



Overview and Scrutiny **Annual Report**

2022-2023



Bromsgrove
District Council

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OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT 2022-2023

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FOREWORD FROM THE CHAIRMAN

Welcome to Bromsgrove District Council's Overview and Scrutiny Board annual report for 2022/23.

The role of the Board is to cast a critical eye across the Council by scrutinising impartially and apolitically its operation and service provision for the benefit of residents.

It was nice to return to normality after the Covid years with all Board meetings being held in person. Task and working groups tended to continue using the virtual medium for meetings.

Over the last year topics investigated, amongst others, have included:

- Scrutiny of the Levelling Up fund awarded to the Council
- Air quality across the district and its measurement
- Council action on homelessness
- UK Shared Prosperity Fund mechanism for allocation
- The council's carbon reduction strategy
- The district wide CCTV system
- Annual review of the community safety partnership.

One task group was undertaken during the year: fuel poverty. The task group was well supported by Officers and my thanks also goes to the Cabinet Member with responsibility for Strategic Housing and Health and Well Being for her support. The final report was well received. The Finance and Budget Working Group continued to meet regularly. However, the Board decided the Corporate Performance Working Group was no longer necessary and instead receives a six-monthly corporate performance report. Many thanks to those who chaired and contributed to the task and working groups.

During the year Jo Gresham, the Board's Democratic Services Officer was promoted to another role within the Council, I would like to take this opportunity to thank her for her outstanding service to the Board and to welcome Mateusz Sliwinski as her replacement.

I would also like to thank all Board members for their work throughout the year and Officers of the Council who have contributed to the Board's work, in particular Councillor Jo Till, our able Vice Chairman. My thanks also go to Cabinet Members for their regular attendance and input to the Board's deliberations.

Councillor Charles Hotham
Chairman

INTRODUCTION

We are pleased to present the Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report which outlines our work during 2022-2023 (this covers the municipal year from May 2022 to April 2023) and provides general information on the overview and scrutiny processes at Bromsgrove District Council.

Overview and Scrutiny is a key part of the democratic decision-making process in local Councils, where elected Councillors outside of the Cabinet can contribute to shaping Council policy, community well-being and accountability. This is done by reviewing Council services and policies, community issues and key decisions and making recommendations for improvement.

The four key principles of Overview and Scrutiny, as defined by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) the lead organisation supporting Overview and Scrutiny in the country, are:

- provide constructive “critical friend” challenge;
- amplify the voice and concerns of the public
- be led by independent people who take responsibility for their role
- drive improvement in public services.

The Members of the Board consider these principles when selecting topics to investigate whether it is holding the Cabinet to account, reviewing policies, policy development or scrutiny of external bodies.

MEMBERSHIP (The Board is made up of 11 Members)



**Councillor Charles Hotham
Chairman**



**Councillor Jo-Anne Till
Vice-Chairman**



Councillor Sue Baxter



**Councillor Andrew
Beaumont**



**Councillor Steve
Colella**



**Councillor Richard
Deeming**



Councillor Rob Hunter



Councillor Helen Jones



Councillor Adrian Kriss



**Councillor Peter McDonald
until January 2023**



Councillor Caroline Spencer

THE ROLE OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

Overview and Scrutiny is a key part of the Council's political structure, and it plays a vital role in improving the services that people of the District use, whether as a resident, employed here or just visiting. It does not just look at the way the Council carries out its services, it can look at anything which affects the lives of people within the District, and it allows citizens to have a greater say in Council matters.

Overview and Scrutiny allows Councillors to review and scrutinise decisions, look at existing practices and make recommendations to help ensure the residents of Bromsgrove District receive excellent services. The aim is to ensure Overview and Scrutiny adds value to the Council's decision-making process and makes a positive contribution towards policy development.

The detailed terms of reference and procedure rules for the Overview and Scrutiny Board can be found at Part 5 and Part 12 of the Council's Constitution. The Council's Constitution can be accessed by using the following link.

[Link to the Constitution of Bromsgrove District Council](#)

(Please click on the latest date to access the most recent version of the Council's constitution).

Meetings

Throughout 2022-23, Overview and Scrutiny Board meetings had been taking place in person and were open to the public to attend at Parkside Hall in Bromsgrove. Meetings are live streamed if there is significant local interest in the items being considered at Overview and Scrutiny Board meetings. Meetings of scrutiny Task Groups and Working Groups continue to be held remotely, since these meetings are private and are not live streamed.

REPORTS CONSIDERED BY THE BOARD

The Board continues to receive updates in order to monitor the progress of recommendations it has made, through the Recommendation Tracker. This contains both recommendations put forward by Task Groups and accepted by the Cabinet, together with recommendations put forward by the Board itself. In respect of Task Groups, the Board does, where necessary, receive an update report 12 months following acceptance of its recommendations.

During the course of the year the Board received a number of reports and made a number of recommendations. There has been continued support from the relevant Portfolio Holders this year, with regular attendance from a number of them when a report which relates to their portfolio has been presented to the Board. This has given them an opportunity to hear first-hand the debate and ideas that the Board has put forward. On a number of occasions, whilst the Board has not made any recommendations in respect of an item, it has endorsed and supported recommendations which would be considered by Cabinet at its meeting.

30th May 2022

Corporate Performance Update - Performance Dashboard

As was agreed during the previous municipal year the Board considered matters in respect of Corporate Performance at Board level during 2022/23. At the meeting held on 30th May 2022 Officers assisting in the development of the new dashboard presented an update for Members' consideration. It was noted that the previous system was still available but was over a decade old and technically no longer fit for purpose. The new system would use more modern tools for accessing data.

It was explained that the current legacy dashboard had a number of technical limitations and a project had been set up to replace this with a modern more up to date dashboard. Initially the new dashboard would concentrate on the strategic measures in line with the Council Plan, touching on operational measures as part of the ongoing design.

In respect of timescales for implementation of the dashboard it was anticipated that it would be rolled out to officers and Councillors by the end of the year.

