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

14TH OCTOBER 2026, AT 6.00 P.M.

PARKSIDE SUITE - PARKSIDE

PRESENT: Councillors J. Robinson (Chairman), B. Kumar (Vice-Chairman), S. Ammar, R. Bailes, S. J. Baxter, J. Clarke, S. R. Colella, A. M. Dale, J. Elledge, S. M. Evans, D. J. A. Forsythe, E. M. S. Gray, C.A. Hotham, R. J. Hunter, R. E. Lambert, M. Marshall, K.J. May, B. McEldowney, S. T. Nock, D. J. Nicholl, S. R. Peters, 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. J. Walton, Mr. G. Revans, Ms N. Cummings, Mrs B. Talbot, Mr. M. Dunphy, Mr. D. M. Birch, Mr D Riley, Mrs. J. Bayley-Hill and Ms M. Bassett

39\26 **TO RECEIVE APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors A. Bailes, D. Hopkins and P. McDonald.

40\26 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no Declarations of Interest on this occasion.

41\26 **TO CONFIRM THE ACCURACY OF THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COUNCIL HELD ON 15TH JULY 2026**

The minutes of the Council meeting held on 15th July 2026 were submitted for Members' consideration.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Council meeting held on 15th July 2026 be approved as a true and correct record.

42\26 **TO RECEIVE ANY ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM THE CHAIRMAN AND/OR HEAD OF PAID SERVICE**

The Head of Paid Service took the opportunity to remind Members that the Council was awaiting feedback from Government in respect of Local Government Reorganisation (LGR), following the Government's

announcement in September 2026 of a pause on LGR. At the time of the meeting no further information had been received, however as soon as there were any updates, Officers would inform Members.

The Chairman paid tribute to the residents of Stourbridge who experienced devastating wildfires in August 2026. On behalf of the Council, he expressed thanks to all the emergency responders and volunteers who provided so much support during this period and to the local community who continued to provide assistance to those affected.

He also took the opportunity to thank former Councillor and former Chairman of the Council, Helen Jones, for her long service at Bromsgrove District Council over a period of almost twenty years. On behalf of Members, he wished her well for the future.

Members were informed that the Chairman's Civic event was due to take place on Sunday 18th October 2026, along with a quiz night in November. Members should all have received invitations to these events.

43\26 **TO RECEIVE ANY ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM THE LEADER**

There were no announcements from the Leader on this occasion.

44\26 **TO RECEIVE COMMENTS, QUESTIONS OR PETITIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC**

A question from Ms K. Plummer had been received for consideration at this meeting. As Ms. Plummer was unable to attend the meeting, Members were referred to the question on the relevant page within the agenda. The question was as follows:

"Bromsgrove District Council's Stourbridge road car park in Bromsgrove town centre was earmarked for sale via Cordwell Property Group in 2014. How has the council planned to use the income from this sold asset?"

The Leader and Cabinet Member for Strategic Partnerships, Economic Development and Enabling provided a response to the question and in doing so stated that when assets were sold, the Council received a capital receipt. Any funding received by capital receipt was required by law to be spent within the Council's Capital Programme (predominantly asset enhancement or delivery) and could not be used to fund service delivery.

The Council's Capital Programme was approved by Council each February and the funding for this programme was sourced from Capital Receipts, Grants, other contributions or borrowing. The capital receipt generated by the sale of Stourbridge Road car park was not ringfenced to any particular scheme or asset and would be used to support the capital programme approved by Council.

45\26 **URGENT DECISIONS**

The Chairman confirmed that no urgent decisions had been taken since the previous meeting of Council.

46\26 **TO RECEIVE AND CONSIDER A REPORT FROM THE PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR FINANCE**

The Cabinet Member for Finance presented the annual report on services within his portfolio for Members' consideration.

In doing so, the following was highlighted:

- The recent appointment of Councillor C. Hotham to the role of Chairman of the Finance and Budget Working Group. The appointment was welcomed and it was commented that a robust budget required detailed and constructive scrutiny and this appointment would ensure this was delivered. He also stated that he operated an 'open door' policy in relation to queries on any particular areas or should Members wish to raise any questions.
- The report indicated a significant milestone towards financial resilience, governance arrangements and long-term sustainability.
- The formal appointment of the Section 151 Officer in April 2026 which enabled the Council to successfully transition the focus from managing immediate pressures towards rebuilding a sustainable finance foundation in a collaborative way. Of particular note were the three following areas:
    1. Financial Resilience Programme – a comprehensive framework that moved far beyond day-to-day budget management. It enabled enhanced oversight of capital planning, treasury management arrangements and annual close down procedures, financial systems and risk management.
    2. The Golden Triangle model of senior management as recommended by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA). This model ensured a tightly

integrated approach to governance between the Head of Paid Service, the Executive Director of Finance and the Monitoring Officer.

3. Investment in Workforce Resilience – This had been achieved by transitioning away from temporary resilience by successfully recruiting to key financial roles, reducing reliance on individual officers, building professional standards and securing vital business continuity.

It was noted that the three areas of work outlined above were broader than a standard savings exercise. It was an evidence led, structured examination of the how the Council reused resources, technology assets and contracts to protect priority services. No decisions regarding service changes had been made and no savings figures were finalised because reviews were still actively validating the financial baselines. Proposals would only be brought forward following appropriate evidence-based challenge and a rigorous impact assessment.

- The next milestone involved turning this substantial review into clear deliverable options for the 2027 - 2028 Budget and Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP). Members were informed that Cabinet would consider these developing proposals in November 2026 prior to meaningful public and Member engagement leading to final Council approval in February 2027.
- Detailed monitoring and assurance would continue through the Finance and Budget Working Group and the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee for wider governance improvements. These were all positive milestones and offered a proactive and transparent approach in how historic challenges were addressed.

Following presentation of the report, Members queried who was undertaking the activities. It was noted that although they had been discussed at Audit, Standards and Governance Committee and Finance and Budget Working Group meetings not all Members might have been aware of the specific activities being undertaken. In addition, it was requested that further detail in respect of ‘the Golden Triangle’ be provided. The Section 151 Officer explained that the Senior Leadership Team and Corporate Leadership Team were involved in the work and liaising with Portfolio Holders. It was noted that a briefing could be provided to Members if necessary.

Clarification was requested in respect of potential costs that could be imposed on the Council if it refused to approve planning applications to build on Green Belt land, in the context of also having to meet the

Council's housing targets. This would be referred to the appropriate Officer, and a response provided following the meeting.

Members also requested further clarification on the delivery of savings as part of the Budget. It was noted that in previous years, savings had not always been delivered as expected. The Cabinet Member for Finance reminded Members that a balanced Budget was delivered the previous financial year and the savings referred to within the report were for 2027 - 2028 within the MTFP. The work currently underway would pick up this area. Members were informed that a Finance Business Partner had been assigned to each Service Area and were providing support to the Assistant Directors and the teams in order to deliver savings. Again, these findings would be shared through Cabinet and the Finance and Budget Working Group in order to provide transparency for all Members.

