

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

18TH NOVEMBER 2025, AT 6.00 P.M.

PRESENT: Councillors P. M. McDonald (Chairman), S. T. Nock (Vice-Chairman), S. Ammar, A. Bailes, R. Bailes, J. Clarke, D. J. A. Forsythe, B. Kumar, R. E. Lambert, B. McEldowney and H. D. N. Warren-Clarke

Observers: Councillor K. May – Leader and Cabinet Member for Strategic Partnerships, Economic Development and Enabling
Councillor S.J. Baxter – Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance

Councillor S.A. Webb - Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing and Strategic Housing

Officers: Mr. G. Revans, R Egan, Ms J. Willis, Mr. M. Bough, Ms R. McElliott, Ms. A. Delahunty, Mr D. Whitney and Mrs S. Woodfield.

Other Parties: Mr G. Anderson and Mr J. Whitman
(Representatives of Bromsgrove District Housing Trust (BDHT))

58/25

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES

Apology for absence was received on behalf of Councillor A.M. Dale, with confirmation provided that Councillor D.J.A. Forsythe was attending as her named substitute, Councillor S. Robinson with confirmation that Councillor J. Clarke was attending as her named substitute and Councillor J.D. Stanley with confirmation that Councillor R.E. Lambert would be in attendance as his named substitute.

59/25

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND WHIPPING ARRANGEMENTS

There were no declarations of interest nor of whipping arrangements.

60/25

TO CONFIRM THE ACCURACY OF THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD HELD ON 2ND AND 28TH OCTOBER 2025

The minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Board meetings held on 2nd and 28th October 2025 were considered.

RESOLVED that, subject to the amendments detailed in the preamble above, the minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting held on 2nd and 28th October 2025 be approved as a correct record.

61/25

STRATEGIC OVERVIEW OF BDHT SERVICES

The Chief Executive of Bromsgrove District Housing Trust (BDHT) presented to the Board with the key points discussed as follows:

- BDHT's objectives included being an excellent landlord, employer, and a community-based Housing Association.
- Stock levels had grown to over four thousand homes, with a strong focus on the Bromsgrove District.
- Financial viability remained critical with all expenditure funded through rental income.
- Compliance and safety were highlighted as top priorities following national regulatory changes.
- Recruitment and retention of skilled staff were proving challenging.
- Complaints were increasing, partly due to external claims companies and rising customer expectations.

Member comments and questions were as follows:

- How could a tenant continue to pay their rent monthly which had been initially agreed and preferred option? BDHT advised that although it was stated and suggested in the tenancy agreement to pay rent weekly, individual cases could be assessed and it was advised for individuals to contact BDHT for further advice.
- Did BDHT hold a land banking and development strategy? In response BDHT confirmed that they did not hold any land bank developments and relied mainly on Section 106 agreements for new developments.
- Concerns were raised about the potential impact of rent caps and inflation on affordable housing supply. BDHT acknowledged that there were pressures and confirmed development targets had reduced from five hundred to three hundred and fifty units annually.
- Members were informed that over a thousand properties were built under the S106 option. Nationally housing developers struggled to source providers for affordable homes which ensured that BDHT were a suitable and often successful bidder.
- Were there any potential future government funding opportunities? In response it was confirmed that bids were possible but it was noted that grants required match funding from BDHT to secure the bids and compliance imposed a strict criteria regime.
- Concerns were raised on the lack of some estate maintenance improvements within the district, in particular, with regards to footpaths and garages. It was agreed that these areas would be

reviewed as a priority and allocation of funds for communal area provision would be looked at.