As part of consideration of the item, Members were given a demonstration of the development of the new dashboard to date and how it was envisaged it would be used.

Levelling Up Phase 1 Funding - Pre-Scrutiny

The Levelling Up Phase 1 Funding report was pre-scrutinised at this meeting, primarily from a funding perspective.

The update on progress to date was outlined for Members information. The recommendation included in the report requested delegated authority be given to the Head of Planning, Regeneration and Leisure Services in order to spend up to

budgeted sum of £2.266m on the demolition of the Windsor Street site and the engagement of a design and build contractor for the Market Hall site.

At this meeting Councillor K. May provided details around the award of the Levelling Up funds and it being fundamental to further development across the District. During a detailed discussion procurement of contractors was discussed and the procurement process that was to be undertaken.

There were some concerns raised by Members in respect of the inclusion of the amount of £2.266m within recommendation 2 of the report. It was thought that the inclusion of an actual amount could potentially be compromise a cost effective tender for the projects. It was with this in the mind that the following amendment to the Cabinet recommendation was made:

“that authority be delegated to the Head of Planning, Regeneration and Leisure Services and the Executive Director of Resources to proceed to spend the Levelling Up Fund allocation up to a total of £2.266m on the required demolition and remediation works at the Windsor Street site and to engage a design and build contractor on the Market Hall site.”

This recommendation was agreed by Cabinet at its meeting held on 1st June 2022.

Council Plan (Including Recovery and Restoration Plan) - Pre-Scrutiny

The addendum to the existing Council Plan was presented at this meeting and a brief overview of the report was provided to the Board.

It was noted that the Council Plan had been put in place prior to the pandemic. A workshop had been held with the Corporate Management Team (CMT) and Cabinet Members in 2021 to ensure that the Council’s strategic purposes and measures remained relevant in a post pandemic world. There had been no changes to the majority of the Council’s priorities and milestones. However, there was a significant change in respect of the Green Thread, which had become a priority in its own right, with its own set of focal points. The addendum should be considered side by side with the Council Plan, which would be reviewed fully in 2023.

Members were reminded that the Recovery and Restoration Plan had been put in place as a response to the pandemic and the majority of this had now been completed, any remaining areas had been picked up within the Council Plan.

5th July 2022

Air Quality Annual Update

The Principal Officer (Planning & Pollution Control) from Worcestershire Regulatory Services presented the update on Air Quality. Included in the update were the following areas:

- DEFRA Annual Status Report 2022

- Actions Update – AQAP improvements
- Legislative Changes
- Air Quality Standards
- Trends in Monitoring

During a detailed discussion Members highlighted the importance of having clean air and the impact of air pollution, not just on people, but the wider impact on other services such as the NHS. In addition to this the importance of monitoring and the benefits of real time data was highlighted by Members. It was with this in mind that the following recommendation was agreed by the Board:

“that Cabinet invite Richard Williams, Principal Officer (Planning & Pollution Control), Worcestershire Regulatory Services, to a meeting to present information on Electro Chemical Devices, which provide real time information on air pollution. With a view to Cabinet looking at the cost implications, advantages, and viability of installing an Electro Chemical Device in a pilot scheme in the District to assess the advantages of using such equipment.”

This recommendation was considered by Cabinet at its meeting held on 12th October 2022 where a further presentation was given by Mr. Williams. He explained that there were new options for monitoring, including chemical based testing that was mobile and could be deployed in different locations as needed. Although there were financial implications of £4,000 to purchase and £2,000 to maintain the equipment, Cabinet agreed to the recommendation of installing an Electro Chemical Device as recommended by the Board.

Housing Enforcement Powers in the Private Rented Sector

The Chairman welcomed the Private Sector Housing Team Leader and the Housing Development and Enabling Manager, together with Councillor S. Webb, as Portfolio Holder for Housing Strategy.

An overview was provided of the Private Rented Sector legislation. Members were advised that there was limited data available on the range of enforcement which were undertaken in the District, both informally and formally.

The following matters were discussed in detail during consideration of this item:

- Smoke alarms and carbon monoxide alarms in properties.
- Legislation on minimum energy performance certificate (EPC) rating requirements for properties to be privately let
- Legal definition of a landlord and park homes (including applying EPC rating legislation to such homes).
- Frequency with which property standards were monitored. Members were advised that the resources were not available to do pro-active assessment, but the team would respond to complaints about properties.
- Complaints about properties and fear of tenants to report issues with properties.
- Options for resolving tenants’ complaints about property standards including informal route and prosecution.
- Awareness about legislation and property standards required by landlords. It was noted that in many cases landlords were unaware of standards required

and compliance issues were resolved through Officers explaining the requirements to the landlord after which they would comply.

- Tenants' legal rights and resources to help people. It was noted that a great deal of information was available on the Council's website and Officers would help and support them when needed. There was also information about how to contact the Tenancy Association and information was promoted through the Council Tax leaflets. Additionally, the team worked closely with the Citizens Advice Bureau.
- Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) including legislation that covered these. Current estimate for the number of HMOs in Bromsgrove was around 65.

11th October 2022

Worcestershire Homelessness And Rough Sleeping Strategy - Pre-Scrutiny

The Housing Strategy and Enabling Manager and the Housing Development and Enabling Manager presented a detailed presentation on the development of Worcestershire Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2022-25 and Action Plan. It was noted that the Homelessness Act 2002 placed a duty on all housing authorities to have an up-to-date homelessness strategy in place and the current Worcestershire Homelessness Strategy was due to expire on 31st December 2022. It was noted that subject to approval of the Strategy by Cabinet, a public consultation on the draft Worcestershire Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2022-25 would be held from 17th October to 4th December 2022.

