

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL  
LEGAL, DEMOCRATIC & PROPERTY SERVICES



# Overview and Scrutiny **ANNUAL REPORT**

**2024 - 2025**



**Bromsgrove**  
District Council  
[www.bromsgrove.gov.uk](http://www.bromsgrove.gov.uk)

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## **FOREWORD FROM THE CHAIRMAN**

The second year of the new Council had been as challenging as the first, with the number of Task Groups and workload in general.

The Task Groups had completed their set agendas within the time limit and furthermore, most of the recommendations had been agreed and actioned by the Cabinet. As expected, the Board was required to increase the number of the meetings to manage an ever-increasing agenda, ensuring scrutiny was carried out efficiently and in a robust manner.

I would like to thank all Members of the Board who committed their time and energy to the tasks and of course to all who took part in Task Groups. I also realise the amount of work been placed on our Officers and would like to thank them for the help and assistance they gave to the Board.

**Councillor Peter McDonald**  
**Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Board**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

We are pleased to present the Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report which outlines our work during 2024-2025 (this covers the municipal year from May 2024 to April 2025) and provides general information on the overview and scrutiny processes at Bromsgrove District Council (BDC).

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 P. M. McDonald  
(Chairman)**



**Councillor S. T. Nock  
(Vice-Chairman)**



Councillor A. Bailes



Councillor R. Bailes



Councillor A. M. Dale



Councillor E. M. S. Gray



Councillor R. J. Hunter



Councillor B. Kumar



Councillor D.J. Nicholl



Councillor S. A. Robinson



Councillor J. D. Stanley

## **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. 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 2024-25, 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.

## **REPORTS CONSIDERED BY THE BOARD**

The Board continued to receive updates to monitor the progress of recommendations it has made, with the recommendations made throughout this year outlined in this report. 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 year the Board had made several recommendations. There has been continued support from the relevant Cabinet Members this year, with regular attendance at Overview and Scrutiny meetings in relation to reports concerning Cabinet Members' areas of responsibility. This has given the Cabinet an opportunity to hear first-hand the debate and any recommendations made by the Board. The Chairman of the Board attends Cabinet meetings to present any recommendations made. On several occasions, whilst the Board had not made any recommendations in respect of an item, it had endorsed and/or supported recommendations which were then considered by Cabinet at its meetings.

The Board is due to consider the Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2024-25 at the meeting due to be held on 15<sup>th</sup> April 2025.

## **THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD'S WORK PROGRAMME**

Topics for the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme were selected. The topics that the Board chose to prioritise as 'key' in 2024-25 were: The Bromsgrove Play Audit; North Worcestershire Community Safety Partnership (including Anti-Social Behaviour); Changes to Waste Services in response to the Environment Act 2021 and Council's Levelling-Up Projects. Topics selected for a 'first look' briefing to all Councillors were: The District Heat Network; Biodiversity; Street Sweeping and Food Waste.

In addition to the above, an update was provided to the Board in respect of the Impact of Heatwaves Task group recommendation for the Board to be provided with an annual update.

Several other areas of interest have also been identified such as EV Chargers, Recycling on Bromsgrove High Street and Council Tax Debt Recovery. These have all been included on the Board's Work Programme for consideration during the 2025-2026 municipal year.

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## **OVERVIEWS**

### **Affordable Housing Briefing**

During the meeting the definition of affordable housing, number and size of the affordable housing delivered, housing register information, affordable housing needs and future delivery were discussed.

### **Play Audit**

During its meeting, Members were advised that the audit was being commissioned in order to ascertain the provision of play equipment within the District. Data was gathered in respect of travel distance and condition of provision, including areas in need of investment, such as infrastructure improvements or resurfacing. The audit included spaces provided by the Council, Parish Councils and third-party providers and only publicly accessible play spaces be included.

There were eighty-five play spaces publicly available within the District, forty areas managed by Bromsgrove District Council, thirty by Parish Councils and fifteen by third party providers e.g. Community Associations. The assessment identified a hierarchy of play provision based on an accessibility model that was comparable to national guidelines which were Local Play Spaces within four hundred metres with a five-to-ten-minute walking distance and Neighbourhood Play Spaces within eight hundred metres with a ten-to-fifteen-minute walking distance.

