2026/27 to 2028/29:

No Councillors (0).

Members voting to ABSTAIN on the Medium Term Financial Plan 2026/27 to 2028/29:

No Councillors (0).

Therefore, on being put to the vote, the recommendations were carried.

RESOLVED that

1) The Growth proposals of £67,639 in 2026/27, £64,719 in 2027/28 and £64,719 in 2028/29 be approved;
2) The Directorate Pressures of £565,655 in 2026/27, £545,295 and £741,514 in 2027/28 and 2028/2029, be approved;
3) The Savings proposals of £621,899 in 2026/27, £665,991 in 2027/2028 and £690,206 be approved;
4) The Capital Programme 2026/2027 to 2029/2030, including bids of £4.738m for new capital projects, be approved;

5) Earmarked Reserves of £12.245m be carried forward into 2026/2027, be approved;
6) The new allocations within the carried forward earmarked reserves as set out in paragraph 3.30, namely the creation of a new Financial Resilience Reserve of £2.5million, a Local Government Reorganisation Reserve of £1m, a Community Investment Fund of £1.250m and a reserve for Particulate Monitoring of £102k be approved;
7) Increases relating to Worcestershire Regulatory Services of £25k for the Food Standards Agency on an ongoing basis be approved;
8) The Flexible Use of Capital Receipts Strategy be approved;
9) The proposed Council Tax increase of 2.99% for the 2026/2027 be approved;
10) The updated fees and charges for Commercial Waste Services be approved for adoption in the 2026/2027 financial year.

Particulate Matter

The Portfolio Holder for Planning, Licensing and WRS presented the report.

Poor air quality was the largest environmental risk to public health in the UK. The mortality burden of air pollution in England was estimated to be between 26,000 and 38,000 a year, but many people suffered further avoidable chronic ill health as a result of it.

Particulate Matter (PM) was considered to be the most important air pollutant in terms of health impacts. Long-term exposure to PM increased mortality and morbidity from cardiovascular and respiratory diseases and caused cancer. Effects were amplified in vulnerable groups including young children, the elderly, and those suffering from breathing problems like asthma. It was also causally linked to dementia and declines in cognitive functions. Furthermore, there was growing evidence for associations with adverse birth outcomes and diabetes.

PM was not a single air pollutant, the composition of particles was very complex, comprising variable amounts of organic and inorganic chemicals derived from direct emissions or from atmospheric processing.

Following a successful bid to DEFRA's Air Quality Grant Scheme 2022-23, 26 low-cost Air Quality sensors had been installed across Worcestershire for a period of 3 years between January and May 2024.

Sensor locations had been chosen to maximise data capture within locations proximal to vulnerable communities, opportunities to encourage behavioural change and from a range of sources of air pollution including transport, solid fuel burning, industry and agriculture.

Three of the 26 sensors were installed in the Bromsgrove District area, and these were located at:

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

WRS had been asked by the Council to prepare an options paper for additional PM Monitoring within the Bromsgrove District Council area.

Various options had been presented to the Council to enable the authority to measure total particulate matter mass concentration.

Cabinet had supported Option E which proposed maintaining current sensors and extended monitoring life for a further period of time, and a source apportionment study with the University of Birmingham on a mobile supersite. This would provide a unique insight into the PM profile in Worcestershire utilising state of the art air quality monitoring equipment and supported by academic expertise from the University of Birmingham.

Members in attendance endorsed the report and the proposals which had been tabled for consideration.

The recommendations were proposed by Councillor K. Taylor and seconded by Councillor K. May.

RESOLVED that

1) Additional monitoring of Particulate Matter (air pollution) be delivered as set out in Option E;
2) Subject to funding being identified and allocated accordingly, a further report be brought back to Cabinet once final costs had been identified;
3) Additional funding of £105,234.04 be added to the revenue budget for 2026/27.

(Following consideration of the above matter referred to at Minute No. 103/25 the meeting was adjourned between the hours of 8.11pm and 8.21pm hours.)

104\25 **TO NOTE THE MINUTES OF THE MEETINGS OF THE CABINET HELD ON 18TH FEBRUARY 2026**

The minutes from the Cabinet meeting held on 18th February 2026 were noted without comment.

105\25 **RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE AUDIT, STANDARDS AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE HELD ON 17TH FEBRUARY 2026**

Council considered recommendations arising from the meeting of the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee held on 17th February 2026.

Capital Strategy 2026/27 Including Treasury Management Strategy

The Chair of the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee presented the report.