47\26 **FINDINGS OF THE FUTURE LOCAL GOVERNANCE IN BROMSGROVE WORKING GROUP - RECOMMENDATION FROM THE ELECTORAL MATTERS COMMITTEE**

The Chairman of the Electoral Matters Committee presented the Findings of the Future Local Governance in Bromsgrove Working Group - Recommendation from the Electoral Matters Committee report for Council's consideration.

In doing so, he explained the report was the result of a Motion on Notice agreed by Council in May 2026. Following this meeting, a cross-party working group had been established to consider local government arrangements, at a neighbourhood and Parish level, in Bromsgrove District.

The working group considered existing arrangements across parished and unparished areas along with neighbourhood area committees, the possible creation of a Parish or Town Council and the findings of the public engagement exercise. The findings of the working group were considered at an Electoral Matters Committee meeting in September 2026. At this meeting Members agreed that the preparatory work should continue with the focus being on the Council conducting a Community Governance Review (CGR).

Members were informed that the £30,000 cost, as detailed in the report, would fund specialist consultancy support and allow Officers to develop detailed terms of reference, a timetable and full costings. It was confirmed that the purpose of this report was not to formally commence

a CGR or create new Parish or Town Councils and that a further report would be brought before Council prior to any decisions being taken.

Following the presentation of the report, Members queried the length of the process of a CGR. It was noted that there was a statutory window of twelve months to complete a review once it had commenced. However, Members would be provided with a further report later in the municipal year to outline costings, process and timeline of a full CGR. It was noted that this activity was independent of LGR.

Some Members raised concerns that they were not in favour of this review or the preparatory work involved. It was noted that the report stated the CGR would cost £240,000. Some Members expressed the view that this was a significant expense for a process that the public had not requested particularly at a time when there were pressures from the cost of living. In addition, some Members queried whether the report should be deferred given the uncertainty around LGR. However, it was reiterated that this report only sought Members' agreement to £30,000 worth of funding.

Members expressed their disappointment that no updates in respect of LGR had been provided by the Government by the time of the meeting. Although the proposal for a North Worcestershire Unitary Council included positives and benefits, it was noted that there would be financial challenges and difficult decisions would need to be made and impacts would certainly be felt in the way in which things were funded. The majority of Bromsgrove District was covered by Parish Councils which could step in to deliver some of those services if they were not funded by a new unitary authority. In addition, Members noted that Parish Councils operated at a much more local level than other Councils and understood the residents and their needs.

It was reiterated that Bromsgrove residents would be consulted as part of this initial process to understand their thoughts for the future governance arrangements. This report would allow Officers to explore the options for governance. There were disadvantages to Parish Councils in terms of finance, as precepts which were raised at a local level, could be considered as an additional form of taxation for residents.

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

A recorded vote was requested in respect of this matter in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 18.3:

Members voting **FOR** the recommendations:

Councillors S. Ammar, R. Bailes, S. Baxter, J. Clarke, S. Colella, A. Dale, S. Evans, D. Forsythe, C. Hotham, R. Hunter, B. Kumar, R. Lambert, K. May, B. McEldowney, D. Nicholl, S. Nock, S. Robinson, J. Robinson J. Stanley, K. Taylor, S. Webb, and P. Whittaker (22).

Members voting **AGAINST** the recommendations:

Councillors J. Elledge, E. Gray, M. Marshall, S. Peters and H. Warren-Clarke (5).

Members voting to **ABSTAIN** on the recommendations:

No councillors (0).

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

RESOLVED that:

1) A budget of £30,000 be approved to fund specialist consultancy services and other associated costs to enable officers to develop a detailed report setting out the terms of reference, timetable and costs required to conduct a Community Governance Review for Council's consideration.

2) The £30,000 be allocated from Reserves.

48\26 **INTRODUCTION OF THE NATIONAL SCHEME OF DELEGATIONS OF PLANNING FUNCTIONS (TO FOLLOW)**

Prior to the presentation of this report, the Cabinet Member for Planning and Strategic Housing commented that these were challenging recommendations to present, and she expressed the view that this would impact on Members' ability to represent, support and influence decisions of importance to local communities in the future.

It was noted, however, that the Council must comply with the law and the consequences of not considering the recommendations would mean that the Authority would be unable to make any Planning decisions in the future.

It was therefore explained that an additional recommendation had been tabled at this meeting to be considered alongside the six included in the report.

The additional recommendation was as follows:

> "Council formally noted its dissatisfaction with regard to the restrictive elements of the national scheme of delegation. Notwithstanding this, as a responsible authority, Bromsgrove District Council would comply with the law. However, Members were concerned about the implications for their ability to act as locally elected representatives in the interests of their communities."

During the presentation of the report, it was explained that the implementation of the Government's mandatory National Scheme of Delegations for Planning functions was to come into force on 31st October 2026. The implementation required all local Planning Authorities to amend their Constitutions accordingly.

Applications would be categorised as either Schedule One, which must be determined by Officers under delegated powers, or Schedule Two which would only be referred to the Planning Committee if they met the Gateway test. This test related to matters of local, economic, social, environmental or significant planning importance.

The existing Member call-in process would cease, although Ward Members would have structured opportunities to make representations through a new seven stage Gateway process. Decisions on referrals would be made jointly by a nominated officer and a nominated Member with outcomes recorded and published.

It was noted that the report also recommended retaining delegated powers for certain application types such as advertisements, tree preservation order works and listed building matters to avoid unnecessary pressures on the system.

In relation to Council Member and Officer own interest applications, these would generally continue to be determined by the Planning Committee in the interests of transparency with limited exceptions for minor or technical matters.

The Chairman invited the Leader to speak and in doing so, she stated there needed to be a very clear distinction made between the Council's

legal responsibility and Members' political views of what the Government had imposed upon Planning Authorities. Members were asked to note that the Council had a duty to act lawfully.

It was reported that the statutory guidance was clear. If a Planning Committee determined an application which should legally have been delegated to Officers, that decision could be subject to judicial review and ultimately quashed.

The Council needed to ensure the Constitution complied with the law. However, it was clarified that compliance with the law did not mean all Members were happy with the new National Scheme of Delegations of Planning Functions. Furthermore, it was noted that, politically, there were very serious concerns about this new process.

The view was expressed that the proposals took away decision-making from the locally elected Councillors and imposed a national system from Whitehall. It was reported that in the second quarter of 2024, 96 per cent of planning decisions were already delegated to Planning Officers. Therefore, Councillors were determining only a very small proportion of applications in the first place. Those applications that were considered by the Planning Committee were often there for a reason and could be controversial or have significant consequences for a local community. They might raise concerns about highways, schools, drainage, infrastructure, or the character of an area. Residents turned to Ward Councillors when they felt their concerns had not been heard. It was noted that Members did not make arbitrary decisions. Instead, they listened to professional planning advice, heard from residents and applicants, reflected on Planning policy and material considerations. Ultimately, Members were accountable to the communities that elected them and that democratic link mattered.