### **The Basement Project (Aims of Grant Funding)**

This report sought to provide an opportunity for Members to familiarise themselves with the aims and outcomes of the Basement Project which provided housing related support and other support to young people up to the age of twenty-five.

The Council supported the Basement Project with both Homelessness Prevention Grant and Domestic Abuse grant funding. The purpose of the ringfenced Homelessness Prevention Grant fund was to give Local Authorities control and flexibility in managing homelessness pressures and supporting those who were at risk of homelessness. The Government expected Local Authorities to fully enforce the Homelessness Reduction Act and contribute to ending rough sleeping by increasing activity to prevent single homelessness, reduce family temporary accommodation numbers through maximising family homelessness prevention and eliminate the use of unsuitable bed and breakfast accommodation for families for longer than the statutory six-week limit.

Domestic Abuse New Burdens Grant funding was also allocated to ensure that Councils could comply with the requirements to provide safe and supported accommodation for those fleeing domestic abuse.

## **North Worcestershire Community Safety Partnership (NWCSP) (including Anti-Social Behaviour)**

In line with the Council's Constitution, the Board scrutinise the work of the Community Safety Partnership on an annual basis.

During consideration of the report at this year's meeting, the Board were informed that at its Planning meeting in February 2024, the North Worcestershire Community Safety Partnership (NWCSP) reviewed and agreed its new priorities for the following three-year period. The Partnership Plan set out the priorities that the CSP would focus on for a three-year period, with an annual refresh to capture any emerging issues and trends.

Alongside the local priorities, NWCSP worked closely with South Worcestershire CSP, through the countywide Safer Communities Board (SCB), to identify and address countywide issues. Through Worcestershire SCB, the two statutory CSPs collaborated on key countywide projects and initiatives to ensure District area input and delivery were considered and implemented.

In 2023-24 new funding was made available by the Home Office via the West Mercia Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) to support Community Safety partners in Implementing the Serious Violence Duty, an annual ring-fenced amount to identify and address local issues at a District level and also allocated additional Safer Communities funding to NWCSP.

## **PRE-SCRUTINY**

### **Levelling-Up**

During various meetings, updates on the Levelling Up Projects at Windsor Street, Market Hall site and the Public Realm works were discussed.

Members were informed that Cabinet were to approve the appointment of City Demolition for the demolition of existing buildings and associated site remediation, removal of existing redundant services and utilities and to approve a 10-week extension in the Market Hall Pre Construction Service Agreement (PCSA) in order to fully validate costs. The Overview and Scrutiny Board endorsed the report recommendations.

Members were also advised of the use of Kier for the delivery of the main works at the former Market Hall site following the Value Engineering exercises which had been approved in July 2024. Discussions also included the possible letting of the former Market Hall site and how associated parking issues could be mitigated, updates on the risk registers and how risks were being mitigated and the overall costs and how the project was to be financed. It had also been discussed that the Council had applied for and was awarded £14.5m of Levelling Up Funding.

During the various quarterly reports Members were briefed on the progress of the schemes at the Windsor Street site, Public Realm works, Former Market Hall, Risk Registers and how risks would be mitigated and also sought Members' approval to agree that the frequency of updates to the Overview and Scrutiny Board in respect of Levelling-Up be quarterly, which was endorsed by the Board.

### **Bromsgrove District Council Plan**

A presentation was provided on the new Bromsgrove District Council Plan for 2024-2027. The Council Plan provided an overarching vision for the District, with four new priorities being Economic Development; Housing; Environment and Infrastructure. It was noted that operationally the Council Plan informed the service business planning process and helped to determine the Medium-Term Financial Plan. The priorities and objectives contained within the Plan would be monitored using specific measures to ascertain areas of success and those where improvement was needed. The Overview and Scrutiny endorsed the Council Plan for approval.