Members were advised that the meeting of the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee had taken place on 17th February 2026 at which recommendations had been agreed for the consideration of Council. Whilst there had not been sufficient time to prepare the minutes of that meeting in time for Council, recommendations had been tabled for Members' consideration.

Council was provided with an overview of capital expenditure, borrowing levels, prudential indicators and treasury risk management, and the impact upon the deliverance of public services.

The strategy set limits and indicators for risk management and the implications upon financial stability. It was noted that the strategy was set following consideration of the MTFP, the UK economic context and projected interest rates.

The treasury function managed cash flow into the local authority so that demands of expenditure could be met and resourced within the financial constraints in which the authority operated.

The CIPFA Code of Practice for Treasury Management in Public Services and the Prudential Code required local authorities to set the Treasury Management Strategy Statement and prudential indicators each financial year.

It was noted that the risk register had been considered by the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee, and had subsequently been updated to incorporate Development Control.

The recommendations were proposed by Councillor E. M. S. Gray and seconded by Councillor S. T. Nock.

RESOLVED that

1) The Capital Strategy be approved as an appropriate overarching strategy for the Council;
2) The Treasury Management Strategy 2026/27 and the associated Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) be approved;
3) The Investment Strategy be approved.

106\25 **QUESTIONS ON NOTICE**

The Chairman advised that there had been six Questions on Notice submitted for consideration at this meeting.

At the start of this item the Chairman agreed that Councillor S. Robinson's question could be considered first at the meeting.

Question submitted by Councillor S. Robinson

"What is this Council doing to ensure that there is enough provision sought from developers for High School provision in Bromsgrove?"

The Leader responded by outlining that the Council was actively communicating with Worcestershire County Council as the local authority with the statutory responsibility for education provision. As part of the local plan consultation exercise, information relating to new educational provision had been provided by Worcestershire County Council. This response, alongside others, had been considered and had contributed to the draft local plan and the infrastructure development plan. These plans would be utilised to identify the scale and location of education provision necessary to support proposed development, and to meet demand. It was noted that County Councillors were aiming to propose a Task and Finish review of education provision through Worcestershire County Council's Overview and Scrutiny Board.

Councillor S. Robinson subsequently asked a supplementary question which sought further information regarding consultation with stakeholders and individual schools.

The Leader responded by explaining that school capacity varied by locality and that data was being collated, however assurances were made that appropriate consultation would take place where appropriate, should the proposed establishment of the Task and Finish Group at Worcestershire County Council be approved.

Question submitted by Councillor S. Ammar

This question was withdrawn.

Question submitted by Councillor J. Clarke

"Can you give an update on the food waste collection service and whether all the other district/borough/city councils in Worcestershire will be collecting their food waste this year?"

Council was advised that the response would be sent to all Members in writing.

Question submitted by Councillor R. Hunter

“Are you concerned that communities in the town of Bromsgrove will be left with poorer services if Bromsgrove is the only town, apart from Redditch, in Worcestershire without a town council following reorganisation?”

The Leader responded by outlining that the Council had supported a two-unitary proposal as part of the local government reorganisation. She acknowledged that the structure of local government was very important to the District’s communities, particularly during a period of change. The English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill placed a duty on local authorities to ensure effective governance at neighbourhood level, however did not prescribe specific structures, although indicated that neighbourhood area committees could form part of the future neighbourhood governance landscape. It was highlighted that any future governance arrangements should ensure that residents were heard and given opportunities to interact with Councillors at a place-based level, which should reflect natural population centres and local identity to encourage both localism and community participation.

Councillor R. Hunter subsequently asked a supplementary question which sought further information about the feasibility of a Community Governance Review.

The Leader responded by outlining that the Council was waiting for further information from Central Government, which would inform the best route forward for the future establishment of local government structures.

Question submitted by Councillor D. Nicholl

“Consultation on the draft local plan closed on October 20th, when can the public expect the results to be published?”

The Portfolio Holder for Planning, Licensing and WRS responded by outlining that over 8,000 responses had been received during the consultation. These responses were being collated at pace, and the interim findings would be presented to the Local Plan Cross Party Working Group in March 2026.

Councillor D. Nicholl subsequently asked a supplementary question, querying whether the Council was on schedule or at risk of not meeting deadlines. The Cabinet Member for Planning, Licensing and WRS undertook to provide a response in writing, following a forthcoming meeting of the Local Plan Cross Party Working Group.

Question submitted by Councillor J. Robinson

“How soon do you think Churchfields Car Park could be brought back into use to help meet our ambition to increase footfall in the town centre?”