It was reported that when the regulations were put before the House of Commons on 8th July 2026, Members of Parliament (MPs) from a number of parties had opposed the regulations. Therefore, the Leader suggested that this went beyond party politics. It was about the principle of local democratic accountability.

The Leader commented that on a practical level there were also questions around the new Scheme of Delegations of Planning Functions. Questions were raised about where public pressure would be directed if residents believed that Councillors no longer had the ability to bring legitimate local concerns into the decision-making process.

Concerns were raised that more pressure would fall directly upon the Council's Planning officers.

Members were advised by the Leader that this was not intended as a criticism of Officers and the professional job they did. The suggestion was made that the planning process worked best when professional expertise and democratic accountability worked together. Therefore, although it was recognised that the Council must amend its Constitution to comply with the regulations and protect the authority from unnecessary legal risk, the Leader requested that it be clearly recorded in the minutes that compliance should not be mistaken for political support. The Council would obey the law. But profound regret was expressed that the Government had chosen to reduce local discretion and the ability of elected Councillors to represent the communities who put them here.

During a detailed discussion on this subject Members raised the following:

- The additional recommendation was welcomed by most Members. However, some felt that this did not go far enough and suggested that the wording should state the Council 'objected' to the restrictive elements of the National Scheme of Delegations for planning functions rather than 'dissatisfaction'. However, the Cabinet Member for Planning and Strategic Housing clarified that she had sought advice from the Legal team before the recommendation was presented and this phraseology was deemed most appropriate.
- Some Members suggested that although the wording could not be changed there should be a statement placed on the Planning pages of the Council's website which noted the Council's resolution in this matter. Officers explained that this would not be appropriate due to the need to show impartiality on the Council's website.
- Some Members reiterated the view that democratic responsibility had been taken from local Members and localism was not being considered. It was also felt that there would be a lack of transparency in terms of the new process and less public scrutiny. Concerns were raised that residents would be angry at the loss of control for communities and decisions on Planning matters being made by Governement.
- It was suggested that a letter be sent by the Cabinet Member for Planning and Strategic Housing to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government which outlined the

Council's significant concerns with the new National Scheme of Delegations for Planning Functions. The Cabinet Member agreed that a letter would be sent following the meeting.

- There had been significant work undertaken by Members, Group Leaders and the Chairman of the Planning Committee in collaboration with Planning Officers, who were thanked for their hard work throughout this process.
- Included in the report was the following paragraph (at paragraph 24.4 of the report):

'Ward members who consider that a Schedule 2 application should be referred to Planning Committee may submit representations to the Assistant Director of Planning, Leisure and Culture Services.

The representations must address the criteria in Ground A and Ground B and must be submitted within 21 days of the publication of the weekly list.'

Members commented that this section would need to be updated in order to reflect the process that had been developed in the flow chart for Ward Member involvement.

- In terms of the national picture, it was noted that Planning had historically been a regulatory function undertaken by local Councils. However, it was now part of a national and economic policy. Members commented that it was clear from the Scheme that the majority of decision making would be made by Officers and only under exceptional circumstances, determined by the Gateway test, would major applications be referred to Planning Committee. Due to the rules within the Scheme, there was very little room for judgement or discretion in decision making. Officers had worked hard to present the Gateway flow chart document and associated narrative in order to provide a vehicle for Councillors to continue to make written submissions.
- It was noted that as the Member call-in process would no longer be available, Members would be encouraged to read the weekly Planning updates and make written submissions on applications. These would be taken into account by Planning Officers when considering the applications. This would be a way of reassuring residents that although the application had not been considered at Planning Committee, a representation had been made by the Ward Member.
- A typographical error was highlighted within the report 'the role of the nominated officer should be held by the Chair of Planning

Committee'. This should read 'the role of the nominated **Member** should be held by the Chair of Planning Committee'.

- Members queried whether there was a way to identify if planning applications were from a serving Member or Officer of the Council. It was confirmed that there was a question included in the application form that specifically requested this information.
- Some Members expressed the view that they were happy to have Officers, as the subject matter experts, making the decisions in these matters going forward. There was still the opportunity for Members to request that an application be submitted and passed through the Gateway.
- Members raised concerns that no consultation from Government had taken place in terms of numbers of residents on housing waiting lists in order to ascertain an appropriate number of houses to be built in the District.
- The large amount of Green Belt land within Bromsgrove and the impact that building on these areas would have on the District was considered.
- Members expressed their significant concerns regarding the removal of a Member call-in process included in the changes and were of the view that residents would feel like their voices were not heard and that it was not as transparent a process as it had been previously.
- It was explained that there were a large number of Planning applications currently awaiting determination for a variety of reasons and which were not yet ready to be considered at a Planning Committee meeting. Members were encouraged to continue to engage with the consultation process as any representations would be considered as part of the decision-making process.
- Officers clarified that any Schedule Two applications within the Planning system would have the flowchart applied to them and Members would be consulted on these applications and not just new applications from 1st November 2026 onwards. Members requested and it was subsequently agreed that the Gateway flowchart and commentary be incorporated and uploaded to the Council's website by 31st October 2026. This would ensure that members of the public were aware how the Council was operating in terms of Planning from this date.

The recommendations were proposed by Councillor S. Baxter and seconded by Councillor B. Kumar.

In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 18.3, a recorded vote was requested.

Members voting **FOR** the recommendations:

Councillors S. Ammar, R. Bailes, S. Baxter, J. Clarke, S. Colella, A. Dale, S. Evans, D. Forsythe, C. Hotham, R. Hunter, B. Kumar, R. Lambert, M. Marshall, K. May, B. McEldowney, D. Nicholl, S. Nock, S. Peters, J. Robinson, S. Robinson, J. Stanley, K. Taylor, S. Webb, P. Whittaker and H. Warren-Clarke (25).

Members voting **AGAINST** the recommendations:

No councillors (0).

Members voting to **ABSTAIN** on the recommendations

Councillors J. Elledge and E. Gray (2).

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

NOTED

1) The matters set out in this report relating to the introduction of the National Scheme of Delegation of Planning Functions; and
2) that there was a mandatory requirement for the Council to adopt the National Scheme of Delegation in accordance with the Town and Country Planning (Discharge of Local Planning Authority Functions) (England) Regulations 2026.

RESOLVED that

3) the arrangements set out in this report be adopted with effect from 31 October 2026;
4) the Constitution be updated by adopting the following documents attached to this report:
    - Scheme of Delegations for Development Management
    - Scheme of Delegations for Trees
    - Planning Committee Procedure Rules
    - Planning Code of Conduct
5) authority be delegated to the Assistant Director for Legal, Democratic and Procurement Services to make any further consequential amendments required to the Constitution;

6) the new arrangements be considered for review by the Constitution Review Working Group after the scheme has been operating for six months, such discussion to include feedback from Members including the Chairman / Vice Chairman of Planning Committee; and
7) Council formally noted its dissatisfaction with regard to the restrictive elements of the national scheme of delegation. Notwithstanding this, as a responsible authority, Bromsgrove District Council would comply with the law. However, Members were concerned about the implications for their ability to act as locally elected representatives in the interests of their communities.