### **Woodland Creation Application**

The Overview and Scrutiny Board endorsed the Woodland Creation Application for approval.

### **Bromsgrove Play Audit and Investment Strategy**

The report set out a factual analysis of the play equipment within the District, detailing Council owned sites, location and who managed the specific areas. The Play Audit and Investment Strategy sought to address deficiencies in play provision across the

District, allowing all households, where reasonably practicable, to have access to good quality play spaces within walking times of up to ten to fifteen minutes.

The Bromsgrove Play Audit which considered the accessibility of play provision, considered the contribution of all 85 play spaces, however the Bromsgrove Play Investment Strategy was focused on the 40 play spaces, for which Bromsgrove District Council had responsibility.

An amendment to the following Recommendation was endorsed by the Board:

“That the approach to capital investment as presented in The Bromsgrove Play Audit and Investment Strategy (Appendix 2) is accepted and that Officers are requested to prepare bids *in consultation with Ward Members* for capital funding, as applicable, to be considered in due course and in the context of other funding bids”.

The amendment to the recommendation was considered at the Cabinet meeting held on 10<sup>th</sup> December 2024 and approved.

### **Introduction of Food Waste Collection (Pre-Scrutiny)**

During this item the Board were informed that the Government had set a new statutory duty under the Environment Act 2021 to introduce a dedicated separate weekly collection of food waste from all households by 31st March 2026, alongside expanded requirements on dry recycling.

Working closely with Worcestershire County Council (WCC) as the Waste Disposal Authority, the Council were able to accommodate the changes to dry recycling without any modification to the existing green bin service. The report focused primarily on the changes required from the new food waste service. As the Council operated such a service, additional resources were required to operate and due to the size restrictions of the depots, were unable to add them to the existing arrangements without significant investment in additional land as well as an expansion of the Operator’s Licence with the Traffic Commissioner and Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA). In addition to the challenges regarding space restrictions on providing the service, it would require procurement and delivery of food waste caddies for each property, additional bins for communal properties, and additional dedicated vehicles and staff to collect the waste.

The Overview and Scrutiny Board endorsed the recommendations for approval.

### **Refuse Fleet Replacement and Wheeled Bin Pressures (Pre-Scrutiny)**

Members were asked to consider the “Diamond” bins which were limiting the Council’s ability to meet the statutory duties, as well as increasing operating costs. It was proposed that BDC replace all the existing “Diamond” wheeled bins with industry standard “Comb” 240ltr wheeled bins or to consider replacing all the existing green and brown “Diamond” wheeled bins with industry standard “Comb” 240ltr wheeled bins and replace the existing 240ltr wheeled bins for residual waste, with 180ltr “Comb” wheeled bins.

The option to reduce the size of the residual waste bin, although would support immediate benefits regarding recycling performance, might add additional challenges,

should the Council look to make further changes to expand the service and/or reduce the frequency of residual waste collection to further pressurise the waste stream and reduce operating costs linked to the non-recyclable waste.

Like for like replacement of all existing Diamond Wheeled bins would require Capital investment including delivery and expected credits against the recycled “Diamond” bins. A decision to reduce the size of the 240ltr residual waste bins to 180ltrs would reduce costs and would also support increased recycling quantities and take up of the food waste service expected to start in 2026 based on a current fortnightly collection service.

During consideration of the item, a recommendation was endorsed by the Board “To endorse the proposal within the report to: Replace all our existing “Diamond” wheeled bins with industry standard “Comb” 240ltr wheeled bins (no change in size for any waste streams)”.

The amendment to the recommendation was considered at the Cabinet meeting held on 7<sup>th</sup> January 2025 and approved.

### **Strategic Parking Review (Pre-scrutiny)**

The purpose of this report was to inform the Board that Waterman Infrastructure and Environment had been commissioned by BDC to undertake the Strategic Parking Review as through various meetings there was a clear desire expressed by Members to ensure a more equitable balance in patrols across the whole District.