Members discussed in detail a number of areas related to the Strategy and homeless in the District, and matters discussed included:

- Variation in funding allocated to local authorities through the Government's Homeless Prevention Fund for 2022/23
- Clarification around the Relief Duty.
- Trends in the number of rough sleepers in Bromsgrove including a decline in numbers during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Initiatives that were successful in reducing numbers of rough sleepers in the District, such as No First and No Second Night Out accommodation, which provided support above statutory duty.
- Ability of the services to respond to increased demand.
- Units of emergency temporary accommodation (TA) available in Bromsgrove
- Increase in the number of evictions from private sector accommodation due to the end of an embargo on Section 21 notice evictions.
- Reporting cases of rough sleeping and delays when reporting cases of rough sleeping to Streetlink to report rough sleeping. It was advised to report cases through the Streetlink website as any information submitted this way was logged on the central government website and alerted all local agencies, which enabled a coordinated, multiagency response.

- Other avenues to report rough sleeping/homelessness cases including feasibility of a 24-hour helpline.
- The issue of custody leavers being released on Fridays and a possibility of changing this policy on the national level.
- Mental Health Grant. The Worcestershire County Council (WCC) was not successful in the first round of bidding and another bid had been submitted by the public health team at WCC. Officers explained that, if successful, the grant would provide enough funds for appointment of only one health worker and other avenues were available to the Council to bid for larger funding.

Members requested that a Homelessness Services leaflet containing contact details of various support organisations be produced by the Council and that a local 24-hour contact number for reporting rough sleeping and homelessness cases be provided to Members. The recommendations of the Cabinet report were endorsed by the Board.

24th October 2022

Levelling Up Funding Update

A detailed update was received with respect to progress in the delivery of the Levelling Up Fund (LUF) projects (LUF0297) in Bromsgrove Town Centre (the Windsor Street and the Former Market Hall sites). This update covered the period between April and August 2022.

The updates on the Windsor Street Site (former Fire Station) included the following:

- The Council purchased the site from the Herefordshire and Worcestershire Fire and Rescue Service (HWFRS) and Worcestershire County Council (WCC) at a cost of £1.806m. It was noted this was below the original asking price of £2.4m.
- The direct cost to the Council of purchasing the Site was £285k, the remaining balance covered from the Levelling Up Fund.
- The freehold acquisition of the site enabled feasibility works to commence.
- The aim of the Windsor Street Site redevelopment was to deliver residential-led mixed housing which would include 29 town houses. It was confirmed that the residual land value stood at £1.90m (as of April 2022).
- The project was at the stage of that pre-development remediation works and building works would not commence on the Site until the remediation strategy and the environmental method statement had been fully approved by the Environment Agency (EA).
- It was currently planned that an operating lease would be granted to an operator once redevelopment had concluded. Site plan to resell the Site once redevelopment was completed. At present, an appraisal process was taking place with regards to finding a suitable operator.
- It was explained that parts of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) funding could be redirected towards either of the Levelling Up Fund projects, but such change would need approval of the Bromsgrove Partnership Board which oversaw the UKSPF funding. Authorities were nonetheless advised to prepare

reserve allocations from operational costs to ensure any overspends could be managed without redirecting funding from or to UKSPF projects.

The Board received updates on the Former Market Hall Site project as follows:

- Caution had to be exercised in this development as part of the Site lied in a conservation area and there was a landmark building adjacent to the Site.
- Cost was the main risk to the project delivery, exacerbated by the current inflationary pressures. Another risk was the short timeframe for planning submission as the deadline for this Site was March 2023. Public engagement would therefore need to commence immediately following the appointment of a multidisciplinary team in December 2022.
- Results of the survey of the creative business sector on the preferred uses for the Market Hall Site showed support for several different uses of the Site including as multifunctional community space, for creative studios, and workshop spaces.
- The soft market testing undertaken in July 2022 confirmed there was much interest for flexible workspace in the West Midlands.
- It was now recommended that a multidisciplinary design team (Multi-dis DT) be appointed for this project, as opposed to a contractor-led design team, from RIBA stage 2. This would enable the Council to avoid entering into an early agreement with a contractor and provided time to develop the project brief to a sufficient level before the document was released to the market.
- The Board requested to see a risk register for both Levelling Up Fund projects in order to fully understand the risk implications. Officers undertook to provide this to Members and reported that projects risks were monitored through quarterly risk reports which were being submitted to the Interim Section 151 Officer for sign-off and through bi-weekly meetings of the Levelling Up Projects Governance Board.
- It was currently envisaged that the ground floor of the proposed building would be occupied by commercial premises including food and beverage with space devoted for temporary exhibitions.
- It was impressed that any design proposals for the Site would need to be justifiable in terms of rental income generation to ensure the Site could operate without subsidy once in operation.

UK Shared Prosperity Fund - Update

The Board was updated on the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) in Bromsgrove as follows:

- Bromsgrove had been allocated a total of £2,805,712 from the UKSPF, available for a three-year period, from 2022/23 to 2024/25.
- The level of funding received would increase in each of the three years from £340,499 in 2022/23 to £1.784 million in 2024/25.
- The Government identified three investment priorities of Community and Place, Supporting Local Business, and People and Skills, which needed to be addressed with the use of UKSPF funding. Most of the funding was allocated

to year three of the UKSPF programme as this would be the only year in which funding would be available for the People and Skills priority.

- The Investment Plan submitted to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) detailed 23 interventions, which were broad areas of investment where the fund would be spent in Bromsgrove. These interventions were spread across the three investment priorities. It was highlighted that the Council was not required to include details of any specific projects in the Investment Plan.
- The Government had provided an indicative date for issuing approvals for the Investment Plan of October 2022 onwards. Once approved, the Council was required to spend the funds on the interventions as submitted in the Investment Plan.
- As the initial call for projects had been open for a limited time only, a second call for projects had been undertaken for organisations to submit specific project proposals by 14th November 2022.

