

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL
MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

17TH JUNE 2025, AT 6.00 P.M.

PRESENT: Councillors P. M. McDonald (Chairman), S. T. Nock (Vice-Chairman), S. Ammar, S. J. Baxter, S. R. Colella (Substitute), D. J. A. Forsythe (Substitute), E. M. S. Gray, C.A. Hotham (Substitute), R. J. Hunter, B. Kumar, K.J. May, B. McEldowney, S. A. Robinson, J. D. Stanley, K. Taylor, S. A. Webb and P. J. Whittaker

Officers: Mr J. Leach, Mr B. Watson, Mr. G. Revans, Mr S. Parry, Mr M. Cox, Mrs. J. Bayley-Hill and Mrs S. Woodfield

Other parties: Professor D. Hall CBE and Ms S. Dickens

1/25

ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

A nomination for the position of Chairman was received in respect of Councillor P.M. McDonald.

RESOLVED that Councillor P. M. McDonald be appointed as Chairman of the Board for the ensuing municipal year.

2/25

ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIRMAN

A nomination for the position of Vice Chairman was received in respect of Councillor S. T. Nock.

RESOLVED that Councillor S.T. Nock be appointed as Vice Chairman of the Board for the ensuing municipal year.

3/25

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillor A. Bailes with Councillor C.A. Hotham in attendance as his named substitute, Councillor R. Bailes with Councillor S.R. Colella in attendance as her named substitute and A.M. Dale with Councillor D.J.A. Forsythe in attendance as her named substitute.

4/25

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND WHIPPING ARRANGEMENTS

Councillor B. Kumar and Councillor S.T Nock both declared disclosable interests in Minute Item no. 6/25 – Local Government Reorganisation All Member Engagement Session Supported by Mutual Ventures – in their capacity as Parish Councillors. They remained present during the debate in respect of this item and voted thereon.

5/25

TO CONFIRM THE ACCURACY OF THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD HELD ON 15TH APRIL 2025

The minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting held on 15th April 2025 were considered.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting held on 15th April 2025 be agreed as a true and correct record.

6/25

LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION ALL MEMBER ENGAGEMENT SESSION SUPPORTED BY MUTUAL VENTURES

The Chief Executive commenced the Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) item by introducing Professor Donna Hall, CBE and Sally Dickens from Mutual Ventures (MV) who were supporting an appraisal of the options under consideration in Worcestershire for LGR. It was explained to the Board that the purpose of the briefing was to have an engagement session to ensure that all Members had an opportunity to input and provide their views. It was on this basis that all Members of Bromsgrove District Council had been invited to the session. All Members could also send their views using the response form provided by Mutual Ventures or by emailing their views in whatever format they chose.

A presentation was delivered in respect of this subject for Members' consideration (Appendix 1). The following key points were discussed for Members' consideration:

The options appraisal process was to assess the performance of two options for a unitary structure in Worcestershire:

- A unitary council for the whole county of Worcestershire.
- Two unitary councils in Worcestershire:
 - North Worcestershire: Bromsgrove, Redditch and Wyre Forest.
 - South Worcestershire: Malvern Hills, Worcester City and Wychavon.

A stakeholder engagement process was being carried out to inform the appraisal process which included a public engagement exercise being undertaken online, until 29th June 2025 and local stakeholder engagement

sessions being held during June and July.

Key lines of enquiry would be discussed as part of the stakeholder engagement process to establish the performance of these options in comparison to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government's (MHCLG) criteria for LGR. The criteria had been detailed in correspondence to the Leader and Chief Executive in respect of LGR and included the following:

- The establishment of a single tier of local government.
- The right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks.
- Must prioritise the delivery of high quality and sustainable public services to citizens.
- Demonstrate how councils in the area had sought to work together in coming to a view that meets local needs and is informed by local views.
- Must support devolution arrangements.
- Should enable stronger community engagement and deliver genuine opportunity for neighbourhood empowerment.

The approach to be utilised included considering:-

- What good looks like in ten years' time.
- To consider what needs to be kept/improved/created to achieve the above.
- Identifying local characteristics.
- Consideration of community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment.

Members were advised to consider structural reform from a public service perspective and to review changes to current arrangements. The Board also considered the demographic and economic comparisons within the Worcestershire area and in relation to Bromsgrove specifically.

The key lines of enquiry, which had been presented to Members, were subsequently discussed with the following points raised by the Board:

Health and Wellbeing

- Preventative measures should be a key consideration.
- Building and maintaining health and wellbeing was important.
- People were living longer. Patient to doctor ratios required improvements.