A key element of delivery was to ensure a clear partnership working amongst the various stakeholders, it was therefore recommended that a Parking Task Group be established including representatives from BDC, WDC and Warwickshire County Council (WCC) to work through the various options pertinent to each organisation.

To assess how car parking enforcement may be delivered in the medium and long term, an options appraisal identifying the positives and negatives of the three key options had been undertaken which included maintaining the SLA with WDC, tender out to external contractors and delivery with internal resources.

The publication of the English Devolution White Paper on 16th December 2024 had provided uncertainty on the impact that this would have on BDC over the forthcoming two to four years. As such, continuity of service for parking enforcement was recommended by an extension to the period of the services delivered by WDC. This continuity would ensure compliance of service delivery during the period of the extended SLA and would also allow officers the time and capacity to deliver the Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) solutions for the three car parks identified.

The Shopmobility Service was also discussed which had five customers with one customer being a regular user.

During consideration it was felt by that the Business Case and Service Review had not addressed the points raised by Members during various meetings and as such

Members were unable to endorse the suggested recommendations to Cabinet. However, the following were Recommended:

- 1) The Business Case and Service Review for the strategic parking review be deferred for 6 months until the issues have been addressed as not fit for purpose, in that it doesn't cover bringing the service in house.
- 2) There should be an increase in the proposed Civil Enforcement Officer (CEO) patrol time, greater than 25%, included in the Service Level Agreement (SLA), as the current proposal of 25% is not considered to be adequate.
- 3) More CEOs should be funded to operate in the District as opposed to introducing an Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) service.
- 4) The Council retain cash payment options for car parks in the District.
- 5) A study be launched reviewing parking in Alvechurch.

The suggested recommendations were considered at the Cabinet meeting held on 12<sup>th</sup> February 2025. The Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Regeneration addressed the recommendations during the presentation of the report and stated that as a result of the pre-scrutiny, there had been several changes to the recommendations contained within the Cabinet report.

### **Local Development Scheme (LDS)**

During this item Members were informed that following Government consultation on the 12<sup>th</sup> December 2024, a new version of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was published and to meet the requirement, a new Local Development Scheme (LDS) had been produced. The LDS was the timetable for the Planning Policies which the Council intended to produce and outlined the likely path the Bromsgrove District Local Plan would take to adoption.

The Board endorsed the recommendation to Cabinet.

### **Bromsgrove Local Heritage List (Pre-Scrutiny)**

This report updated Members on the tasks which were undertaken by the Conservation Team to prepare the Bromsgrove Local Heritage List (LHL). Work for the Parishes of Alvechurch, Beoley, Belbroughton and Fairfield and Dodford with Grafton had been completed. The report also gave an update of progress for other areas within the District.

A six-week consultation period had commenced with letters sent to all owners/occupiers providing information about the consultation, including the listing for their property. Following completion of the consultation process the LHL for each parish was finalised. The Conservation Team were asking Cabinet to recommend that Council approve the LHL list which would then be a material consideration in the planning process. The Board endorsed the recommendation to Cabinet.

During various quarterly updates held the Board were advised of progress made on the Bromsgrove Local Heritage list. Draft lists for the parishes of Alvechurch, Belbroughton and Fairfield, Beoley and Dodford with Grafton were published and a six-week consultation process carried out. The Board were also informed of progress on preparing the lists and inviting nominations for Lickey and Blackwell and Barnt Green. Work on drafting the lists for Lickey and Blackwell, Bromsgrove, Wythall and Bournheath continued but had been reduced due to staff sickness and a rise of Development Management work in January and February.

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## **INFORMATION ITEMS**

### **Worcestershire Health Overview & Scrutiny Committee (HOSC)**

The Council's representative on the Worcestershire-wide Health Overview and Scrutiny 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 2024-25 was Councillor B. Kumar. During the year Councillor B. Kumar provided comprehensive and informed updates on meetings of HOSC and responded to questions from Members on matters including:

- Mental Health provision in Worcestershire (including Hill Crest MH Ward)
- Children's Hearing Services
- Health Services Winter Planning
- Review of Public Health Function
- Health Care System Plans (including Urgent Community Response)
- West Midlands Ambulance Service (WMAS) calls
- Community Ambulances and Primary Care (GP) Access within Worcestershire
- Access to GP appointments
- Herefordshire and Worcestershire Primary Care Access Recovery Plan

### **Hybrid Leader and Cabinet Governance Model – Sixth-Month Review of Working Arrangements**

The six-month review of working arrangements (hybrid Leader and Cabinet governance model) report reviewed how the Hybrid Leader and Cabinet model of governance had been working at BDC for the last six months.