During the debate following presentation of the reports on this item, the following issues were discussed:

- Governance arrangements for managing the UKSPF within the District were explained. The Bromsgrove Partnership oversaw the development of the Investment Plan and would make decisions on project selection in its capacity as the local partnership group for managing the fund.
- UKSPF project selection criteria. It was explained that once the second call for projects had closed, all project proposal submissions would be assessed by a sub-committee of the Bromsgrove Partnership Board against strategic fit, deliverability, and value for money criteria. The Sub-Committee of the Partnership Board would then make recommendations to the main Board regarding which projects should be selected.
- Each project submission would be assigned against one of the three investment priorities and assessed against other projects assigned to that same investment priority. In Bromsgrove, it was recommended that 40 per cent of the funding should be allocated against Communities and Place priority, 30 per cent allocated to Supporting Local Business priority, and 30 per cent against People and Skills investment priorities. The Government allowed flexibility to vary these allocations by up to 30 per cent, where, for example, not enough projects were submitted in one of these investment priorities.
- Members requested that further detail be provided with respect of the decision-making arrangements for UKSPF fund allocations in Bromsgrove.
- Some Members requested that minutes of the Bromsgrove Partnership Board Sub-Committee be made available to the Overview and Scrutiny Board to enable transparency with regards to decision-making on UKSPF project allocations.

Climate Change Strategy/Carbon Reduction Implementation Plan

The Net Zero Projects Manager from the Midlands Net Zero Hub provided a detailed presentation on the Council's Carbon Reduction Strategy and Action Plan and the main points discussed included:

- Bromsgrove District Council's Carbon Reduction Strategy and Action Plan covered exclusively the carbon dioxide emissions of the Council (including emissions directly from the activities of the Council and emissions which the Council had influence over).
- The Council's carbon reduction targets were set in line with the Worcestershire Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) target of 50 per cent carbon dioxide emissions reduction by 2030 and the ambition of becoming net zero by 2040.
- To reach an interim target of 50 per cent CO² emissions reduction by 2030, the Council would need to reduce its emissions by approximately 41 tonnes of per year. To achieve the net zero in the remaining 10 years to 2040, the Council would need to deliver on a target of approximately 51 tonnes reduction per year.
- The Council's 3-year Implementation Plan identified that Bromsgrove District Council emitted 818 tonnes of CO² in 2019 (the latest year for which data was available). The latest CO² emissions figure for Bromsgrove District as a whole was 669,200 tonnes per annum.
- The Council was successful in securing funding from the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme for the Artrix, which would contribute to a carbon reduction of 126 tonnes and a saving £16,000 per annum through the installation of heat pumps and solar panels.
- The Council had also applied for 'Public Sector Energy Efficiency Programme' funding for decarbonisation of the Parkside building.

During the consideration of this item the Board agreed to submit the following set of recommendations to the Cabinet:

1. *that the latest figure, quantifying Bromsgrove District Council's reduction in carbon emissions (in tonnes) between 2019 and the present, be provided.*
2. *that Birmingham City Council be asked to engage in partnership working on carbon reduction with Bromsgrove District Council and other Worcestershire Councils, especially given that Lickey Hills Country Park, located mainly in Worcestershire, is owned and maintained by Birmingham City Council.*
3. *that an easily accessible, infographic version of the Bromsgrove District Council Carbon Reduction Strategy and Action Plan be produced for the benefit of councillors and members of the public.*
4. *that Parish Councils be included as stakeholders in the Bromsgrove District Council Carbon Reduction Strategy and Action Plan and its ongoing development.*

These recommendations were considered by Cabinet at its meeting on 26th October 2022. The Cabinet had agreed to an amended set of these recommendations as follows:

1. All bordering Local Authorities be asked to engage in partnership working on carbon reduction with Bromsgrove District Council and other Worcestershire Councils and;
2. Parish Councils be included as stakeholders in the Bromsgrove District Council Carbon Reduction Strategy & Implementation Plan and its ongoing development and;
3. An easily accessible, infographic version of the Bromsgrove District Council Carbon Reduction Strategy & Implementation Plan be produced for the benefit of Councillors and members of the public on the website.

21st November 2022

CCTV Digitalisation Upgrade

The Head of Community and Housing Services presented a report on CCTV digitalisation upgrade. Since the last update on the CCTV scheme in April 2022 a further six camera locations in the District had been upgraded to digital and all cameras forming part of the CCTV scheme had been replaced.

It was noted that although most transmission lines were now digital and many analogue links had been replaced, three CCTV locations in the District remained on analogue transmission. These analogue transmission cameras still provided day and night surveillance capability. Members were informed that the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) had provided funding to the Council's CCTV project for the last five years and Officers recommended that decision on upgrading the remaining analogue cameras to digital be paused pending the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) grant funding becoming available.

Following the presentation, Members discussed the viability of either funding the upgrades to the remaining analogue cameras from the capital budget or holding discussions with the PCC regarding provision of funding for this purpose. Officers responded that the PCC was unlikely to be in a position to provide funding for this in the next few years and that the Council should also be mindful of any additional capital and revenue costs given current pressures. Most Members present were in agreement about giving priority to upgrading the remaining analogue cameras to digital and with this mind the Board made the following recommendations:

1. *that £48,600 be included in the Capital Programme and £6,030 per annum in the revenue budget as part of the review of the Medium Term Financial Plan for the upgrade of CCTV cameras at Brook Road (Rubery), Wythall and Alverchurch, and;*
2. *that all options for obtaining external funding for CCTV system upgrades be pursued.*

These recommendations were considered by Cabinet at its meeting on 18th January 2023. Recommendation 2 was agreed by Cabinet and recommendation 1 was recommended for approval by the Full Council. Recommendation 1 was subsequently approved by Full Council at its meeting on 25th January 2023.

Update on the Corporate Performance Dashboard

The Head of Business Transformation, Organisational Development and Digital Strategy presented an update on the development of the Corporate Performance Dashboard and in doing so reported that the dashboard was in the final stages of development and would soon be available to view by Members and the public via the Council's website. It was reported that the Council would opt, subject to Members' agreement, to provide a public view of the dashboard as this did not entail having to purchase individual Power BI licences for each Member. This option also provided greater flexibility for Members in that the publicly available dashboard could be accessed from any PC that had an internet connection. Due to licensing policy for the Power BI suite, it would not be possible to provide access to the dashboard on a generic machine as licences were allocated to each named user.

