B R O M S G R O V E D I S T R I C T C O U N C I L

MEETING OF THE CABINET

16TH SEPTEMBER 2026, AT 6.00 P.M.

PARKSIDE SUITE - PARKSIDE

PRESENT: Councillors K.J. May (Leader), S. J. Baxter (Deputy Leader), S. T. Nock, K. Taylor and P. J. Whittaker (from Minute Item no. 28/26)

Observers: Councillor P. M. McDonald (Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Board)

Officers: Mr J. Leach, Mr. J. Walton, Ms R. Egan, Ms J. Willis, Mrs. H. Mole, Mr D. Riley, Ms. K. Sharp-Fisher and Mrs. J. Bayley-Hill

26/26 **TO RECEIVE APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

An apology for absence was received on behalf of Councillor S. Webb.

Members were advised that Councillor P. Whittaker would be arriving late at the meeting.

27/26 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

28/26 **TO CONFIRM THE ACCURACY OF THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE CABINET HELD ON 22ND JULY 2026**

The minutes of the meeting of Cabinet held on 22nd July 2026 were submitted.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of Cabinet held on 22nd July 2026 be approved as a true and correct record.

29/26 **HOUSING ASSISTANCE POLICY 2026**

The Private Sector Housing Manager presented the Housing Assistance Policy for Members' consideration.

The Housing Assistance Policy detailed assistance that could be provided by the Council to fund adaptations to properties. The particular focus was on assisting residents with disabilities and there were statutory duties to be met in respect of use of Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) funding. In addition, the Council was in a position to distribute a number of discretionary grants to assist residents with their housing.

The policy had been developed jointly with colleagues at other Councils in Worcestershire. This would ensure a consistent approach was applied across the county. The application of the policy and use of grant funding would enable the Council to meet statutory duties in respect of keeping people in their homes and providing quality housing.

Once the report had been presented, Members discussed the following points in detail:

- The extent to which the recent pause on Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) might impact on the policy. Officers confirmed that no impact was anticipated and that the co-ordinated approach across the county was simply designed to align processes.
- The approach to providing housing assistance that had been adopted in other parts of the country and whether any benchmarking had been undertaken to compare practices in Worcestershire to other areas. Cabinet was informed that benchmarking had not been undertaken, although it was suggested that this would be a useful exercise to undertake in the future.
- The adoption of an approach that aligned with national best practice and the fact that this was likely to compare favourably to some other counties.
- The level of flexibility available to Councils in respect of use of discretionary grant funding.
- The specific requirements that local authorities needed to meet when utilising DFGs to fund adaptations to properties.
- The sensitivities surrounding the use of DFG funding and the casework that this could generate for Councillors.

RESOLVED that

1) The Housing Assistance Policy be approved and adopted; and

2) Delegated authority be granted to the Assistant Director of Community and Housing Services, following consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Housing, to agree any revisions to the Housing Assistance Policy and in line with any legislative or government guidance updates.

30/26 **PROMOTION OF BUSINESS SUPPORT**

The Assistant Director of Regeneration and Property Services presented a report on the subject of the promotion of business support.

Cabinet was advised that the report had been produced, following agreement of a Motion on Notice on this subject at a Council meeting held in February 2026. This Motion had requested that Cabinet consider producing a concise business prospectus.

Following that Council meeting, Officers had undertaken research on best practice in respect of provision of business support by local authorities and business growth hubs. During this work, Officers had found that it would be difficult to produce and keep up to date a paper copy of a business prospectus due to constant change occurring within this space. Consequently, Officers were not proposing a paper-based prospectus but instead that the information provided on the Council's website should be enhanced. It was further suggested that this should be extended in such a way that this could be expanded to neighbouring local authority areas if appropriate.

After the report had been presented, Members discussed a number of points in detail:

- The inclusion of economic development as one of the Council's priorities and the extent to which considerations about economic development were embedded in the work of services outside the Business Support team at the Council. Officers confirmed that there was more that could be done but cited existing work, including:
  - Links being developed with HOW College to offer work experience opportunities at the Council to students.
  - Exploration of social value and recruitment opportunities.
  - The impact of the Service Business Plans in place for each service and opportunities for services to work together to share ideas and deliver projects. There were Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) in place to monitor performance in respect of these plans.
  - The progress that had been made in respect of holding appraisals at the Council, whereby close to 100 per cent of staff were receiving appraisals. As well as good practice supporting staff, this would enable key objectives and tasks to be filtered down to employees, including in respect of economic development, where appropriate.
- The links between the Planning and Economic Development departments at the Council and the potential for these links to be enhanced.
- The need for effective communications to be in place to raise awareness amongst businesses, particularly Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) about the support available both online and from the Worcestershire Growth Hub.
- The potential for Members to help raise awareness within their wards, using their networks, of the support available to businesses. Members requested that communications should be provided to enable Members to share information about business support using their local networks.
- The opportunity for a clear marketing and promotions strategy to be developed to support effective communications in respect of this matter.
- The role of the Worcestershire Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) in providing support to businesses.