[Prior to the vote, a request was made by Councillor J. Elledge, that it be noted in the minutes that she was in favour of the original six recommendations but opposed to the additional recommendation which was tabled at the meeting.]

49\26 **BROMSGROVE DISTRICT LOCAL PLAN - GATEWAY 1 SELF-ASSESSMENT AND SUMMARY OF SCOPING CONSULTATION**

The Cabinet Member for Planning and Strategic Housing presented the Bromsgrove District Local Plan - Gateway One Self-Assessment and Summary of Scoping Consultation.

In doing so, it was explained that the report sought Council approval to publish the Gateway One Self-Assessment and the summary of scoping consultation as part of the preparation for a new Bromsgrove District Local Plan.

Members were reminded that a new Local Plan was required because national planning reforms introduced a new thirty plus four plan making system in 2026. Previous work undertaken by Officers, which included consultation on the draft development strategy in 2025, would inform the new plan.

The Council also carried out a scoping consultation between 24th July 2026 and 4th September 2026. It was noted that 252 responses were received from residents, consultation bodies, stakeholders, developers, and landowners. Officers and the Local Plan Cross Party Working Group (LPCPWG) concluded that nothing raised as part of the consultation would prevent progression to the next stage. This had been agreed unanimously at the most recent LPCPWG meeting.

It was reported that the Council must complete and publish a Gateway One Self-Assessment to demonstrate that it had the governance resources and programme management arrangements necessary to deliver the Local Plan within the required timescales. The proposed timetable would see the draft Local Plan consultation in Summer 2027, the proposed Local Plan consultation in Spring 2028, in readiness for submission for examination in October 2028 with the adoption targeted for April 2029.

Future plan making work would include preparation of an Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP) which covered transport, education, health, utilities, green infrastructure, flood risk, climate change, economic infrastructure, and other key infrastructure topics. It was confirmed that the £108,000 of Government funding was reliant on the approval of Gateway One. Failure to meet Gateway One requirements could result in some Government funding being lost.

Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) should not delay Local Plan preparation reflecting Government guidance and the Council should continue plan making.

The report emphasised that progressing the Local Plan would provide an up-to-date planning framework, secure infrastructure investment, support housing and economic growth, improve certainty for communities and developers, coordinate delivery of transport, education and health infrastructure and support environmental and climate change objectives.

Following the presentation of the report, Members commented that it was important to move forward with plan making in order to understand the best options and areas for development within the District.

Members queried the difference between the Local Plan and the Council Plan. Officers explained that there was a distinct difference between the two. The Local Plan was the statutory development plan which carried full weight in making planning decisions. Whereas the Council Plan was a broader plan not just considering the spatial planning aspects produced by the Council and although it was put out for consultation, it was not subject to the detailed scrutiny undertaken as part of the Local Plan process. In terms of consultation in respect of the Local Plan, Members thanked the public, local residents and the community organisations that responded.

Members were keen to understand whether the Green / Grey Belt review had been completed. It was confirmed that it had been completed and Members had been informed.

In terms of resource, it was raised whether there was sufficient resourcing within the Strategic Planning department in order to progress the Local Plan. It was confirmed that there was one Senior Planning Officer vacancy which would be recruited to. Three new Planning Officers had been recently recruited, and two Senior Planning Officers had been promoted to Principal Planning Officers.

Council was reminded that included in the report was information on the budget available for consultancy and private sector advice if required.

Members thanked the Officers for the significant amount of work undertaken in preparation of the Local Plan.

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

Council **RESOLVED** that

1) The Local Plan Gateway 1 Self-Assessment, be approved for formal publication on 30th October 2026, and following publication, the Council progresses with plan-making as per the published timetable.

2) The Local Plan Summary of Scoping Consultation be approved and published alongside the Gateway 1 Self Assessment.

50\26 **DESIGNATION OF THE MONITORING OFFICER FUNCTION**

The Cabinet Member for Strategic Partnerships, Economic Development and Enabling presented the Designation of the Monitoring Officer Function report for the consideration of Members.

The Council was required by law to designate an Officer to undertake the statutory role of Monitoring Officer. At present, that designation sat with the Assistant Director of Legal, Democratic and Procurement Services. This followed agreement to change the senior leadership arrangements that had recently been considered through the appropriate governance process involving the Joint Appointments Committee. The

title of that role would now change to Executive Director of Governance and Assurance.

If agreed, the recommendation would provide approval to simply transfer the statutory designation of Monitoring Officer to that new post title when the revised structure was implemented. The purpose of the recommendation was to ensure continuity, clarity and compliance with the Council's statutory obligations and to ensure that the Monitoring Officer designation remained attached to a role that existed within the Council's structure.

Members were informed that the decision had no direct financial implications as any financial considerations were addressed through the separate restructuring process. This was therefore a matter of good governance and statutory compliance.

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

Council **RESOLVED** that

the post of Executive Director of Governance and Assurance is designated as the Council's Monitoring Officer pursuant to Section 5 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989, with effect from the date the revised structure is implemented.

51\26 **AUDIT, STANDARDS AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT 2025/26**

The Chairman of the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee in the previous municipal year presented the Committee's Annual Report 2025/2026.

It was highlighted that the report did not simply summarise the Committee's work over the previous municipal year but provided Council with assurance that independent Member oversight continued to be exercised over some of the most important aspects of the Council's governance framework. This included risk management, financial reporting, standards, internal control, audit and ethical governance.

Good governance rarely attracted headlines when it was successful, but it was fundamental in protecting public money, for maintaining public confidence and supported effective decision making. The Committee

therefore provided an important source of challenge, assurance and scrutiny on behalf of all Members and residents.

During the municipal year 2025 - 2026, the Committee maintained a powerful focus on several significant issues which included oversight of the Council's response to the Section 24 Statement, monitoring progress on the recovery of the Statement of Accounts process, scrutiny of External Audit findings and Value for Money arrangements, oversight of Internal Audit activity, strengthening Risk Management arrangements and monitoring compliance with the Council's standards framework. It was noted that there was encouraging progress in all these areas.

In terms of the Internal Audit report, findings stated that there was a reasonable level of assurance over the Council's Governance Risk Management. Improvements made in risk management had been achieved by embedding risk management in everyday operations. Progress had been achieved in addressing historic finance and VAT issues and Members continued to challenge and monitor improvements in financial governance and accountability.

While challenges remained, particularly in relation to historic audit matters and completion of outstanding External Audit work, the Committee had continued to play an important role in monitoring improvement activity and holding Officers and external stakeholders to account.

Thanks were extended to Committee Members, the Risk Champion, Internal and External Audit, the Monitoring Officer, the Interim Section 151 Officer and all the Officers who had supported the work of the Committee throughout the municipal year.

Members were reminded that a new Section 151 Officer was appointed earlier in the year. It was noted that he was reviewing accounting procedures and had welcomed new staff and was filling vacancy gaps to ensure any weaknesses were being addressed.