The Leader responded by acknowledging that the matter had been considered at a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board on 10th February 2026. It was noted that costs related to remediation works were due to be provided for consideration at a future meeting of the Board. The Leader outlined that this matter was important for the local authority and that any timescales associated with the re-opening of the car park would be relayed to Members when further information was available.

Councillor J. Robinson subsequently asked a supplementary question which sought further information around timescales.

The Leader responded by outlining that further information and data around car park usage would most likely be available in the new municipal year.

107\25 **MOTIONS ON NOTICE (TO FOLLOW)**

The Chairman highlighted that two Motions on Notice had been submitted for consideration at the Council meeting.

Flooring in Social Housing

Councillor R. Hunter presented the following Motion on Notice for Members’ consideration, in accordance with Procedure Rule 10.

“Council calls on Cabinet to ask officers to work with Bromsgrove District Housing Trust (BDHT) and central government to explore opportunities to end the practice of letting social housing without adequate flooring in Bromsgrove. This will include exploring whether BDC and its successor authority can be included in the national working group and pilot.”

In presenting the motion, Councillor R. Hunter noted that it was not a mandatory requirement for floor coverings to be provided as part of a tenancy agreement. It was highlighted that the Government had recently published an updated Decent Homes Standard which set out that a national working group and pilot would take place to consider the matter of funded flooring for social housing tenants.

The motion was proposed by Councillor R. Hunter and seconded by Councillor S. Ammar.

In seconding the motion, Councillor S. Ammar acknowledged that this matter was of importance to those living in the District with enhanced vulnerabilities and those with less than average disposable incomes.

The Cabinet Member for Planning, Licensing and WRS, outlined that a meeting was due to take place with BDHT, in consultation with Councillor R. Hunter to discuss the matter and provided assurances that he supported the motion in principle.

Members subsequently debated the motion and agreed that they supported the motion and outlined that finished flooring, in most circumstances, was necessary to provide a safe, comfortable and warm home.

In summing up Councillor R. Hunter thanked Members for supporting the motion and stressed the importance of a safe, secure and appropriate home to support the wellbeing of tenants.

RESOLVED that

"Council calls on Cabinet to ask officers to work with Bromsgrove District Housing Trust (BDHT) and central government to explore opportunities to end the practice of letting social housing without adequate flooring in Bromsgrove. This will include exploring whether BDC and its successor authority can be included in the national working group and pilot."

Production of a Business Prospectus

Councillor S. Ammar presented the following Motion on Notice for Members' consideration, in accordance with Procedure Rule 10.

''Council understands the importance of attracting small and medium businesses and helping them grow and thrive in our area.

Council asks the Cabinet to consider producing a concise Business Prospectus bringing together useful information about available grants, incentives, guidance, and clear signposting of business opportunities in the north of the County. This will be a single market-ready document to be distributed across Bromsgrove and subject to agreement from Redditch Borough Council and Wyre Forest District Council across North Worcestershire. This document would be made available at Council offices and published digitally on the Council's website.

The Business Prospectus will act as a springboard to establish the new local authority as a champion of local small and medium businesses. It will make it easier to do business in our area, showcase credible projects and the support available and demonstrate the Council's commitment to local economic development''

In presenting the motion, Councillor S. Ammar noted that the proposal would assist entrepreneurs in establishing a business and would support both the District's economy, and small and medium sized businesses.

The motion was proposed by Councillor S. Ammar and seconded by Councillor K. May.

In seconding the motion, Councillor K. May acknowledged that Bromsgrove had the highest number of start-ups within Worcestershire and that the consolidation of information in one place would support entrepreneurs and business leaders.

Members subsequently debated the motion and acknowledged the challenges facing small and medium businesses owners in the current economic climate and supported efforts to consolidate useful information in one place.

It was acknowledged that local businesses supported the local economy and boosted footfall on the high street and in other population centres within the District.

In summing up Councillor S. Ammar thanked Members for supporting the motion and paid tribute to local business owners.

RESOLVED that

''Council understands the importance of attracting small and medium businesses and helping them grow and thrive in our area.

Council asks the Cabinet to consider producing a concise Business Prospectus bringing together useful information about available grants, incentives, guidance, and clear signposting of business opportunities in the north of the County. This will be a single market-ready document to be distributed across Bromsgrove and subject to agreement from Redditch Borough Council and Wyre Forest District Council across North Worcestershire. This document would be made available at Council offices and published digitally on the Council's website.

The Business Prospectus will act as a springboard to establish the new local authority as a champion of local small and medium businesses. It will make it easier to do business in our area, showcase credible projects and the support available and demonstrate the Council's commitment to local economic development''

108\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 for consideration on this occasion.

The meeting closed at 9.37 p.m.

Chairman