- A request for contact details of Housing Officers which were allocated to specific ward areas was agreed by BDHT to provide to Members.
- The Board also requested access to the asset register for footpaths owned by BDHT. In response it was agreed that this would be reviewed to have available for Members.
- Was there a prevention plan to ensure the homeless was housed and remained in employment and if there was relevant data to demonstrate this? It was advised that it wasn't within the contract agreement to provide a plan but BDHT did assist where possible. The necessary data was shown on returns to Central Government which included employment status.
- Parking issues within the district was discussed with Members, suggesting that repossessed land, formerly for garages could assist with the problem. BDHT explained that selling the land was less costly than maintaining the specific areas, however, there were some areas of land within the district which had been made into parking spaces.
- Clarity on complaints handling procedures was requested. In response BDHT outlined the two-stage process and confirmed the Housing Ombudsman involvement where necessary. BDHT also discussed Members' involvement as an advocate between BDHT and residents. It was suggested that to ensure complaints were dealt with effectively, all Members should contact via email (as discussed during the presentation) to ensure that complaints were processed in one isolated area. Members suggested a unique complaints reference numbering system could be devised. In response, BDHT agreed to review the complaints procedure further.

The portfolio holder for Health and Wellbeing and Strategic Housing added her thanks to BDHT for giving up their time and attending the Board meeting. She also expressed her gratitude to the Homelessness and Domestic Abuse teams for their efforts when dealing with individual cases for the Council.

RESOLVED that the Strategic Overview of BDHT briefing paper and presentation be noted.

62/25

HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION GRANT AND DOMESTIC ABUSE GRANT - PRE-SCRUTINY

The Strategic Housing Officer presented the Cabinet report on proposed allocations for 2026/27.

A summary of proposals were highlighted as follows:

- Total grant funding available was £531,661 (including Homelessness Prevention, Rough Sleeping, and Domestic Abuse grants).
- Key allocations included:
 - BDHT Housing Agency Agreement top-up of £52,475
 - Additional temporary accommodation units of £30,688
 - Young Persons Pathway Worker of £41,116
 - Rough Sleeper outreach (Maggs) of £35,607
 - Domestic Abuse support services of £35,744

Member comments and discussions were as follows:

- The Severe Emergency Weather Provision was discussed with Members being informed that the provision was not utilised regularly but was required to ensure the people are kept safe during extreme weather.
- Members welcomed the ringfencing of funds for prevention and relief activities.
- Members were informed that domestic abuse was on the rise with requests for accommodation out of area being a huge burden on services, in areas such as Birmingham and Dudley.
- Further clarity on the role of the Empty Homes Officer was requested. Members were informed that the grant and role targeted homes which had been emptied for longer than a six month period.
- Clarity on performance monitoring and outcomes was requested with Officers explaining that there were quarterly monitoring and compliance requirements from Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG).
- The sustainability of voluntary sector services if grant funding ceased? Officers stressed the importance of continued support to avoid increased homelessness pressures.
- NewStarts and GreenSquare Accord worked collaboratively, particularly for volunteering and tenancy sustainability.
- Members expressed concerns regarding rough sleeper numbers and monitoring. Officers reported three had been verified as rough sleepers at the last count which is a snapshot and explained that this figure changes frequently as people move from rough sleeping into accommodation.

RECOMMENDED that

- 1) Subject to the final decision by central Government, that the proposed element of the Revenue Support Grant 2026/27 attributed to Temporary Accommodation is ring fenced to the Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Grant.

- 2) The initiatives in 4.6 be approved to receive the Homelessness Prevention Grant and Domestic Abuse Grant allocations of funding for 2026/27.

- 3) Delegated authority be granted to the Assistant Director of Community and Housing Services, following consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Strategic Housing to use any unallocated Grant during the year or make further adjustments and uplifts as necessary to ensure full utilisation of the Grants for 2026/27 in support of existing or new schemes.

63/25

HOUSING TASK GROUP - FINAL REPORT

The Chairman of the Housing Task Group was pleased and proud to present the Housing Task Group's final report to the Board.

Members were informed that the group had covered a wide range of subject areas, guided by the terms of reference, with key recommendations to be noted by the Board. The Chairman of the task group expressed his thanks for the contributions from group Members for their valuable cross-party debates and also to the Democratic Services Officers who facilitated the meetings.

Members of the Housing Task Group also provided their gratitude for being part of the group and thanked the Chairman for his contributions and leadership.

Members discussed content within the report which highlighted a suggestion of residents downsizing to smaller properties which could assist with the pressures of council tax payment demands. In response the Chairman of the Housing Task Group highlighted a recommendation within the report which requested that relevant Officers should monitor the number of residents claiming council tax in housing bands F, G and H.