It was anticipated the ongoing cost of the dashboard would not exceed £3,000 in licence costs per year. In addition, there would be a saving in staff time spent on populating the dashboard with data compared with the alternatives. The planned future move to the use of automated processes to generate quarterly reports, for example, would further reduce staff time costs. Members were informed that new performance indicator measures would be added to the dashboard on an ongoing basis following the live release.

Fuel Poverty Task Group – Final Report

The Chairman of the Fuel Poverty Task Group, Councillor R. Hunter, presented the final report of the Fuel Poverty Task Group. During the discussion it was explained that the Task Group had obtained evidence from a range of expert witnesses representing both the Council and external organisations and the Task Group's recommendations were evidence-based. These recommendations were ready to be implemented and this action would be timely.

The Chairman of the Fuel Poverty Task Group further noted that some of the actions outlined in the Task Group's recommendations had already started to be taken, for example a leaflet on fuel poverty had been produced by Officers which contained useful information for residents.

Following the presentation, Members discussed the work of the Task Group and it was noted that the Council and Act on Energy had undertaken publicity work to encourage people to come forward if they were struggling with energy costs or were in fuel poverty, and the Council had also sought to find ways to engage with those residents who were eligible for help but did not come forward.

The Overview and Scrutiny Board agreed to recommend that the Cabinet adopt the recommendations of the Fuel Poverty Task Group, subject to a minor change to recommendation 6, to require that the Cabinet should actively explore all external

funding options available to the Council to support Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) groups. It was therefore recommended that:

- 1. The Council ensures its webpages are up to date and takes a proactive approach in promoting the various areas of support (including an up to date list of Warm Hubs/Spaces and support provided by local libraries in the District) available through as many different mediums as possible. For example, through its social media account and by learning from the best practice approaches used by other Councils;*
- 2. A poster or booklet is created which includes a simple straight forward guide to all the various areas of support – this should be accessible in local buildings such as the libraries and Councillors provided with copies to hand out to residents or distribute for display on noticeboards;*
- 3. Councillors are provided with the contact details of Act on Energy and encouraged to proactively liaise with the outreach workers to ensure access to support is readily available to residents within their Wards;*
- 4. The Bromsgrove Partnership, supported by the Council, takes a lead role in the collection of high quality intelligence/data to ensure that the Council's partners can target their interventions where support is most needed;*
- 5. The Bromsgrove Partnership (with input from all District Councillors and/or relevant Parish Councils) take a lead role in co-ordinating appropriate support, to ensure it is readily available for residents throughout the whole district, for example this could mean the provision of a Warm Hub/Space and the facilities offered by the local libraries;*
- 6. The Cabinet actively explores all external funding options (for example the UK Shared Prosperity Fund) available to the Council in order to ensure that, if needed, it is able to provide financial support to VCS organisations throughout the district in providing the support detailed in recommendation 5 above.*

These recommendations were approved by Cabinet at its meeting on 23rd November 2022.

Finance and Budget Working Group – Update

The Chairman presented an update on the Finance and Budget Working Group meeting of 17th November 2022, where the following matters were discussed:

- Update on the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) 2023/24 to 2025/26;
- The Notice of Motion which was referred for consideration of the Finance and Budget Working Group by the Full Council on 3rd November 2021;
- Finance and Performance Monitoring Report Q2 2022/23; and,
- An update on Fees and Charges 2023/24.

With respect to the Notice of Motion, this related to a proposal submitted to provide free short term car parking for Blue Badge holders in all Bromsgrove District Council

(BDC) owned car parks. Consideration was given to whether a business case could be drawn up for this proposal and whether it was suitable to consider for consideration as part of the budget setting process. The Chairman reported that at the Finance and Budget Working Group meeting on 17th November 2022, most of the Members present agreed that provision of free short term car parking for Blue Badge holders would be prohibitively expensive for the Council at the current time. However, the Working Group asked Officers to investigate if more up-to-date data could be found from sources such as parking ticket machines, to determine the true demand for Blue Badge parking spaces in Bromsgrove.

The Chairman announced that Councillor J. King had submitted a request to join the Finance and Budget Working Group for the remainder of this municipal year. During the discussion that followed, some Members argued in favour of holding a vote on the matter at this meeting. The majority of Members, however, put forward a proposal to defer making the decision on the matter to a future meeting to enable Officers to prepare a report detailing the constitutional implications of a Councillor who was not a Member of the Overview and Scrutiny Board joining the Finance and Budget Working Group. Thus, it was agreed that a decision on the matter be deferred to the next scheduled meeting of the Board when an Officer report would be presented.

17th January 2023

Planning Enforcement Update

The Technical Services Manager for Worcestershire Regulatory Services (WRS) provided a report around planning enforcement. It was noted the most desirable outcome was always compliance by the offender within an acceptable timeframe. When there was a breach of planning conditions, the enforcement action taken by the local planning authority was proportionate to the severity of the breach in question and a staged approach was adopted towards ensuring compliance, whereby a number of warning letters would be issued to the applicant, and if this did not lead to resolution, formal enforcement action would be taken, starting with Enforcement Notices (including Stop Notices) and prosecution or injunction if no compliance had been secured.

During consideration of this report, Members asked discussed a number of matters related to enforcement and Officers provided answers to Members' queries.

It was requested that data on the number of planning enforcement cases that had been closed during the 2021-22 municipal year through to 10 November 2022 be provided and Officers undertook to compile and distribute this information to Members.