The key proposals outlined was that the Council should have a Hybrid Leader and Cabinet model of governance moving forward. To enable this to be delivered, the recommendation was underpinned by six sub-proposals summarised as follows: -

- That the changes to the constitution detailed in the October 2023 report be implemented.
- That working protocols be introduced to embed more collegiate working.
- That Cabinet Advisory Groups (CAGs) be introduced.
- That action be taken to improve communications with Members.
- That a Memorandum of Understanding between all political group leaders to maintain these working arrangements for at least the next four years be introduced.
- That the arrangements be reviewed in six months' time by the Overview and Scrutiny Board.



## **WORKING GROUPS**

### **Finance & Budget Working Group**

This Group met on six occasions during the year with the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Enabling in attendance at all the Group's meetings, together with the Deputy Chief Executive (Section 151 Officer) and the Head of Finance and Customer Services.

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

- 2024-25 Budget
- Medium Term Financial Plan 2024-25 to 2026-27 – Tranche 1 and Tranche 2 Reports
- Finance and Performance Monitoring Reports
- The Financial Outturn Report
- Council Tax Empty Homes Discounts and Premiums report
- Council Tax Support Scheme
- Council Tax and Non-Domestic Rates Discretionary Relief Policy
- Council Tax and Business Rates Yield 2024-25
- Financial Recovery Plan
- Blue Badge Holders Parking Proposal
- Ward Funds Proposal

During the first meeting of the municipal year the Overview and Scrutiny Board appointed the Chairman and Members to the Finance and Budget Working Group. The Members for the 2024 – 2025 municipal year were Councillor P. McDonald, Councillor S. T. Nock, Councillor A. Bailes, Councillor R. Bailes, Councillor S. Robinson. Councillor H.D.N. Rone-Clarke was appointed to sit on the Group in his role as the Chairman of the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee in line with the Terms of Reference of the Working Group. Discussions also took place about allowing substitutes on the Finance and Budget Working Group, most Members felt that no substitutions should be allowed on the Working Group. It was also felt that Members would first discuss whether the quorum should remain at three before considering changes to the current terms of reference.

During its meeting on 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2024 the Board were informed that three recommendations were agreed by the Finance and Budget Working Group at its July meeting and were proposed to Overview and Scrutiny Board for their onward recommendation to Cabinet. These recommendations were:

1. That the Council seek maximum threshold of developer contribution (as set out below) in respect of the rate/proportion of affordable housing delivered for housing developments taking place in the District. The thresholds, as per the Council's Local Plan, are:

- Up to 40% affordable housing (or a higher % if proposed [by a developer]) on greenfield sites or any site accommodating 200 or more dwellings.
  - Up to 30% affordable housing (or a higher % if proposed [by a developer]) on brownfield sites accommodating less than 200 dwellings.
2. That the 40 % thresholds referred to above be extended to any site accommodating below 100 dwellings, to narrow the ever-increasing gap between Market Houses and Affordable.
  3. To ensure that when deadlines are provided in Council reports, these are realistic and are being adhered to be approved.

At the meeting of Cabinet on 24<sup>th</sup> July, recommendations 1 and 2 above were referred to the Strategic Planning Steering Group (SPSG) for consideration.