Members supported the recommendations but noted legal complexities around fleecing and the need to align with forthcoming government reforms. In response the Chairman of the Board informed Members that during recent discussions with the Legal Department, it was proposed to amend recommendation 6 a) as follows:

From:

“As part of the Local Government Reorganisation process, the Council:

Includes the proposal that a process be investigated whereby a future unitary authority pursues and seeks to manage contracts in new developments that are causing fleecing issues within the District”.

To:

“As part of the Local Government Reorganisation process, the Council:

Notes that the Government is currently analysing the feedback from the consultation which sought views on proposals to implement aspects of the Leasehold and Freehold Reform Act 2024 and further reform related to the charges leaseholders, and homeowners on freehold estates, pay and services they receive, which closed on 26th September 2025”.

After consideration Members agreed to the recommendations within the Housing Task Group Final Report and suggested recommendation amendment.

RESOLVED that the Housing Task Group Final Report be noted.

RECOMMENDED that

Recommendation 1 – Housing Allocations

Officers approach Bromsgrove District Housing Trust (BDHT) and jointly explore a startup crisis package for residents living in social housing including the potential of an increase in housing benefit payment to cover the costs of the crisis package. The findings to be completed in three months and reported back to the Overview and Scrutiny Board.

Recommendation 2 – Housing Allocations

Bromsgrove District Council’s preference is for the mix of affordable housing contained within a new development be made up of social rent and shared ownership properties only and exclude outright sales of affordable homes.

Recommendation 3 – Asset Rich and Potentially Revenue Poor

Officers provide Members with costings of bad debt owed to the Council as a result of non – payment of Council tax by residents.

Recommendation 4 – Asset Rich and Potentially Revenue Poor

Officers monitor the number of residents claiming Council Tax Support in housing Bands F, G and H (with metrics built into the performance reporting framework).

Recommendation 5 – Section (S) 106 Contributions

Where a planning application has a material impact on the local community and there is a consideration for S106 contribution allocation, the Ward Member (and neighbouring Ward Member(s)) should be informed and consulted with prior to consideration of the application. A

follow up consultation with the Ward Member (and neighbouring Ward Member(s)) should also take place.

Recommendation 6 - Fleeceholding

As part of the Local Government Reorganisation process, the Council:

- a) Notes that the Government is currently analysing the feedback from the consultation which sought views on proposals to implement aspects of the Leasehold and Freehold Reform Act 2024 and further reform related to the charges leaseholders, and homeowners on freehold estates, pay and services they receive, which closed on 26th September 2025.
- b) Suggests that a new unitary authority continues to lobby Government on the matter of fleeceholding within Bromsgrove District.

64/25

WORCESTERSHIRE HEALTH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - UPDATE

The Worcestershire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC) representative, Councillor B. Kumar updated the Board on its recent meetings held on 8th September and 10th October 2025.

At the HOSC meeting held on 8th September 2025, Engaging Neighbourhoods and Community in Health Improvements were considered and the Board were informed that generally community health improvement projects were reducing emergency admissions.

The following key points discussed:

- Priority Neighbourhood Development (PND)
- Empowering School Communities
- Wider Community Development
- Harnessing Assets – Green Spaces, Libraries, Volunteering
- Community Voice and Partnerships
- Volunteering in Healthwatch & Hospitals
- Innovative Models of Integrated Care

At the meeting held on 10th October 2025 Pharmaceutical Needs Assessment (PNA) and Winter Planning were considered with Members informed that Pharmaceutical Needs Assessment highlighted reduced pharmacy hours and rural access issues.

The following key points were discussed during the meeting:

- Pharmacy Landscape & Access
- Gaps, Barriers & Inequalities
- Service Opportunities & Health Needs

- Winter Planning & Key Priorities
- System-Level Interventions & Capacity Measures
- Demand Trends, Challenges & Targets
- Communications & Public Engagement

Members also discussed the Pharmacy First, with a Member discussing his own personal experiences with the scheme. Concerns about capacity and public awareness were also discussed.