Finance and Budget Working Group – Update

During this update, the Chief Executive presented a report on the constitutional implications of allowing an elected Councillor who was not a Member of the Overview and Scrutiny Board to join the Working Group. It was explained that under the

legislation non- Overview and Scrutiny Members were not precluded from joining any of the Board's Task Groups, provided they were not Members of the Cabinet or the Chairman of the Council. It was also noted that under Section 15(5)(c) of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989, the political balance rules, did not apply to Working Groups as these were not classed as 'ordinary committees' under the legislation. Members were advised, however, that as of this meeting, other Members of the Overview and Scrutiny 'pool' had not been consulted about this vacancy.

It was agreed by the Board that the membership of the Finance and Budget Working Group should be restricted to a sub-group of members of the Overview and Scrutiny Board unless this option had been exhausted and a long-term vacancy had been identified which necessitated a wider membership of the Overview and Scrutiny 'pool' to join the Working Group

The Board agreed that the following amendments be made to the Terms of Reference of the Finance and Budget Working Group, to apply from the start of the municipal year 2023-24:

1. The Working Group shall comprise 7 Members, to be made up of 6 Members (who are Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Board) plus the Chairman of the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee.
2. Should a vacant post remain after Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Board had been approached, members of the Overview and Scrutiny "pool" (i.e. those who do not sit on the Overview and Scrutiny Board and are not Cabinet Members) may be appointed to fill the vacancy.

Levelling Up Fund Update – Purchase of Windsor Street Site and Former Market Hall Site

The Board received an operational update with respect to progress in the delivery of the Levelling Up Fund (LUF) projects (LUF0297) in Bromsgrove Town Centre. The update covered the period September 2022 – January 2023 for the two projects taking place at Windsor Street Site and the Former Market Hall Site.

With regards to the Windsor Street Site, the Board was informed that:

- The Environment Agency (EA) provided a positive response to the remediation strategy that had been prepared for the Site.
- The draft remediation specification and monitoring plan had been prepared and would now be reviewed before submission to the EA.
- Soft market testing period for finding a remediation contractor had been extended following Programme Board agreement as additional procurement frameworks had to be approached due to a risk of inadequate number of returns by interested contractors.
- Going forward two procurement frameworks would be used, the Pagabo and the Consortium Procurement Construction (CPC) frameworks.

With regards to the Former Market Hall Site, the Board was informed that:

- One Creative Ltd would be appointed as the project's technical adviser and cost consultant following procurement exercise in November 2022.
- RIBA stage two closed in December 2022 with the brief for the design team including proposals for the Main Building to be a mix of open plan office spaces and adaptable workspaces with food and beverage provided on the ground floor
- Proposals for the Pavilion Building were to provide a two-storey pavilion-style building with a covered area to perform as a market square and the ground floor to be adaptable to hosting a range of community events and festivals.

The Board also received an update on the financial implications of the Levelling Up Fund (LUF) projects at Windsor Street (Former Fire Station) and Former Market Hall Sites.

(During the consideration of this item, Members discussed matters that necessitated the disclosure of exempt information. It was therefore agreed to move to exclude the press and public prior to any debate on the grounds that information would be revealed which related to the financial and business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information)).

8th February 2023

Review of the work of North Worcestershire Community Safety Partnership 2022-23

Local authorities were required to scrutinise and review the work of the local Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership on an annual basis. At this meeting the work of the local crime and disorder reduction body, the North Worcestershire Community Safety Partnership (NWCSP), had been scrutinised by the Board, focusing on the work undertaken by the Partnership in Bromsgrove District.

Members received a detailed presentation and held a detailed debate on the NWCSP Plan for 2021-24, the core funding of NWCSP, and the grants available to the Partnership through the West Mercia Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) and how they had been spent within Bromsgrove District. An update was also received on the initiatives of the Partnership, including the Community Safety Project updates for 2022-23. Case studies were also presented on Tibberton Improvement Project and on the resolution of a long standing anti-social behaviour (ASB) problem at West Hills, Hopwood boundary with West Heath, to showcase the positive impact that the Partnership had in reducing crime and disorder.

There was also a discussion regarding local initiatives, particularly with young people including the Empowering Young People Project, Youth Outreach, Young Citizen's Challenge, Bromsgrove Youth Hub, and The Respect Programme.

The Community Safety Partnership Manager and the Community Safety Project Officer presented the Review, and the information was well received by Members, who were grateful for such a detailed overview of the work of the Partnership.

Overview & Scrutiny Board Report – Damp & Mould

The Board received a report on damp and mould in Bromsgrove District properties, detailing what powers the Council possessed regarding property standards and how Bromsgrove District Housing Trust (BDHT), a local registered provider, were dealing with this issue. It was noted that BDHT held approximately 86 per cent of the social housing stock in the district and thus were not the only social housing provider. Several other providers also operated in the district, and they were subject to the same responsibilities and requirements with regards to maintaining housing standards.

It was reported that:

- It was estimated based on the English Housing survey data that around 440 private rented sector properties in Bromsgrove suffered from damp and mould.
- In the last three years the Council's Private Sector Housing Team completed on average 62 Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) inspections per year in Bromsgrove.
- The Housing Act 2004 introduced the HHSRS. It was a calculation of the effect of 29 possible hazards on the health of occupiers and any visitors and during inspections Officers assessed properties against all 29 hazards.
- The HHSRS applied equally to all tenures, therefore all enforcement options were available to the Council regardless of whether the premise in question was owner occupied, privately rented or a Registered Providers (RP) property.

During discussion some of the matters which were highlighted were as follows:

- Enforcement was built around a process of escalation and as such prosecution would only be considered in serious circumstances such as a deliberate, negligent, or persistent breach of legal obligations.
- The Council's Private Sector Housing Team would undertake a thorough assessment of the property based on HHSRS before determining whether damp and mould were occurring at a property due to lifestyle of property occupiers or due to structural issues, for example penetrative damp occurring from blocked gutters.
- A tenant could request inspection by calling the Private Sector Housing Team, but the landlord would also be informed and would need to be present at the proposed visit. In circumstances where the landlord was uncooperative, the inspection could take place without the landlord being present.
- External wall insulation would normally not cause damp to occur. Instead, the issue was that properties were becoming more sealed through so with no air circulation, which caused condensation and, in turn, mould. It was noted that this was often linked to lifestyle choices where occupants left windows and ventilation vents permanently shut and/or did not turn the heating on.
- Government guidance was awaited on powers available if tenants were not cooperating with the advice given on how to tackle mould/damp issues and the condition of the property was deteriorating due to negligence.