Following the presentation of the report the appointment of an Independent Member was raised, which had been mentioned in previous municipal years. It was reported that this was currently being discussed with the Section 151 Officer and the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Committee. Best practice would be to include two Independent Persons on the Committee. However, currently and historically it had been difficult to appoint to these roles. It was confirmed that an advertisement for the roles would be placed on the Council’s website in due course.

The Leader took the opportunity to thank Members of the Committee including the Parish Council representative for their hard work in such an important role for the Council.

The Cabinet Member for Finance welcomed the work of the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee. It provided an important source of independent challenge and assurance and was a key part of the Council's wider governance framework. It was suggested that strong governance was not separate from service delivery or financial management, but underpinned them. In addition, effective risk management, robust financial controls, independent audit, ethical standards and transparency and transparent reporting were all essential in order to make sound decisions and maintain public confidence.

52\26 **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD ANNUAL REPORT 2025/26**

In the absence of the Chairman of the Board in the previous municipal year, the Vice-Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Board presented the Board's Annual Report 2025-2026 for Members' consideration.

During the 2025 – 2026 municipal year, the Board undertook a wide-ranging programme of work which included scrutinising Planning, Housing, Finance, Town Centre Regeneration, Community Safety, Homelessness, and Local Government Reorganisation (LGR).

Another key area of focus was Planning Enforcement. The Board called for clearer performance indicators and better information for Members to strengthen oversight in this area.

Housing and homelessness were also priorities. The Housing Task Group made recommendations to explore crisis support for social housing residents, increase the emphasis on social rent and shared ownership and improve understanding of Council Tax debt and support.

The Board also examined the future of the Windsor Street site recognising the potential for residential redevelopment, affordable housing and wider Town Centre Regeneration.

Financial scrutiny remained central to the work of the Board. The Finance and Budget Working Group met six times during the municipal year. The reports that were scrutinised included reviewing the Budget, Financial Performance, Council Tax and the Council's Financial Recovery Arrangements. As a result of this scrutiny, clearer financial

reporting including explanations of significant variances, corrective actions and Officers responsible were recommended.

Other important matters considered throughout the year included Town Centre recycling, parking provision, electric vehicle charging, Citizens Advice Bureau funding, and regular updates on the continuing process of LGR.

Overall, the work of the Board demonstrated the importance of constructive challenge, transparency, and accountability. Through its investigations and recommendations, it sought to influence decisions before they were made and ensured that public money and Council services were managed effectively.

Ultimately, the Board's purpose was to help deliver outcomes for the residents of Bromsgrove, ensuring that decisions were evidence-based, financially responsible, and focused on the needs of the community.

The Vice-Chairman added that Board members worked very hard and well together and took a keen interest in subject matters and wanted the best outcome for the residents.

The Leader took the opportunity to thank the Members of the Board for their important and hard work over the municipal year. She added that scrutiny was very important and Members carried out a very thorough job.

Following the presentation of the comprehensive report, some Members commented that they believed that, excluding the Housing Task Group's recommendations, only three formal recommendations had been made over the municipal year to Cabinet and that the Board should potentially be more ambitious in holding the decision makers to account and driving policy.

The Vice-Chairman noted that in the absence of the Chairman of the Board at this meeting, a request had been made to provide any questions to the Democratic Services Officer who facilitated the Board meetings and questions could be provided to the Chairman following the meeting.

Some Members suggested that there had been more than three formal recommendations throughout the year, however this would be checked and the information provided to Members following the meeting. The Chairman of the Board attended Cabinet meetings. This was to ensure

the views of the Board were provided to the Cabinet at their meetings, which usually took place the day after a Board meeting. As a result of this there had been significant changes made to reports and policies through these discussions.

53\26 **CHANGES TO COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP**

Members were asked to note the following changes to Committee membership:

- Joint Appointments Committee – Councillor S. Robinson replaced Councillor R. Hunter.
- Planning Committee – Councillor H. Warren-Clarke replaced Councillor P. McDonald and Councillor S. Robinson had been appointed as a new named substitute.

There were no further changes to Committee membership.

54\26 **RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE CABINET**

There were two sets of recommendations considered at the Cabinet meetings held on 22nd of July and 16th of September 2026. Council was informed that there was an additional recommendation on the subject of Food Waste Collection Services agreed at the Cabinet meeting held on 22nd July 2026. The timing for consideration of this recommendation was contingent on the outcome of the work of the Medium-Term Financial Plan which was currently ongoing. Therefore, it was too soon to consider the proposal at this stage.

Low-Cost Housing Capital Receipts

The Cabinet Member for Planning and Strategic Housing presented the report and explained that its was to approve the use of low-cost housing capital receipts for the purchase of additional units of temporary accommodation for homeless households by Bromsgrove District Council.

Bromsgrove District Council had operated a low-cost housing scheme for around twenty-eight years enabling lower income households and first-time buyers to purchase homes at 70 per cent of the market value with the Council retaining a 30 per cent equity share. The receipts from the sale of these assets were to be utilised in partnership to help address increasing homelessness pressures, reduce reliance on expensive bed and breakfast accommodation, and support compliance

with Government guidance that families should not remain in bed and breakfast accommodation for more than six weeks. The Council was now seeking to purchase properties itself and currently held £620,812 of low-cost housing receipts with further income expected from additional property sales.

Once purchased, the properties would be managed by a registered provider under a Service Level Agreement (SLA), providing professional management of the temporary accommodation as well as reducing accommodation costs. The properties would become long-term Council assets with potential to increase in value. The proposal supported the Council's statutory duties under homelessness legislation, reduced the risk of legal challenge arising from prolonged use of unsuitable bed and breakfast accommodation, and aligned with the Council's Housing Priorities and Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy.

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

RESOLVED that

1) all low cost housing receipts be used by the Council to increase the supply of temporary accommodation by purchasing suitable dwellings.

2) delegated authority be granted to the Assistant Director Community and Housing Services following consultation with the Cabinet Member of Housing to purchase properties.

Treasury Management Outturn Report 2025 - 2026

The Cabinet Member for Finance presented the Treasury Management Outturn Report 2025 – 2026 for consideration.

This report was the strategy element of the Council's governance framework and provided assurance that Treasury Management activity during the year was undertaken in accordance with the Treasury Management Strategy previously approved by Members and within the credential limits set by Council.

The report confirmed that all treasury activities remained within the approved Treasury Management Code, Credential Code requirements, and the Council's authorised borrowing limits. It also provided transparency regarding the Council's borrowing position at 31st March 2026.

Members were asked to note that borrowing of £15 million was in place at year end. This borrowing was undertaken to manage short-term cash flow requirements. It was not undertaken to fund a budget deficit, nor was it outside the strategy and credential framework previously approved by Council.

Whilst Bromsgrove District Council had historically been regarded as debt-free, Treasury Management reports over a number of years had highlighted that borrowing would ultimately be required if the Council continued to invest in its Capital Programme whilst reducing available internal resources and reserves. The borrowing reported within this report therefore reflected the position that had been anticipated through previous Treasury Management Strategies and the Medium-Term Financial Plan rather than an unexpected deterioration in the Council's finances.