RESOLVED that the Worcestershire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC) update be noted.

65/25

FINANCE AND BUDGET WORKING GROUP - MEMBERSHIP REPORT AND UPDATE

After consideration of the Finance and Budget Working Group Membership Report and terms of reference the Board agreed to maintain six Members on the Working Group.

The Chairman explained that should the three current vacancies as reflected in the report remain after the Board had been approached, Members who did not sit on the scrutiny board and were also not a Cabinet Member may be appointed to fill the vacancies.

RESOLVED that the Finance and Budget Working Group Membership Report be noted.

66/25

CABINET WORK PROGRAMME

The Cabinet Work Programme was presented for Members' consideration.

The Chairman suggested and the Board agreed that the following items were to be added to the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme:

- Biodiversity First Consideration Report
- Permission to Revoke the First Homes Policy

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

67/25

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Overview and Scrutiny Board Work Programme was considered by Members. The following items were requested by Members and agreed by the Board should be added to the Overview and Scrutiny's work programme:

- Town Centre Parking and Automatic Number Plate Recognition Update (ANPR)
- Police and Crime Commissioner (Grant Funding)

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

68/25

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY ACTION SHEET

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

The Chairman raised concerns regarding Electric Vehicle charger revenue arrangements and requested a further review of profit-sharing agreements. It was agreed that this would be raised with the relevant Officers and reported back to the Board accordingly.

RESOLVED that the Overview and Scrutiny Action Sheet be noted.

69/25

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

There was no urgent business for consideration.

70/25

TO CONSIDER, AND IF CONSIDERED APPROPRIATE, TO PASS THE FOLLOWING RESOLUTION TO EXCLUDE THE PUBLIC FROM THE MEETING DURING THE CONSIDERATION OF ITEM(S) OF BUSINESS CONTAINING EXEMPT INFORMATION:-

RESOLVED: that under Section 100 I of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended, the public be excluded from the meeting during the consideration of the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Part I of scheme 12A to the Act, as amended, the relevant paragraph of that part, in each case, being as set out below and that it is in the public interest to do so:-

<u>Minute Item</u>	<u>Paragraph</u>
71/25	3

71/25

WINDSOR STREET SITE - PRE-SCRUTINY

The Regeneration Project Delivery Manager presented to the Board.

The Board considered delivery options for the Windsor Street redevelopment with the key points discussed as follows:

- Homes would be considered sustainable in design.
- Site remediation was underway.

- Phase 2 was expected to be completed by May 2026 which was not critical as planning permission was required and would take time to complete.
- There would be no cost implications due to delay as there were no contractors present on site, however, when Phase 2 commenced, there could be costs to the Council.
- The requirement for affordable housing on site was 30%.
- Town Centre Living requirements was requested as a consideration.
- Detailed risk assessments were also requested by Members.
- The procurement selection process for a RSL should be considered for their creative vision.
- The chosen RSL should be located close to the district area.
- Members were assured that Homes England funding opportunities would be explored.
- Concerns were raised about parking provision and sustainability.

During consideration of comments received by the Board the Assistant Director Generation and Property explained that the purpose of reporting, as stated in the recommendations, were to gain approval for residential use, to seek delegated authority to review the procurement rules process and to review contractual requirements which could then be considered at Cabinet.

Following consideration and discussions, Members expressed their concerns that some of the recommendations were not clear regarding the delegated authority and contractual details. It was therefore agreed that the recommendations would be reviewed and reworded accordingly.

RECOMMENDED that

- 1) The Windsor Street site be redeveloped for residential use.
- 2) Subject to a further report to Cabinet outlining the detail of the collaboration agreement arrangements, the Council seek to enter into partnership with a Registered Social Landlord to develop the site.
- 3) The Assistant Director for Regeneration and Property and the Assistant Director for Legal, Democratic and Procurement Services be delegated authority to progress the preferred option, including reviewing administrative and contractual requirements, following consultation with the Leader, and to report back to Cabinet on the outcomes at a later date.

The meeting closed at 8.23 p.m.

Chairman