



Portfolio Holder Report

Portfolio Holder Report – Strategic Partnerships and Enabling

Introduction and Overview:

At Bromsgrove District Council Portfolio Holders provide an annual update to Council on services within their portfolio remit. These services are delivered in accordance with the Council's Priorities, as detailed in the Bromsgrove District Council Plan 2024 - 27.

This report provides an outline of services and activities within the remit of this particular Portfolio Holder. Information is included in relation to the Council's Priorities, relevant key activities, partnership working, projects and programmes and news stories.

A version of this report, focusing on each Portfolio Holder's remit in turn, will be considered at each meeting of Council (except for the Annual Council meeting).

Whilst services will be contributing information into this report it is worth noting that not all sections of the report will be relevant to all service areas. In this circumstance, some sections may not be completed by all services.

The report will be structured as follows:

- 1) Update on Council Priorities
- 2) Partnership working
- 3) Key activities and priorities
- 4) Good news stories and awards (if applicable)
- 5) Other

The Council has the following Priorities:

Council Priorities	Organisational priorities
Economic Development	Financial stability
Housing	Sustainability
Environment	Partnerships
Infrastructure	Organisational Culture – the 4Ps
	Budget & Resources



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1. Update on Council Priorities

Relevant Council Priorities:

The Bromsgrove Partnership supports and complements all of the Council's Priorities and its Vision, particularly given it has representation from a wide variety of organisations and has a wide remit. The Partnership's vision is: *'We will make Bromsgrove District the place to live, do business and to visit.'*

The vision of the Partnership complements the Council's vision: *'We aspire to create a welcoming environment that prioritises quality of life, where residents and businesses feel a deep sense of belonging and connection'*

The Council plan highlights the thread created that relates to the wellbeing of our communities, which is integral to all the Council's priorities. This same thread is integral to the work of the Partnership, particularly in relation to the Collaborative, which forms part of the Partnership's remit.

Although the Bromsgrove Partnership has theme groups, such as the Community Wellbeing Theme Group, for the purposes of this annual report, and to avoid duplication with other Portfolio Holder Reports, this report will focus specifically on the Bromsgrove Partnership Board (including District Collaborative arrangements) and joint Cost of Living Partnership Group.

Background Context

Bromsgrove Partnership Board – The Bromsgrove Partnership is a local strategic partnership which brings together representatives from different organisations primarily from the public sector and voluntary and community sector. Instead of each organisation working separately in isolation, the Bromsgrove Partnership provides a way, through a Board and Theme Groups, for partners to work together in a more effective and cohesive way.

Following health reforms and the introduction of District Collaboratives within Integrated Care Systems (ICS), it was suggested by health partners that the Bromsgrove Partnership took on the remit of the local District Collaborative, which was agreed in 2022. The focus is on prevention and priorities agreed in 2023 were: Mental Health and Wellbeing; and Health Inequalities. This aligns with the Countywide Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2022-2032.

The Board meets every 2 months and are in person meetings. They are chaired by the Chief Executive of Bromsgrove District Housing Trust (BDHT) and the Vice-Chair is the Chief Executive of Act on Energy. Alongside the Leader, the District Council's Chief Executive and Assistant Director of



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Community and Housing Services, are members of the Board, and other agencies represented on the Board, generally at Chief Officer level, are:

- Act on Energy
- Age UK Bromsgrove, Redditch and Wyre Forest (Age UK BRWF)
- Bromsgrove and Redditch Network (BARN)
- Bromsgrove District Housing Trust (BDHT)
- Bromsgrove Primary Care Network (PCN)
- Citizens Advice Bromsgrove and Redditch (CABR)
- Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)
- Heart of Worcestershire (HoW) College
- Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service (HWFRS)
- NewStarts
- Parish Councils - County Association of Local Councils (CALC)
- West Mercia Police
- Worcestershire County Council (including Public Health & Adult Social Care)
- Young Solutions

The above covers Board representation, however, there is a wider variety of representatives engaged at Theme Group level.