- Additional surgical facilities were required.
- Some people had lower expectations than in previous generations but were striving and aspiring to achieve better.
- There were difficulties predicting future efficiencies due to the need for more data. The Chief Executive explained that the data in the slide deck (by way of context) was to help fuel discussion, and it was Members' feedback from their experience and knowledge as democratically elected representatives of their communities, that was being sought from the session. This was to provide important qualitative information, alongside quantitative information that was also being gathered to help inform the options appraisal.

Education and Opportunity

- Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) support, currently available through Worcestershire County Council (WCC), would continue to be needed in the District.
- There were good examples of effective partnership working with WCC to promote and enhance health and wellbeing within the community i.e. the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP), which included organisations from the public, private, voluntary and community sectors.
- There were difficulties predicting future efficiencies due to a lack of funding from Central Government.

Social Cohesion

- Local identity was seen as important.

Transport and Connectivity

- Required better connectivity between the outer parishes and the town centre to support the elderly.
- There was a lack of connectivity to the town centre which had an impact on people's mental health.
- Examples of best practice suggested by Members were as follows; Tourist Information Centre (closed), Avoncroft Museum, The Transport Museum and Chapel Lane Caravan Motorhome Club Campsite.
- Members suggested that the Council should be building on the strong tourist opportunities available i.e. The National Exhibition Centre (NEC) and the proposed 8 Hills Regional Park.

Economic Growth

- Economic growth was key to address all the suggested key lines of enquiry.

- A cohesive approach to generate wealth was a priority.
- A unitary structure could assist to provide effective business support to startup businesses.
- Bromsgrove District Council (BDC) had one of the highest achieving business starts ups in the County with assistance from BetaDen; a locally funded organisation aiming to benefit businesses and entrepreneurs by providing resources, mentorship and access to a network of support.
- To start from the grass roots and upskill the younger generation was a key priority.
- BDC offered good public service engagement. Retaining the town centre's local community feel was important, which could diminish if the unitary structure was too large.
- To retain the town centres and areas local heritage should be a consideration.
- Encouraging people to live and work locally, rather than commute to work, was considered to be important.
- Working cohesively should assist the agricultural sector.
- Discouraging shop units which had a negative impact on the reputation of Bromsgrove Town Centre was considered important.

Safety and Security

- A unitary structure should assist with providing effective police engagement.
- The Police needed to provide effective face to face public engagement and a physical presence.

Environment

- Bromsgrove's agriculture and local environment were noted as important features of relevance to the character of the area. This was seen as important to retain and champion.

Members were also encouraged to consider and discuss community engagement with the following points provided by the Board:

- Being able to engage effectively with communities was seen as important.
- Public/stakeholder engagement should incorporate face to face opportunities where possible in addition to online to help gather evidence.
- Set boundaries needed to be balanced democratically for ease of

Member engagement.

- Parish Councils played a key role in public engagement in their own right. The Chief Executive reassured Members that Parish Councils would remain under a unitary council.
- Concerns were raised that having larger divisional boundaries could have a detrimental effect on public engagement.

The Chief Executive encouraged Members to complete and return the response forms which had been issued during the session and confirmed that the deadline for submission of completed forms was Tuesday 8th July 2025. Members were also informed that Group Leaders would have the opportunity to meet with Mutual Ventures for further discussions, so they could pass on views to their Group Leaders if they wished and if Members simply wanted to email in any feedback, then that was also welcomed.

The Chief Executive concluded the briefing by thanking Members for their participation in discussions and Mutual Ventures for their presentation and engagement session.

The Board were also reminded of the LGR timeline as follows:

- 28th November 2025 – Deadline for final proposals to MHCLG.
- First part of 2026 – Government public consultation on LGR.
- Summer 2026 – Government anticipated decision on the proposals.

RESOLVED that the Local Government Reorganisation All Member Engagement Session Supported by Mutual Ventures be noted.

7/25

CONTAMINATED LAND STRATEGY - PRE-SCRUTINY

A presentation was provided to Members by the Technical Services Manager of Worcestershire Regulatory Services (WRS).

Key points raised during the presentation were as follows:

- The new inspection strategy aimed to replace the previous version and meet the requirements of the statutory guidance which was issued in 2012.
- The strategy outlined the process for the review of potential contaminated land sites within the District and the prioritisation methodology used.
- The report aimed to provide an overview of the framework that existed in respect of contaminated land.
- Part 2A of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 placed a duty on Local Authorities to review and assess the significant possibility of harm to human health arising from contaminated land.