- The extent to which LEPs would continue to receive Government funding moving forward and whether LGR might impact on the position of the LEPs.
- The impact that the Government's recent decision to pause further action on LGR might have on Council services and the knock-on implications for the Council's priority of economic development. Clarification was provided that senior officers were in the process of reviewing the potential implications for Council services including Council budgets.
- The lead officer support for the Worcestershire LEP and the extent to which senior officers from Bromsgrove District Council were in a position to attend these meetings.

RESOLVED that

1) The Council continue to develop and enhance its digital-first model for promotion of business support programmes available to businesses in the District; and

2) The Council continue to utilise Worcestershire Growth Hub as a central access point for business advice, support and opportunities.

31/26 **QUARTER 1 2026/27 PERFORMANCE REPORT**

The Performance and Improvement Manager presented the performance monitoring report for the first quarter of 2026/27.

The report detailed the performance of Council services during the quarter. Strong results had been recorded for a range of services, including Planning, Environmental Services and in respect of workforce measures. Recycling performance had improved during the period and Building Control had recorded 100 per cent performance in respect of statutory requirements. The Bromsgrove Community Investment Fund had attracted a lot of applications. Staff turnover compared favourably with the national average.

There were also areas of performance that were being monitored. This included fly tipping rates and temporary accommodation.

In terms of community safety, performance in respect of crime statistics was broadly consistent. However, provision of data to the Council in respect of Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) had been delayed.

Following the presentation of the report, Members discussed a number of points:

- The potential impact on fly tipping rates of Worcestershire County Council's decision to no longer accept fridges and freezers from bulky waste collections. It was noted that the Environmental Services team had already been asked to monitor the potential impact on fly tipping.

- The reasons why Worcestershire County Council had chosen to no longer accept fridges and freezers. Members noted that this approach was consistent with many County Councils across the country and a consequence of rising costs for the disposal of fridges and freezers.
- The extent to which performance in respect of planning enforcement data had been impacted by the new approach adopted by Worcestershire Regulatory Services (WRS).
- The impact that the Covid-19 pandemic might have had on fly tipping rates and the extent to which this was still have an impact six years after the pandemic first emerged.
- The inclusion of RAG ratings in the report. Members welcomed references to "red", "amber" and "green", as applicable, within the report as this helped to clarify the ratings in black and white paper copies of the agenda pack.
- The hard work of the Business Improvement Team, particularly the Performance and Improvement Lead, on the preparation of the report. Members thanked the team for their hard work.

During consideration of this item, the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Board addressed Cabinet on behalf of the Finance and Budget Working Group (FBWG). Members were informed that at a recent meeting of the group the performance monitoring report had been scrutinised. There had been general consensus amongst Members of the group that this was a good report and that Council services were performing well.

RESOLVED that the overview of Quarter 1 performance for the period April to June 2026 against the Council Plan priorities be noted.

32/26 **BDC EQUALITY STRATEGY 2026-2028 (INCLUDING ENGAGEMENT POLICY)**

The Improvement and Performance Manager presented the Equalities Strategy (including Engagement Policy) 2026/28 for Cabinet's consideration.

The Equality Strategy provided a framework at the Council for equalities and inclusion and brought together activities from across the authority. The content extended beyond the aspirations of the previous strategy and would influence a range of key projects and activities. Within the strategy, an Equality Action Plan had been developed containing key objectives. Progress in respect of this action plan would be monitored.

The Engagement Policy detailed the Council's approach to engaging with local residents and service users.

Members discussed the content of the strategy and policy. In doing so, it was noted that the previous strategy had applied for a four year period whilst it was proposed that the draft strategy should apply for two years, from 2026 to 2028. Questions were raised as to whether these

timeframes had been influenced by the original timetable for LGR. Officers confirmed that this had been taken into account when the timeframes were considered.

Consideration was subsequently given to the potential to extend the timeframes covered by the strategy up to 2030. Clarification was provided that whilst there was a pause on LGR, the Council was reviewing the implications of this for Council services and budgets. However, confirmation was provided that extending the timeframes of the strategy would not require significant extra work or expenditure. Furthermore, it was acknowledged that the timeframes could be revisited at a later date, depending on the Government's future announcement on LGR for Worcestershire.

In this context, Members proposed to amend the timeframes of the strategy to apply from 2026 to 2030. To ensure consistency, Cabinet further proposed that the timeframes for the Engagement Policy should also be extended to cover the period 2026 to 2030.

RECOMMENDED that the Equality Strategy 2026 – 2030 (including the Engagement Policy 2026 - 2030) be approved.

33/26 **DISCRETIONARY COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION POLICY 2026/27**

The Revenue Support Manager presented the Discretionary Council Tax Reduction Policy 2026/27.