Cost of Living Partnership Group – Following a discussion at a Bromsgrove Partnership Board meeting back in 2022, it was suggested and agreed that a joint Cost of Living Partnership Officer Group be set up covering both Bromsgrove and Redditch. Relevant officer representatives from the Board volunteered to form the group, and additional officer representatives, including from our own our Financial Inclusion Team, were invited to join too. The purpose of the group is to bring together different agencies and stakeholders in Bromsgrove and Redditch to create a unified and comprehensive approach to alleviating the impact of the cost of living crisis, with the aim of improving the wellbeing of residents and communities. It's chaired by the District Council's Assistant Director of Community and Housing Services who reports back to the wider Board.

Key activities since last report:

Below are some recent examples of discussions and actions that have come out of the Bromsgrove Partnership Board and Cost of Living Group:

Falls, Frailty and Reconditioning –

Earlier this year, Dr Daphne Austin (DA) gave a presentation to the Board (and Ageing Well Group) regarding the above to raise awareness of skeletal muscle loss, that can happen as part of the ageing process and through deconditioning events (e.g. as a result of the recent pandemic, physical injury, mental health issue etc), and the significant impact muscle loss had on the incidence of frailty. It was explained that if an individual did not fully



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recondition (i.e. build muscle mass) after deconditioning events, the cumulative effect would be the individual would be on a trajectory to functional loss and frailty.

However, what was emphasised was frailty is not inevitable therefore the importance of considering ways to prevent functional decline in older age by individuals, employers, organisations (including NHS) and as a local system was highlighted. As a result of the presentation to partners, various actions were agreed and completed including:

- (a) Dr Daphne Austin was invited and attended HOW College to present to students and discuss with tutors the possibilities of incorporating information into the curriculum for relevant courses, as appropriate.
- (b) BDC Leisure Team colleagues met with Dr Daphne Austin and as a result changes were made to sessions delivered by instructors the Council work with to ensure reconditioning was covered as standard.
- (c) Resources were made available for partners (such as Age UK Bromsgrove, Redditch and Wyre Forest) to share with individuals to help raise awareness of the consequences of deconditioning and the importance of movement and reconditioning.
- (d) To help get the message out amongst partners, as suggested by the Chief Executive of the District Council, a presentation was recorded and circulated, along with many other links to other resource information: [Reconditioning and its importance in the prevention of frailty - YouTube](#)

Digital Connectivity –

Concerns were raised at the Board around connectivity which lead to the relevant officer from Worcestershire County Council being invited to attend to discuss further. During discussions the plans that are underway by the telecommunication industry to switch off the Public Switched Telephone Network (PSTN) and ultimately retire the copper network were raised. Whilst there is a need for the Councils (County and District) and partners to manage the impact on its systems and services (e.g. Lifeline Service) partners questioned what more could be done to ensure local residents, including vulnerable groups, were informed.

The need for a national approach was considered but, in the meantime, to assist at a local level, Age UK Bromsgrove, Redditch and Wyre Forest, with the support of partners, including Council teams such as Lifeline and Community Safety, as well as the Older People's Forum, held a very successful digital switchover information and Q&A event with BT in the High Street earlier this year. Due to demand, a follow up event at Amphlett Hall with BT was also held. More discussions are planned at the next Board meeting to consider further ways partners can work together in relation to digital connectivity, including the mobile agenda and ways in which partners could potentially assist the County Council in collating data/evidence.

UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) –

The Partnership Board was requested to oversee the [UK Shared Prosperity Fund](#), of which Bromsgrove District was allocated £2.8m over 2022-25. The role of the Partnership is outlined in Government Guidance but in short it is



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to support the lead local authority by putting forward recommendations to help inform its decisions.