Members acknowledged the Council was within its borrowing limits. However, concerns were raised in respect of the loss on investments. It was suggested that the potential level of future borrowing, as detailed in the report, although it might not come to fruition, would be a worry particularly as the Council did not historically have any external borrowing.

It was queried why the Council was borrowing now if it did not before? It was reported that Cabinet had been advised that the borrowing related to cash flow management and was not due to a structural deficit. Officers had advised that no further borrowing was anticipated although future requirements continued to be reviewed through the Treasury Management Strategy cash flow forecasting process.

The Section 151 Officer explained there was a difference between cash flow balancing and management and long-term borrowing for capital purposes. It was clarified that at the end of the previous financial year some short-term borrowing was undertaken purely for cash flow purposes. There was no borrowing as at the 31st of March 2025. However, that did not mean there was no borrowing throughout the year, as due to cash flow in and out of the organisation, there may be short-term borrowing and short-term investment.

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

RESOLVED to **NOTE** the

1) Council's Treasury performance for the financial year 2025-2026.
2) position in relation to the Council's Prudential indicators.

Quarter 4 Financial Monitoring and Outturn Report 2025 - 2026

The Cabinet Member for Finance presented the Quarter 4 Financial Monitoring and Outturn Report 2025 – 2026. The report provided the Council's final revenue and capital position for the financial year ending 31st March 2026 and confirmed the outcome of the annual accounts review process undertaken by finance following the end of the financial year.

Members were informed that the headline position was that the Council delivered a near balanced Budget Outturn which reported a net under spend of just £5,000 against a revenue budget of more than £15.3 million. Whilst there remained some significant variations within the individual service areas, these had largely been offset by stronger corporate financing performance, additional grant income, investment income, and year-end accounting adjustments.

The report also confirmed the Council maintained a strong Reserves position with Earmarked Reserves of over £14 million and a General Reserve of over £13 million. These balances provided resilience and capacity to manage future uncertainty. They did not however remove the need to address the Budget pressures identified through the Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) and spending review.

The report formed a wider commitment to transparency and improved financial performance. It was explained that these decisions had historically been determined through Cabinet, however, it was considered appropriate that the Final Revenue Outturn, Reserve movements and Capital Programme position be subject to consideration by full Council.

Following the presentation of the report, Members raised the following queries:

- Had the UK Shared Prosperity Funding (UKSPF) which needed to be spent by 30th September 2026 actually been spent? It was confirmed that all the funding had been spent by the required date.
- The deficit between the Capital Outturn and the cost of the Capital Programme for 2026-2027.

- The delay between the financial year end and consideration of this report for consideration. It was acknowledged that there had been six months between year end and this report. However, a number of areas had impacted on this. The appointment of the Section 151 Officer, the appointment of the Chairman of the Finance and Budget Working Group and the TechOne system. Members were assured that a significant amount of work was being undertaken to resolve any areas of concern quickly and efficiently.

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

Following the consideration of the report it was

RESOLVED that

1) The 2025 - 2026 revenue outturn position was an overspend of £5,480 to be funded by an allocation from General Fund Balance.

2) The General Fund Opening Balance of £13.382million would be reduced to £13.150million as a result of the overspend and the net transfer to Ward Budget Reserves previously agreed with Members.

3) The 2025/26 Capital Outturn position was £16.943million spend against a total approved programme of £21.877million. The net balance of £4.934million would be carried forward and included within the 2026 - 2027 capital programme.

4) The Ward Budget allocation for 2025 -2026 of £62,000 had approved allocations at £55,402 as at 31 March 2026, resulting in £6,598 which was transferred to General Fund reserves.

5) The balance of Earmarked Reserves as at 31 March 2026 was £14.169million.

6) The updated procurement position with any new items over £200,000 to be included on the Forward Plan.

Bromsgrove Equality Strategy 2026-2030

Prior to the consideration of the Bromsgrove Equality Strategy 2026-2030, the Chairman explained that at the Cabinet meeting held on 16th

September 2026 Members agreed to extend the timeframes for the Equality Strategy and the Engagement Policy from 2026 - 2028 to 2026 - 2030. It was noted that there may be some references to 2028 still contained within the documentation included in the agenda. These would be updated prior to publication of the Strategy to the Council's website.

The Cabinet Member for Strategic Partnerships, Economic Development and Enabling presented the report for Members' consideration. It was explained that this strategy built on the work already taking place across the Council and provided a clear framework for ensuring services and engagement were fair, accessible and responsive to all communities within the District.

The strategy did not introduce new duties, but how the Council continued to meet its existing equality responsibilities, improved engagement with residents, and ensured equality considerations were embedded in decision-making and service delivery.

Members welcomed this Strategy, particularly as it displayed long term thinking to 2030. It was noted that the inclusion of interactive democracy sessions had proved successful earlier in 2026 with a very positive visit from Chadsgrove School. Officers and Members were thanked for their involvement in this visit.

Councillors also commented that an Equalities Task Group had presented recommendations to Cabinet in 2021, and that these recommendations had been enacted and embedded. It was acknowledged that this strategy placed an even stronger focus on embedding those qualities and engagement into everyday Council decisions and services.

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

RESOLVED that

The Equality Strategy 2026 – 2030 (including the Engagement Policy 2026 - 2030) be approved.

Discretionary Council Tax Reduction Policy 2026 – 2027

The Cabinet Member for Finance presented the Discretionary Council Tax Reduction Policy 2026 – 2027 report.

The policy governed the Council's use of discretionary powers under section 13A(1)(C) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 to reduce Council Tax liabilities in exceptional circumstances. It provided the framework within which Officers could make fair, consistent and transparent decisions whilst ensuring that public funds were used appropriately.

Members were informed that the majority of the policy remained unchanged and existing arrangements continued for care leavers, flood recovery support, government hardship schemes, and exceptional hardship cases.

The principal change to the policy was the introduction of a specific category relating to residents who had been diagnosed with a terminal illness. The proposed approach reflected representations made by organisations such as Marie Curie and sought to provide compassionate support to residents facing terminal illness. It also recognised that the Council had a responsibility to ensure that discretionary relief was targeted where it was needed most. The policy therefore allowed awards of up to 100 per cent Council Tax reduction whilst it retained consideration of the wider financial circumstances of the household.

The updated policy sought to strike a balance between compassion, fairness and stewardship of public funds. It extended support where none currently existed whilst it ensured that decisions could be tailored to individual circumstances.

Members welcomed the updated policy and felt it should be celebrated due to the Council’s dynamic approach and affording empathy to residents in the most trying time of their lives.

Reassurance was requested from Officers that the claim for this relief would not be a burden to those who needed to apply. It was commented that the same process would be followed as a low-income household. This required claimants to make a claim for Council Tax reduction first to ascertain if their claim could be covered by the Council Tax Reduction Scheme which shared the cost against all of the precepting authorities. Consideration would then be given to whether support could be provided under this policy, the cost of which was met entirely by the Council.