- Contaminated land legislation should only be used when there were no other alternative mechanisms available. However, the framework was predominately reviewed through the planning and development control process.
- The revised report reflected the gradual reduction and withdrawal of funding from Central Government.
- To date no sites had been declared as “Contaminated Land” by BDC. However, several sites of concern had been subject to detailed inspection.
- Planning policies encouraged the reuse of Brownfield land.

After consideration of the presentation, Members raised the following:

- The protocol to be followed if a member of the public had concerns that a plot of land was contaminated. Members were reminded that the strategy only reported on sites where contamination might be present and had the potential to pose a significant possibility of significant harm to human health. It was also explained that the Council focused on addressing sites where contamination might exist predominately through the planning and development control process. However, if a member of the public did have a concern, they could contact Worcestershire Regulatory Services (WRS) to review.
- Members noted in the report that approximately 2,020 sites, which had been identified as potential sites of contaminated land within the District, largely related to historic land use, with some sites to potentially be identified as Brownfield sites. However, Members expressed the view that the District did not have a significant amount of Brownfield sites and requested clarification on this point. Members were informed that inspections involved reviewing land for suitable usage which could involve further scrutiny beneath the surface land layer.
- Members were reassured that the Council did not have any contaminated land sites. It was also explained that there was a specific criterion for land inspection including sites categorised in the order of priority.
- The Leader requested the outcome of two sites following any review undertaken. It was agreed that the appropriate information would be provided accordingly by the necessary Officers.
- It was queried how a member of the public would be informed if land they owned was contaminated land. The Board were informed that any remediation to address potential contaminated land should be revealed in the title deeds to a property. However, Members were reassured that in the event that any land, which posed a concern when being developed, would have remediation action carried out accordingly.
- Members enquired if there was a comprehensive list of potentially contaminated land sites available for public viewing. In response it was explained that some, but not all were listed in the strategy document, available to view online.

- The Board raised concerns and sought reassurance regarding the absence of external funding mechanisms and that this would not result in BDC failing to proactively undertake detailed inspections of Sites of Potential Concern. Members were reassured that potential sites of contamination had been prioritised, and risks had been mitigated where necessary.

RECOMMENDED to Cabinet that:

- 1) The Council adopt the revised strategy which should be published on the Worcestershire Regulatory Services (WRS) website.

8/25

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT PLAN CONSULTATION (REPORT TO FOLLOW)

The Chairman confirmed that this agenda item had been **withdrawn** with the agreement of the Chairman and Vice Chairman, prior to the meeting. The decision had been taken as the item was no longer due to be considered at the forthcoming Cabinet meeting but would be debated by all Members at the Council meeting on 19th June 2025.

9/25

INSTALLATION OF EV CHARGERS

A presentation on the Installation of Electric Vehicle (EV) chargers was provided to the Board by the Assistant Director Environmental Housing Property Services.

The purpose of the report was to outline the Implementation of Electric Vehicle (EV) charging infrastructure across BDC's owned car parks and land. Key objectives of the project were to increase the availability of EV charging points in public spaces whilst supporting the Council's Carbon Reduction Strategy.

After consideration of the report, the Board provided the following points of discussion:

- Members queried if the Council were satisfied that when providing Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure (EVCI) across Council owned land, that disabled access would be a key priority. In response Members were informed that an appropriate update would be sought from the current contractor Zest Eco Limited and would be reported back to Members accordingly.
- A point was raised concerning the existing agreement in place with the contractor Equans regarding revenue share arrangements. Members sought clarification on how much revenue the Council could achieve. Members were advised that the relevant information would be sought from the contractor Equans and would be reported back to Members accordingly.
- The Board sought clarification as to whether the Council was required to pay for vandalism damages to EVCI's concerning an incident which involved wires cut on BDC owned land. It was

explained, as stated in the report, that the supplier was required to provide fully funded EVCI at no cost to the Council. The contract allowed for the supply, installation, maintenance and ongoing operational management of the EVCI across the various agreed sites.

- Members expressed their disappointment that the outer village areas had not been part of the EVCI criteria. The Board was informed that the key objectives were focused on Council owned car parks and land.

The Chairman concluded discussions on the topic and requested that the Board be provided with the specifics of the revenue share arrangement in place with the current contractor. In addition, the Chairman expressed disappointment that, unlike in other areas, the Council would not be in receipt of an immediate revenue income. In response it was explained that the arrangement was part of the contract Terms and Conditions agreement, however, it was agreed that the matter would be discussed with the contractor.

RESOLVED that the update on the Installation of EV Chargers be noted.