A separate Task Group, made up of a selection of Board members and a business representative, was set up to consider in detail project proposals submitted and make recommendations to Bromsgrove District Council. The Partnership Task Group is supported by the Council's UKSPF Manager and ultimately decision making sits with Bromsgrove District Council. To date, all recommendations put forward by the Partnership and its Task Group have been considered and agreed. (Information on UKSPF funded Projects can be found on our website at: [UKSPF Projects \(bromsgrove.gov.uk\)](http://www.bromsgrove.gov.uk))

Cost of Living Work –

The latest cost of living survey was undertaken the end of last year and what came out very clear from those surveys was the need to raise awareness, in different ways, of the support available. This led to the cost of living leaflets and various versions / updates were produced where partners helped to distribute to various places in the community such as GP surgeries, libraries, shops, community facilities like the Pod, and handing them out at various events etc. Many District Councillors (and Parish Councils) also assisted with this, to help reach those digitally excluded to ensure as many of our residents were informed. This was in addition to online promotion via websites and social media. There were also different events where partners came together to help ensure people knew where to turn for help.

Working with Worcestershire County Council, the District Council have received an allocation of Household Support Fund (HSF) since it started and in turn has distributed a proportion to local foodbanks and white goods scheme, as well as to BDHT's hardship scheme. The majority of funds have been used by the District Council to deliver a local scheme and in the recent phases this has been a cash voucher scheme. However, this has only been possible to deliver due to the close working partnership with Citizens Advice Bromsgrove and Redditch. They were able to work flexibly, in very tight timeframes, and reach a number of households needing support, many of whom would not necessarily reach out to the Council. The Council is intending to continue to work with Citizens Advice Bromsgrove and Redditch and other partners during phase 6, due to commence in October 2024. At the time of writing this report, Government Guidance is awaited.

The Council has supported the cost of living work through the allocation of £150,000 to support cost of living initiatives. Council has already approved resources to enhance the support of its Financial Inclusion Team, and Members are considering a recommendation from Cabinet to fund a voluntary sector advisor and a Citizens Advice Outreach Development Worker as part of the Agenda this evening.

Poverty Truth Commission –

The idea of a Poverty Truth Commission was suggested at a Partnership Board meeting. It was understood other areas, including Malvern Hill District Council, were also considering so a representative from the Poverty Truth Network (PTN) was invited to attend a meeting earlier this year.



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It was explained that 'Poverty Truth' started with an understanding that any talk about poverty must include people who had experienced poverty - "Nothing about us, without us, is for us". It was explained that a commission sought to build relationships and trust between people struggling against poverty and decision-makers. The purpose is to collectively work together to understand the underlying issues that cause poverty and explore creative ways to address them. The Poverty Truth Network website was referred to www.povertytrustnetwork.org which included a short video to explain.

There are different phases of setting up a commission, including a closing event to communicate the findings, but the process starts with exploring the idea and then finding out if there is enough interest and commitment locally. The Partnership Board agreed it was worthwhile exploring and a small partnership group has been established to consider next steps, with the free support of a PTN mentor.

Knowledge Bank Redesign –

The [Knowledge Bank](#) is a community services directory covering Bromsgrove and Redditch. It's available publicly for all to use and is a searchable tool to help connect people to relevant support and activities. The Council, working closely with partners, in particular BARN (Bromsgrove and Redditch Network – who work with and support our voluntary and community groups) help us to update and maintain the content of the Knowledge Bank. The Council, and its partners, have supported this through existing resource only. Without the strong working relationships with partners, this would have been impossible to set up and more crucially, maintain, let alone redesign into a tool which is now more inviting and user friendly.

Partnership Bulletin –

There is a monthly Partnership E-Bulletin to help keep all informed. If local agencies, including teams across the Council, are well-informed, they in turn can ensure our residents are aware of all the appropriate help and support available locally. Information within the bulletin is information the Partnership team receives which is put into one email and circulated widely, including all District Councillors. It takes time to distil the information into one monthly email but the idea is simple but again, would not be possible if partners, including Council teams, did not share information to be included.

Anticipated Activities/Key Milestones For Next Period

The Partnership quite deliberately tries to remain flexible so that it is able to respond to issues / concerns / any partner requests, however, below is a list of some of the up and coming work anticipated over the next few months:

Digital Connectivity – Following on from earlier discussions, the Board is keen to revisit this to discuss what more they can do collectively at a local level. This will happen at the next meeting.