Recommendation 3 was agreed in the following format: *‘Subject to updating the Cabinet Work Programme to schedule items for consideration “not before” particular dates, to ensure that when deadlines are provided in Council reports, these are realistic and are being adhered to’.*

The Terms of Reference was also discussed regarding Point 6 *“No substitute will be permitted to sit on the Finance and Budget Working Group”* be amended to *“No substitute will be permitted to sit on the Finance and Budget Working Group, other than in exceptional circumstances, such as planned absence”.*

The following were also discussed:

- Section 24 Notice remained whilst the Authority’s accounts were unaudited.
- Agency staff utilisation had reduced by 10% since the previous update.
- Woodland Creation scheme due to be considered by the Board before it was presented to Cabinet.
- 2021/2022 accounts which were due to be discussed at the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee scheduled to be held on Thursday 10<sup>th</sup> October 2024. The Government passed legislation on 9<sup>th</sup> September 2024 that all Councils had until 13<sup>th</sup> December 2024 to submit their 2021/2022 accounts. These accounts would also go out to public consultation.

During the meeting held on 10<sup>th</sup> September 2024 the Chairman discussed the Terms of Reference with the Board. Following discussions the Board agreed the following change be made from *“No substitute will be permitted to sit on the Finance and Budget Working Group”* to *“No substitute will be permitted to sit on the Finance and Budget Working Group, **other than in exceptional circumstances, such as planned absence**”.*

The following were also discussed:

- The Section 24 Notice remained whilst the Authority's accounts would be audited by external auditors.
- Agency staff utilisation had reduced by 10% since the previous update to Members, with the number of new employees likely to reduce agency staff numbers even further. The use of an independent audit adviser had been discussed previously but it was agreed this was too costly to the Council purse.
- The Woodland Creation bid was also discussed, with this scheme due to be looked at by Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Board before it was presented to Cabinet. The Deputy Chief Executive updated the Members regarding the 2021/2022 accounts which were due to be discussed at the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee scheduled to be held on Thursday 10th October 2024. The Government passed legislation on 9th September 2024 that all Councils had until 13th December 2024 to submit their 2021/2022 accounts. These accounts would also go out to public consultation.

At its meeting held on 6<sup>th</sup> January 2025 the Medium-Term Financial Plan Tranche 1 Budget was discussed as follows:

- A one-year settlement was agreed.
- The agreed 3.25 percentage increase in grant funding had been re-evaluated to 0 percent. Consultations were ongoing to review the funding.
- There would be a 2.99 percentage increase in Council Tax.
- There was an agreement of a 3 percent increase in pay awards (an estimated £154k).
- It was agreed that National Insurance contributions would be funded by the Government.
- The Council to allocate £1m revenue funding for the Food Waste Collection Service.
- A dividend of £250k would be provided by Bromsgrove School.

During its meeting held on 11<sup>th</sup> February 2025 the Tranche 2 of the Budget setting was discussed as follows:

- The Council would be increasing the Council Tax by a further 1%.
- There was no increase in government funding and a balanced budget was to be taken from the general fund.
- After consideration of The Poverty Truth Commission presented during the meeting, Members requested further information to detail how the commission had helped individuals and to provide examples. An extraordinary Finance and Budget Working Group meeting would take place on 18<sup>th</sup> February 2025 for further consideration of this item.

During the meeting held on 25<sup>th</sup> March 2025 the following were discussed:

- A new software system was being utilised within the Council to analyse data, which would identify important information and any trends or areas of improvement required.

- Members were also encouraged by the recovery plan which was in a good position for the impending Local Government Reorganisation (LGR).

## **TASK GROUP INVESTIGATIONS & SHORT, SHARP REVIEWS CARRIED OUT**

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

### **Impact of Heatwaves Task Group**

The Short Sharp Review was commissioned by the Board on 12th February 2024 following a Motion submitted by Councillor Marshall to Council on 24th January 2024. The Motion was in respect of a review of immediate action to be taken to educate and equip residents for impending heatwaves made more likely by climate change. The terms of reference were agreed on 22nd April 2024 with the final report discussed with the Board on 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2024.

Members agreed to the recommendation that an annual report be provided to the Overview and Scrutiny Board in order to update Members any areas of change in respect of the Impact of Heatwaves on the Community and any changes in the response to those events be noted. The report and its recommendations were subsequently noted at Cabinet at its meeting on 11<sup>th</sup> September 2024.