Officers confirmed that the policy was intended to be apply to residents who had received from doctors specific medical forms which confirmed

that they had less than twelve months to live. When such documents had been processed the policy would take effect.

In summing up, the Cabinet Member for Finance, stated that the policy did not ask whether terminally ill residents deserved support. It started from the position that they did. The real question was whether support should be targeted according to financial need or provided regardless of means. The policy provided a more generous and compassionate route to support.

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

RESOLVED that

The revised Section 13A(1)(C) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 policy be approved and adopted.

55\26 **TO NOTE THE MINUTES OF THE MEETINGS OF THE CABINET HELD ON 22ND JULY AND 16TH SEPTEMBER 2026**

The minutes of the meetings of the Cabinet held on 22nd July and 16th September 2026 were submitted for Council's consideration.

56\26 **QUESTIONS ON NOTICE (TO FOLLOW)**

Question submitted by Councillor S. Ammar

"Could you confirm how much Bromsgrove District Council has spent to date preparing for local government reorganisation including a breakdown of costs met by Government funding and costs met by Bromsgrove council taxpayers?"

The Cabinet Member for Finance responded to the question and in doing so explained that Bromsgrove District Council had incurred expenditure of £77,292 to date in preparing for Local Government Reorganisation (LGR). This expenditure related primarily to external consultancy and specialist support commissioned jointly across Worcestershire authorities, including work undertaken by KPMG and Mutual Ventures in developing and assessing LGR proposals.

The Council's share of Government funding received to support this work was £36,834. Worcestershire authorities agreed an equal

distribution of the Government grant provided to support the development of LGR proposals.

As a result, the balance of expenditure met locally was £40,458 which equated to £77,292 expenditure less £36,834 Government funding.

A supplementary question was asked whether this expenditure included the cost of Officer time. It was noted that the amounts provided did not include the costs for Officer time.

Question submitted by Councillor S. Evans

"With the UK having experienced five widespread heatwaves this year, and this summer being the warmest since records began in 1884, are you confident that we will meet our targets to reduce carbon emissions by 50% by 2030 and achieve net zero by 2040?"

The Cabinet Member for Local Government Reorganisation, Worcestershire Regulatory Services (WRS) and Climate Change responded to the question and in doing so explained he was confident in the progress that Bromsgrove District Council was making to meet its ambition to reduce carbon emissions by 50 per cent by 2030 and achieve net zero by 2040. That confidence was based on the progress already being made across the organisation, including a reduction of around 20 per cent in emissions from Council buildings through improvements in energy efficiency and building management. However, achieving longer-term targets required continued commitment, strong delivery and a willingness to take advantage of every opportunity available to the Council, including securing external funding and working with partners to accelerate further carbon reductions.

The Council had recently adopted an updated Climate Change Strategy which set out a clear pathway towards the Council's targets, supported by detailed action plans and governance arrangements in order to monitor progress. The Council recognised there were challenges ahead, particularly given the scale of change required across energy, transport, housing and the wider economy. As a District Council, many of the factors which influenced carbon emissions sat beyond the Council's direct control, meaning partnership working was essential.

The approach taken by the Council was therefore focussed not only on reducing emissions from Council operations, but also on enabling wider emissions reductions across the District. This included working closely with residents, businesses, community organisations, Worcestershire

partners, and Government programmes to maximise the impact of local action.

The Council would continue to actively pursue external funding and investment opportunities wherever possible. Securing support from Government schemes, regional programmes, community energy initiatives and private sector investment would be critical in accelerating delivery and ensuring that the greatest possible carbon savings were achieved while providing value for money for residents.

While no responsible Authority could guarantee the outcome of a target that depended on many external factors over the next fourteen years, the Council had established a strong strategic framework, was putting the right measures in place, and was committed to maximising every available opportunity to achieve net zero ambitions for Bromsgrove.

The Cabinet Member for Local Government Reorganisation, WRS and Climate Change stated he was confident in the direction of travel, provided momentum was maintained, delivery against the Council's strategy continued, and full use of the funding, partnerships and innovation opportunities available were utilised.

Question submitted by Councillor J. Clarke

"Despite multiple reports looking into car parking provision, Churchfields car park has now remained closed for four years. Could you clearly lay out the Council's plans for the site and a timeline for when we can expect this site to no longer be an unused car park?"

The Leader and Cabinet Member for Strategic Partnerships, Economic Development and Enabling provided the response to the question and explained she shared the concerns of residents regarding the length of time that Churchfields Car Park had remained closed, following community safety concerns relating to anti-social behaviour. As Members would appreciate this was not a straightforward decision. Churchfields was an important Council asset and it was essential that any decision about its future was based on robust evidence and a clear understanding of considerations relating to current and predicted future parking needs and the financial implications of the options available, alongside the priorities of the Council and other related activities and changing circumstances that impacted on projects such as this.

It was important that any decision about Churchfields was made in the context of the wider parking needs of Bromsgrove rather than being

considered in isolation. It was explained that this was the reason a Bromsgrove Car Parking Strategy was being developed and would be considered by Cabinet in November 2026. The strategy provided the broader evidence base needed to assess parking demand, capacity and future requirements across the town.

Recognising the progress being made with the District's Car Parking Strategy, which was to set the Council's strategic approach to car parking, within this context there was to be a Cabinet Advisory Group meeting to look at Churchfields car park. This meeting would be held as soon as practicably possible.

This was a complex issue and a number of factors needed to be considered before any decision was made. These included the current and future need for parking in the town centre, the financial implications of the options available, and the effect of changes to parking provision across Bromsgrove, including the recent closure of Stourbridge Road Car Park.

Members were informed that the Cabinet Advisory Group would consider both the current and future need for parking provision, alongside the financial implications of the different options available for Churchfields. This would help ensure that any future recommendation was based on robust evidence and a clear understanding of the costs, benefits and wider implications for Bromsgrove.

The priority was to make the best possible decision for residents and businesses. Rather than rushing to a conclusion, the Council wanted to ensure that any decision about Churchfields was informed by an assessment of parking need, financial considerations and the long-term interests of the town centre. At this stage, no final decision had been made, but work was progressing and Members would consider the available evidence at the Cabinet Advisory Group meeting.

A supplementary question was asked as follows:

"Can the Leader confirm the specific milestones that would be achieved in the Car Park Strategy and provide a date to understand the timescales'.

The Leader stated that the strategy would be considered by Cabinet in November 2026. Members were reminded that the car park was closed on community safety advice. Therefore, whatever action the Council

took in the future, it must be safe and a facility that did not endanger anybody whilst using it.

The strategy due to be considered would specifically take Churchfields into account. It was anticipated that a meeting exclusively for Churchfields would take place sometime in December 2026.

Members were informed that the costs to reopen the car park were very extensive. Therefore, it was imperative the car parking provision must be fit for the future and be safe and proper. This was a very complex matter, particularly due to historic events in terms of community safety issues experienced at the car park.