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Mental health and wellbeing and suicide prevention – Collectively the Board would like to consider what they are doing to support community wellbeing, directly and indirectly, and discuss together if there is anything further they can do by working together. Public health colleagues will lead on this item, as a starting point, at a meeting later in this year.

NHS Patient Engagement – The Board has been approached by the Worcestershire Acute NHS Trust to present their Patient Engagement Strategy, and this is being arranged to take place at the Board meeting in January 2025.

Sunrise 360 Project – This project originated some years ago from the Partnership originally focussed on a very small specific area of high need. Led by Bromsgrove District Housing Trust and supported by the District Council, it has grown and covers a far wider area and is tenure blind. The 360 team work in a way that is person-centred focussed, supporting vulnerable residents with complex needs who are often known to a number of agencies. Since it started, reports are provided to the Board and the next one is due in the coming months.

Poverty Truth Commission (PTC) – Exploration of this work will continue, including looking at ways to join up health related work (such as the 'Your Health' Bus) with engaging people with lived / living experience of poverty. For instance, linking Challenge Poverty week in October to Your Health bus events locally to help test out if residents are interested in sharing their story and being involved should a PTC be set up.

Poverty Alleviation Research – We have been approached by Aston University to attend a Cost of Living Partnership Group to present their research and a toolkit they have devised which might be useful to us in strengthening our collective action to alleviating poverty at a local level. Representatives will be joining our October meeting to explain more.

Wider promotion of Knowledge Bank – With a refresh of the Knowledge Bank to make it more inviting and user friendly, the next step is to increase the promotion to ensure all who may benefit from it, are aware the tool is there for them to use. With input from BARN (Bromsgrove and Redditch Network – who support local voluntary and community groups and assist us in maintaining the directory), promotional materials are being produced and distributed to make sure partners are fully aware of the community services directory that their teams can use, and local residents are aware of the free online tool too. It's already been incorporated into the Citizens Advice Bromsgrove and Redditch Information First Aid Training as a tool anyone can use.

Partnership Bulletin – Continuation of the monthly Partnership Bulletin as one way to help ensure all of our teams and our partners are as informed as possible with a variety of information, which they can glance through and pick what is relevant to them so they can effectively refer and signpost residents they are already engaging with.



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2. Partnership Working

Given this report relates to Bromsgrove Partnership, partnership working is covered within the above section.

3. Good News Stories and Awards (if applicable)

What the Bromsgrove Partnership does is provide a platform to facilitate and support partnership working locally. Effective partnership working can only happen when there is good understanding and strong working relationships between partners. Without that as a basis, even straightforward partnership projects can go wrong very fast.

No time is wasted on promoting the Bromsgrove Partnership itself, as that would be of little use to our local residents. Our residents are unlikely to even be aware of the Bromsgrove Partnership as its purpose is to smooth the way to ensure it's as easy as possible for local organisations to work together so that partners, including the Council, can deliver on its plans, priorities and overall vision for the benefit of our residents.

No one organisation, including the District Council, can work in isolation to deliver and meet the needs of local residents. This can only be achieved by working effectively together and we are fortunate in Bromsgrove that other organisations locally recognise this and are willing to take the time to come together to address issues which, ultimately and most importantly, benefits our local residents.

4. Other

LGA Corporate Peer Challenge – Feedback Report 2023

Finally, it is perhaps worth noting the positive feedback relating to the Bromsgrove Partnership that was contained within the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge Report last year. Below are a couple of extracts from that report:

There are very strong, honest and trusting partner relationships in place at the senior levels through the Local Strategic Partnership and the council is to be commended as the peer team heard universal praise on this. The partnership is driven by a desire to improve local services, and everybody is committed to making a difference. Partner relationships now need to be better invested across the whole organisation.

The council effectively uses partner capacity to shape and deliver priority outcomes. For example, the 'Sunrise Project' which worked closely with



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*families struggling with issues including drug and alcohol addiction, debt problems, anti-social behaviour and school absenteeism was a successful project between the council and the Local Strategic Partnership. This was due to strong and productive partnership relationships at senior level which have been praised by strategic partners, community and voluntary sector and the wider county networks – “**by far the best partnership I’ve worked with**”.*