10/25

FINANCE AND BUDGET WORKING GROUP - MEMBERSHIP REPORT

Members received a report requesting for the Chairman and Members to be appointed to the Finance and Budget Working Group for the 2025/26 municipal year.

It was noted that the Chairman of the Group had traditionally been the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Board. Members agreed that this arrangement should continue for 2025/26. It was explained that as per the terms of reference, the Working Group would comprise seven members which would include the Chairman of the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee, once appointed, and six Overview and Scrutiny Members. Priority would be given to appointing Overview and Scrutiny Board members to the group, in line with the terms of reference, but membership could be offered to other scrutiny pool members should there be any vacancies.

Members that expressed an interest in joining the group were Councillors S. Ammar, R.J. Hunter, S.T. Nock and P.M. McDonald. The Board noted that Councillor C.A. Hotham also expressed an interest, should there be a relevant vacancy available.

RESOLVED that

- a) Councillor P. McDonald be appointed as the Chairman of the Finance and Budget Working Group for the ensuing municipal year 2025/26.
- b) Councillors S. Ammar, R. J. Hunter, P. McDonald and S. T Nock be appointed as Members of the Finance and Budget Scrutiny Working Group for the municipal year 2025/26.

- c) Overview and Scrutiny Board Members not in attendance at this meeting of the Board to be contacted regarding their potential interest in being appointed as members of the Finance and Budget Working Group in 2025/26; and
- d) The Terms of Reference for the Finance and Budget Working be approved.

11/25

WORCESTERSHIRE HEALTH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - ELECTION OF REPRESENTATIVE FOR 2025-26

Councillor B. Kumar was nominated to become the Council's representative on the Worcestershire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC) for the municipal year 2025/26.

Members were informed that Councillor K. May had been appointed as by Worcestershire County Council as the Chairman of the HOSC for 2025/26. The Board was informed that the next meeting would be held in July 2025 with discussions to be reported back at the July Board meeting.

RESOLVED that Councillor B. Kumar be appointed as the Council's representative on the Worcestershire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee for the 2025/26 municipal year.

12/25

TASK GROUP UPDATES

An update on the Housing Task Group was provided to the Board on behalf of the Chairman. It was explained that the group's recommendations were in the process of being finalised and delays to the group's draft report had been largely caused by the summer recess. However, the Chairman was satisfied to proceed, finalise and present findings in the Autumn, upon the end of recess.

RESOLVED that Housing Task Group update be noted as per the preamble above.

13/25

CABINET WORK PROGRAMME

The Cabinet Work Programme was presented for Members' consideration. Members were informed of additional items to the Cabinet Work Programme that had been added since the last meeting, which were as follows:

- Bromsgrove Town Centre Strategic Framework which was going to Cabinet on 23rd July 2025. It was explained that this item had been added to Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme for 22nd July 2025.
- Windsor Street Site which was going to Cabinet on 23rd July 2025.

Members sought clarification as to why the Medium-Term Financial Plan Tranche 1 Budget Report 2026/27 had appeared twice on the Cabinet Work Programme. An explanation was provided to the Board by the Deputy Chief Executive, which highlighted that the budget would be reported in two tranches and there would be consultation on the first tranche prior to determination by Council.

RESOLVED that the content of the Cabinet Work Programme be noted as per the preamble above.

14/25

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

The Overview and Scrutiny Board Work Programme was considered by Members.

The following items were requested for addition to the Board's work programme as follows:

- The Windsor Street Site for pre-scrutiny prior to Cabinet on 23rd July 2025.
- An overview of the work of Citizens Advice to explain the uses of grant funding.
- Bromsgrove District Housing Trust (BDHT) to be invited to attend a meeting to deliver a presentation on the services provided within the District.

It was agreed that the items would be added to the Board's work programme accordingly.

RESOLVED that the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme be noted as per the preamble above.

15/25

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY ACTION SHEET

The Overview and Scrutiny Action Sheet was considered by the Board.

RESOLVED that the Overview and Scrutiny Board Action sheet be noted.

16/25

TO CONSIDER ANY URGENT BUSINESS, DETAILS OF WHICH HAVE BEEN NOTIFIED TO THE HEAD OF LEGAL, DEMOCRATIC AND PROPERTY SERVICES PRIOR TO THE COMMENCEMENT OF THE MEETING AND WHICH THE CHAIRMAN, BY REASON OF SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES, CONSIDERS TO BE OF SO URGENT A NATURE THAT IT CANNOT WAIT UNTIL THE NEXT MEETING.

There was no urgent business for consideration.

The meeting closed at 7.56 p.m.

Chairman