Former Market Hall Site Proposal – pre-scrutiny

The Board was informed that Bromsgrove District Council had been awarded £14.5m of Levelling Up Funding from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC). Almost £11m of this funding was allocated to the redevelopment of the Former Market Hall Site. In respect of allocation of funding, it was clarified that Levelling Up Funding could not be allocated to any other projects due to the strict funding criteria.

It was reported that public consultation was currently underway in Bromsgrove regarding the Community Hub proposal along with proposals for a high quality office building at the Former Market Hall site. The consultation was open for comments online on the Council's website until 21st March 2023.

It was highlighted that alongside the landmark office space, a rooftop bar and a high quality restaurant were also included in the design for Former Market Hall Site. These plans were designed to provide diversity and choice for visitors to Bromsgrove Town Centre. It was also noted that demand for premium office space in Bromsgrove had recently been evidenced in a report published by GJS Dillon regarding the Worcestershire Commercial Property Market.

(During the consideration of this item, Members discussed matters that necessitated the disclosure of exempt information. It was therefore agreed to move to exclude the press and public prior to any debate on the grounds that information would be revealed which related to the financial and business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information)).

29th March 2023

Provision of Street Name Plates

A report on Street Name Plates (SNPs) provision within Bromsgrove District was presented by the Environmental Services Manager. It was clarified that the Council had responsibility for the repair and maintenance of Street Name Plates (SNPs) on adopted roads. This included replacement, when necessary, either due to accidental damage, vandalism or normal wear and tear. On new developments, it was the developer's responsibility to erect SNPs initially to the Council's specification.

It was reported that the Council's contract with the existing approved manufacturer of street name plates was due to finish at the end of this financial year. A quotation exercise was due to be undertaken shortly to ascertain the manufacturer to be contracted for the next three years.

It was explained that SNPs were being ordered in bulk due to the saving on delivery costs that this option provided. Damage to SNPs was usually reported by the general public or Members. After a site inspection to determine what remedial works would be required, the damaged sign might be added to the order for the supply of a new SNP, with the manufacturer taking on average 6 weeks to complete the order after it had been raised.

Members discussed the annual budget currently allocated for replacement of street name plates and most Members felt that the current budget of £3,900 per year was too low to provide appropriate coverage of replacement and that the budget should be increased on the basis that at least two new signs per Ward would need to be installed per year.

A motion was agreed by the Board that it be recommended to Cabinet that it consider a report on Street Name Plates including data on the number of signs replaced each year and the newly tendered price per sign (including delivery), and that it be recommended that Cabinet agree to the annual budget for Street Name Plates (SNPs) to be increased to a level suggested as appropriate by Officers. The following two recommendations were agreed by the Board:

- 1. A report on Provision of Street Name Plates be presented to Cabinet.*
- 2. The budget allocation for provision of Street Name Plates be reviewed by Cabinet and increased as per Officer recommendation of the aforementioned report.*

These recommendations are due to be considered by Cabinet at its next meeting, currently scheduled for 7th June 2023.

Electric Vehicle Charging Update

An update on the provision of electric vehicle charging points within Bromsgrove District was provided. It was explained that the Council was looking to increase the number of charging points within the District providing 'off-street' charging facilities for residents with no access to their own charge point.

Currently, four detailed responses were received to the tender for this service which were being evaluated before the contract could be awarded. The prospective contractors were provided with a selection of locations (as listed in the report to the Board) some of which did not have chargers and others which only had one charging point in place. These were initial locations proposed for charging point installation and the rationale was that once the Council had engaged with a contractor, additional locations could be discussed at a later stage.

Some Wards were currently not on the list for charging point installation. This included Rubery South Ward where there had been delays due to contractor issues.

Fly Tipping and Environmental Enforcement Update

The Board received the briefing note and the matters highlighted included:

- Incidence of fly-tipping in the District had been decreasing and the number of recorded to date in 2022-23 had been the lowest recorded in the last eight years.
- The cost of environmental crime incurred by the Council had been reducing over the last 8 years. Nevertheless, the Council still had to spend almost £100,000 per year in tackling environmental crime.

- Demand for fly-tipping monitoring had been greater than the resource available to the Council and there were two cases of fly-tipping captured on CCTV footage that were currently followed up as active cases.

Members requested that Officers undertake the following actions:

- Review national legislation with respect to the maximum distance allowed for placement of CCTV warning signs away from the camera (without necessitating the use of RIPA legislation).
- Add a standing item on fly-tipping and environmental enforcement to the Overview and Scrutiny Board Work Programme, to be considered on a bi-annual basis.

Overview and Scrutiny Board Work Programme

The Board agreed to cancel the meeting scheduled for 17th April 2023 due to the pre-election period and agreed to this Annual Report for 2022-23 being considered at the first meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board in the 2023-24 municipal year.

Conclusion of the 2022-23 Year

The year was concluded with special mention and note of thanks to two long-standing Councillors and current Members of the Board, Councillors C. Spencer and Councillor R. Deeming, for whom this was the last year on the Council.

Councillor C. Spencer served as a Bromsgrove District Councillor for twenty consecutive years from the 2003-04 municipal year. Councillor Spencer represented Slideslow Ward and was the Chairman of Bromsgrove District Council from 2015 to 2019.

Councillor R. Deeming served as a Bromsgrove District Councillor for thirty-two years, having first joined the Council in 1987-88 municipal year. Councillor Deeming represented Cofton Ward. Among Chairmanship positions held over the years, Councillor Deeming had most recently been serving as the Chairman of the Licensing Committee in the current municipal year (2022-23).