57\26 **MOTIONS ON NOTICE (TO FOLLOW)**

The Chairman advised Members that two Motions on Notice had been submitted for consideration at this meeting.

Council considered the following Motion on Notice that was submitted by Councillor S. Evans:

Farming in Bromsgrove

"This Council notes the Government's Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI) Scheme closed for applications in September 2026 within six hours.

This Council notes that the next opportunity to apply for SFI Scheme funding is 2027.

Following the increasing strain our farming community is under, with Inheritance Tax (IHT) changes, extreme heat and drought, and a botched Brexit withdrawal from the Common Agricultural Policy, Council believes that Bromsgrove's farmers deserve a better deal.

Council therefore requests that the Leader writes to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to demand better for Bromsgrove."

In presenting the Motion on Notice, Members were informed that the SFI budget of £253 million was allocated out in less than six hours.

Farmers in Bromsgrove had faced many effects in recent years, most notably climate change, inheritance tax changes and a new relationship in the common agricultural policy as a result of Brexit.

Farming was a way of life for many in the District, and the Motion on Notice had been submitted to support local farmers and to lobby the Government on their behalf.

Councillor P. Whittaker seconded the Motion on Notice and stated that the SFI provided financial support to farmers undertaking environmental land management and sustainable farming activities and was one of the only options in which the Government supported agriculture.

The other way the Governement was supporting British agriculture was through capital grants. However, it was explained that farmers had to spend the money in the first instance in order to claim money back from Government.

Agriculture was in a very difficult situation and after three very poor harvests due to inclement weather and other conditions, it was suggested that this year could be the final one for many farmers if the situation did not improve over the next twelve months.

Members were informed that the Government had proposed the introduction of a fertiliser tax from the following year. Coupled with the situation with the wars in Ukraine and in the Middle East and the difficulties experienced in respect of oil supplies, this would mean there would be significant impact on farmers going forward.

There was cross party support for this Motion. Members felt that the external effects on farming communities such as war, the cost of fuel and climate change, meant famers were finding it increasingly difficult to continue.

Members expressed the view that it was important for the Government to look at the situation as it was imperative that, as a nation, the UK be able to feed itself in times of worldwide shortages.

It was stated that the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) was looking for farmers, growers, and land managers to join a user panel to help improve guidance and services. Members could find out more information on how to take part by going on the Government website and contributing that way.

In summing up, Councillor S. Evans thanked Members for cross party support in this matter and expressed hopes that the Government would listen to the Council's concerns regarding farming in the future.

The Motion on Notice was proposed by Councillor S. Evans and seconded by Councillor P. Whittaker.

RESOLVED that

The Leader of the Council write to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to demand better for the farmers of Bromsgrove.

Council considered the following Motion on Notice that was submitted by Councillor J. Clarke:

Investment in Healthy Living

"Invest fast food site proceeds in healthy living.

Council notes the imminent sale of Stourbridge Road Car Park for development into a fast-food drive through restaurant. Council resolves to ask Cabinet to review the potential to invest the capital receipts from the sale in healthy living initiatives across our parks and open spaces in line with the Council's objective of improving health and wellbeing of our communities through the management of and provision of parks and open spaces as stated in the Parks and Open Space Strategy."

In presenting the Motion on Notice, Councillor J. Clarke called for investment in parks, walking routes, outdoor fitness equipment, play facilities, biodiversity improvements, and he stated that active recreation delivered benefits far beyond just leisure. It supported physical health, mental well-being, community cohesion, and reduced long-term pressures on public services.

It was acknowledged that that Council was currently operating against a backdrop of uncertainty. The ongoing work of external auditors and the prospect of Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) had created significant questions about future governance and finances. Because of this uncertainty, the Motion intentionally stopped short of directing the expenditure and simply asked when decisions were made about these receipts. The health and well-being of residents formed an integral part of that conversation.

The Motion linked development with community benefit and sought to turn a one-off capital receipt into a lasting investment in the well-being of the District's residents.

The Motion on Notice was proposed by Councillor J. Clarke and seconded by Councillor D. Nicholl.

Prior to debate on the Motion on Notice, an amendment was proposed by Councillor M. Marshall and seconded by Councillor E. Gray. The amendment read as follows:

"Council resolves to ask Cabinet to review the potential to invest in healthy living initiatives across our parks and open spaces in line with the Council's objective of improving health and wellbeing of our communities through the management of and provision of parks and open spaces as stated in the Parks and Open Space Strategy."

The Chairman requested that the meeting be adjourned briefly to discuss the proposed amendment. Following which, the amendment to the Motion, proposed by Councillor Marshall, was withdrawn.

However, it was noted that the amendment sought to express the view that investment in healthy living initiatives, was to be supported. However, it was suggested that what was not appropriate was support provided within the context of the sale of the Stourbridge Road Car Park for a fast-food drive-through restaurant. It was highlighted that it might imply something regrettable about a decision that had been made by the Planning Committee. Members of the Planning Committee were obliged to make decisions within planning law, and regulations and avoid decisions that could lead to appeals and costs to the Council.

Members commented that, capital receipts from the sale of Council assets could only be spent on physical capital infrastructure. They could not be used for day-to-day funding, service delivery, or public health programmes. The proper place to allocate these funds was during the full Budget setting process in February 2027 where the needs of the whole District would be evaluated objectively.

A further amendment was proposed by Councillor C. Hotham and seconded by Councillor S. Colella. The amendment read as follows:

"Council notes the imminent sale of Stourbridge Road Car Park for development into a fast-food drive through restaurant. Council resolves to ask Cabinet to review the potential to invest the capital receipts from

the sale in healthy living initiatives through further funding for the Community Investment Fund."

Councillor J. Clarke, as the proposer of the original Motion on Notice, accepted the amendment as detailed above, and therefore this became the substantive Motion.

During the debate, Members raised the following areas in more detail:

- One of the Council's Priorities was in respect of health and well-being and therefore investment in this area was already in place such as through the Parks and Open Spaces Strategy.
- The financial implications and process undertaken to permit the use of the capital receipt as detailed in the amendment to the Motion on Notice. It was confirmed that if Cabinet were to investigate this for the future an amount would need to be ringfenced. Officers explained that there could be some specific decisions made by Members in respect of this capital receipt made during the Budget setting process in February 2027. It was suggested that it could be discussed at a future Finance and Budget Working Group meeting. There was concern that there had been no public consultation as to whether this would be an appropriate use of this capital receipt and perhaps it could be discussed as part of the wider Budget setting discussions.
- This was an opportunity to invest a windfall capital receipt for the benefit of local residents. If it was to be spent in this way, then it would be possible to see clear benefit for the wider community.
- The potential to stigmatise residents who visited the fast-food restaurant in the future.

In summing up, Councillor Clarke commented that this was not about committing to allocating this funding, but to look at it as a potential option for the future. It was clarified that the Motion did not seek to criticise the Planning Committee.

On being put to the vote the Motion on Notice was **lost**.

58\26 **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.

The meeting closed at 9.36 p.m.

Chairman