The report to consider the annual update was presented to the Board at its meeting held on 25<sup>th</sup> March 2025. The Board were briefed on the Council's preparedness for the impact of heatwaves as recommended by the Board. The topics discussed included updates on Heatwaves at the Local Resilience Forum Level, Cools Hubs, Plans, Warning and Informing, Priority Services Register, Business Continuity Plans and Training.

### **Foodbank and Community Shop Provision Task Group – Proposed Amendment to recommendation**

The Chairman of the Foodbank and Community Shop Provision Task Group presented to the Board on 19<sup>th</sup> November 2024. It was explained that the report detailed the background to, as well as the wording of, an amendment suggested by Cabinet to Recommendation 4 of the Foodbank and Community Shop Provision Task Group, the other recommendations from the group having been approved by Cabinet earlier in the year.

The original recommendation was "That the Council endeavour to investigate, under the auspices of existing arrangements available to the Council, such as the Bromsgrove Partnership, whether communities in areas of the district that do not currently have foodbanks require this provision, and that the Council make best effort to create a food bank in Rubery where a need has already been identified".

The proposed amendment was "That the Council endeavour to investigate, under the auspices of existing arrangements available to the Council, such as the Bromsgrove Partnership, whether communities in areas of the district that do not currently have foodbanks require this provision, and that the Council make best effort *to support the*

*local community and Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) to create a food bank in Rubery where a need has already been identified”.*

The Board agreed to endorse the proposed change to the wording of the Food Bank Task Group’s fourth recommendation.

### **Topic Proposal for Task Group – Housing**

On 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2024 Councillor Rone-Clarke presented the topic proposal for the Board’s consideration. The Board endorsed the decision that a Housing Task Group be established and that the terms of reference be approved. Key objectives of the proposed task group review were to scrutinise the following areas:

- Fleece-holding - Members “to address and influence” to assist residents.
- Section 106 monies to support infrastructure rules – Members located in town centres/urban areas could add significant value.
- To investigate “asset rich” but “revenue poor” residents and the support available locally to residents - This could involve the task group exploring potential gaps that could be addressed by the Council and partner organisations.

During the meeting on 10<sup>th</sup> September 2024, it was explained that the purpose of the report was to formalise the Membership of the Task Group, considering requests received since the previous meeting. It was agreed that the Chairman would be appointed at the first task group meeting. The proposed membership of the Housing Task Group was approved by the Board.

During its meeting held on 19<sup>th</sup> November 2024 the Chairman of the Housing Task Group updated Members of its meeting which took place on 31<sup>st</sup> October 2024. The initial meeting had gone well, with positive engagement and discussions by all Members. During the debate Members had suggested that a further area could be explored in more detail. Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Board were requested to consider and subsequently agreed the following as an addition to the Terms of Reference: *“To scrutinise the allocations policy and housing register regarding eligibility, qualification and allocations and explore standards of housing let under the policy”.*

During various meetings the Board were informed of progress of the Housing Task Group. Members were informed that the group were on track and had covered each of the terms of reference items for investigation in various meetings with Officers. The next scheduled meeting would be held in person on 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2025 to draft the report and recommendations.

## **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, two task group investigations (Impact of Heatwaves and Foodbank Provision) had been concluded with a further Housing Task Group progressing well and had covered each of the terms of reference items for investigation in various meetings with Officers. The final report for this Task group was due to be considered by the Board at its meeting due to be held in June 2025. This would subsequently be considered at the cabinet meeting held in July 2025.

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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](mailto:scrutiny@bromsgrove.gov.uk) or complete the form on the Council's website at <https://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](mailto:scrutiny@bromsgrove.gov.uk) or telephone 01527 881288 and ask to speak to the Democratic Services Officer.

### **Overview and Scrutiny**

**Legal, Democratic and Property Services**

**Bromsgrove District Council**

**Parkside, Market Street, Bromsgrove B61 8DA**

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