Members of the Board expressed their gratitude to Councillors R. Deeming and C. Spencer for their stunning contribution to residents of Cofton and Slideslow respectively, and to Bromsgrove District as a whole.

The Chairman also took the opportunity to thank the rest of the Board for their contributions. Councillors A. Kriss, M. Middleton, and the Vice-Chairman, Councillor J. Till, were thanked for their service to the Council as it was noted they were not contesting the upcoming elections.

WORCESTERSHIRE HEALTH OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE (HOSC)

The Council's representative on this Committee must be a Member of the Overview and Scrutiny Board and is required to provide the Board with regular updates on the work being carried out.

The Board's representative for the municipal year 2022/23 was Councillor S. Baxter.

During the year Councillor Baxter highlighted the following areas and responded to questions from Members:

- Ambulance Hospital Handover Times
- Mental Health provision in Worcestershire (including Hill Crest MH Ward)
- Physiotherapy Services and Elective Surgery
- Maternity Services in Worcestershire
- Community Ambulances and Primary Care (GP) Access within Worcestershire
- Health Inequalities resulting from the Covid-19 Pandemic
- Medical Staff Shortages.

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WORKING GROUPS – UPDATE

Background to Working Groups

In 2022-23 the Board continued to have a dedicated Finance and Budget Working Group. This had enabled a dedicated group of Members to consider these areas in both more detail and in a timelier manner and had also, when necessary, enabled Members to feed through any recommendations to Cabinet more promptly.

The terms of reference for the Finance and Budget Working Group were agreed by the Board and were regularly reviewed to ensure that the work being carried out remained relevant. This year the Board agreed to make some changes to the Finance and Budget Working Group terms of reference which are to be implemented from the start of 2023-24 municipal year. A review of the Working Groups, as part of the review of the overall Overview and Scrutiny Board function, had historically taken place at the April meeting. This year it was agreed that the April meeting would be cancelled and the Board's Annual Report be considered at the first meeting of the Board in the 2023-24 municipal year, where the Working Groups would also be reviewed.

Finance & Budget Working Group

Membership: Councillors C. A. Hotham (Chairman), Councillors S. R. Colella, R. Hunter, A. D. Kriss and J. Till

This Group met on four occasions this year and the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Enabling has attended all the Group's meetings, together with the Interim Director of Finance and the Head of Finance and Customer Services.

The list below contains some of the reports which the Working Group has considered and gives an insight into the work that has been carried out:

- 2023/24 Budget
- Medium Term Financial Plan 2023/24 to 2025/26
- The Financial Outturn Report
- Blue Badge Motion which had been submitted by Councillor S. Robinson at the Full Council meeting held on 3rd November 2021
- Council Tax Empty Homes Discounts and Premiums report
- Fees and Charges

Once again, by being able to consider a number of reports in more detail and prior to their consideration at Cabinet, Members of the Board were able, via the Working Group, to play an increased part in the budget setting process.

Corporate Performance Working Group

As detailed in the previous year's Annual Report it was agreed by Members of the Board that the Corporate Performance Working Group would no longer meet in 2022-23. It was deemed more appropriate to scrutinise the Performance of the Council at the main Board meetings every 6 months.

In 2022-23, The Board considered items on the Performance Dashboard Update on two occasions and the Board was also regularly updated on the progress in implementing the Performance Dashboard throughout 2022-23 municipal year.

TASK GROUP INVESTIGATIONS & SHORT, SHARP REVIEWS CARRIED OUT

The detailed final reports of all these investigations can be found on the Council's website within the Overview and Scrutiny section.

Fuel Poverty Task Group

Membership: Councillors R. Hunter (Chairman), S. Baxter A.B Beaumont, M. Glass, H. Rone-Clarke, J. King, C. Spencer, and K. Van Der Plank

The outcome on the Fuel Poverty Task Group investigation can be found earlier in this report in the 'Reports Considered by the Board' section – 21st November, Fuel Poverty Task Group – Final Report.

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Conclusion

A significant amount of pre-scrutiny work has been carried out by the Board throughout the year and based on detailed discussions a number of recommendations had been made to Cabinet and Full Council. Some of these recommendations were subsequently approved by the decision-making bodies. In addition to this, the work of the the Finance and Budget Working Group has been useful in providing Members with an opportunity to look at complex finance reports in some considerable detail. During the year one task group (the Fuel Poverty Task Group) had also concluded and made a number of constructive recommendations which were accepted by Cabinet. Overall, this was a positive and constructive year for the Overview and Scrutiny function in Bromsgrove.

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FURTHER INFORMATION

Overview and Scrutiny Board Meetings

Overview and Scrutiny Board meetings are open to the public. To find out more visit our website at <http://www.bromsgrove.gov.uk/council/the-council/overview-and-scrutiny.aspx> or telephone 01527 881288 and ask to speak to the Democratic Services Officer.

Public Involvement

If you would like to have your say on issues being considered by Overview and Scrutiny or to suggest a topic for consideration you can email scrutiny@bromsgrove.gov.uk or complete the form on the Council's website at <http://www.bromsgrove.gov.uk/council/the-council/overview-and-scrutiny/public-participation.aspx>

Giving Evidence

Members of the public or organisations with a special interest or knowledge about a particular topic being considered by Overview and Scrutiny can put forward evidence to a Committee or appear as a witness to give evidence for an investigation. If you think you or your organisation might be able to participate in an issue currently under review, please contact us.

If you have a personal issue with a Council service you may find it more useful to contact your local ward Councillor who can help you decide the best way to take it forward.

Contact Overview and Scrutiny

If you would like to find out more about any aspect of the Overview and Scrutiny Board then you can email scrutiny@bromsgrove.gov.uk or telephone 01527 881288 and ask to speak to the Democratic Services Officer.

Overview and Scrutiny

Legal, Equalities and Democratic Services

Bromsgrove District Council

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