Cabinet was advised that the authority reviewed the content of the Discretionary Council Tax Reduction Policy on an annual basis. The Council had discretionary powers to amend or reduce Council Tax, including through assessment on a case-by-case basis. Decisions on Council Tax reduction were subject to a review process and tax payers could appeal decisions if they disagreed with the decision made by the authority.

The Discretionary Council Tax Reduction Policy needed to support speedy and transparent decision-making. In addition, Tribunals expected Councils to have a policy for discretionary Council Tax reductions.

Within the Council's existing Discretionary Council Tax Reduction Policy there were four criteria:

- Reductions for care leavers aged 25 or under. Worcestershire County Council worked with the authority to help clarify eligible candidates.
- The flood recovery framework, which applied to householders that had been impacted by a flooding incident.
- Any other Government additional support.
- Other cases, which were assessed on a case-by-case basis under exceptional hardship arrangements.

In the updated policy, an additional category was proposed in respect of Council Tax reductions for households in which there was a resident who was terminally ill. This additional category had been proposed following receipt of communications from charities that supported people who were terminally ill and their carers. Previously, the position of residents who were terminally ill had been considered in relation to exceptional hardship arrangements.

In considering the proposed new category, Members were asked to note that this reduction would not apply to every household in which there was a resident who was terminally ill. Before a decision would be taken, the Council would consider the financial income for the household. There would be a need to achieve a balance in decision-making between providing appropriate levels of financial support and meeting the authority's duty of care.

Consideration had originally been given to amending the policy in this manner in January 2026. However, Officers had been asked to research practices in other parts of the country before taking this forward. Subsequently, Officers had established that none of the Councils in South Worcestershire had included this category in their Discretionary Council Tax Reduction Policies and neither had Wyre Forest District Council. All of these authorities assessed Council Tax reductions in relation to hardship arrangements when supporting terminally ill residents. There were some larger local authorities, including Manchester City Council and Bristol City Council that had already introduced this category alongside Redditch Borough Council and different approaches had been adopted at these authorities.
During consideration of this item, the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Board advised that the report had been scrutinised at a meeting of the Finance and Budget Working Group. During this meeting, there had been two distinct views that had been raised by Members:

- Some Members had argued that if a resident was terminally ill the evidence of that illness should be sufficient for that resident to be eligible for discretionary Council Tax reduction without means testing.
- Other Members had commented that there should be targeted support for terminally ill residents. In this scenario, terminally ill residents in receipt of personal income above a certain threshold should not be eligible to receive Council Tax reduction.

No consensus had been reached at the meeting of the Finance and Budget Working Group on a preferred way forward and therefore no recommendations had been made to the Cabinet on this subject.

Members subsequently discussed the following matters in detail:

- The extent to which the Council's current policy provided sufficient flexibility to apply Council Tax reductions for terminally ill residents.

Clarification was provided that limited support could be provided under exceptional hardship arrangements.

- The approach that would be adopted under the proposed new policy and whether residents' income would be taken into account. Officers confirmed that residents' incomes would be taken into account when assessments were undertaken.
- The position of homeowners who lived alone who had been diagnosed with a terminal illness and how their eligibility would be assessed. Cabinet was advised that a compassionate approach would be adopted and, where appropriate, recovery of debts could be deferred until after the residents' death, to be obtained from their estate.
- The extent to which terminally ill residents and their carers were likely to be aware of or to think about applying for discretionary Council Tax reduction. Members commented on personal experiences in which many such considerations were unlikely to have been their focus at the time of a loved one's diagnosis. The suggestion was made that instead, information about the availability of support should be shared with palliative care teams and hospices, which could then assist residents and their carers.
- The decision-making process that would apply in determining eligibility. Confirmation was provided that Officers would gather evidence and would make the decisions in line with a framework. Cabinet was informed that the first stage of appeal would be referred to an officer. A second appeal stage would involve referral of the case to an evaluation tribunal.
- The extent to which residents would be liaising with Officers in person or by phone, rather than the Council using artificial intelligence. Officers confirmed that staff would liaise directly with residents.
- The extent to which there was a risk of legal action being taken by the Council to recover Council Tax debts whilst a resident was experiencing terminal illness. Members were assured that the Council would continue to adopt a compassionate approach to debt recovery and that the authority did not take court action against terminally ill residents.
- The fact that the proposed changes reflected best practice and the likelihood that other Councils would adopt similar arrangements in future.
- The annual reviews of the Discretionary Council Tax Reduction Policy that would continue to take place and the potential for amendments to be made to the policy as further information emerged about best practice across the country.
- The extent to which it was likely that a future Unitary Authority would adopt a similar approach. Cabinet was informed that the Members of the future Unitary Authority would need to determine their own policies.
- The potential for the financial impact of this policy in relation to all precepting authorities to be explored at a meeting of Worcestershire Leaders' Board.

RECOMMENDED that the revised section 13A(1)(C) policy be approved and adopted.

34/26 **RECOMMENDATION FROM THE SHAREHOLDERS COMMITTEE - APPOINTMENT OF SHAREHOLDERS COMMITTEE REPRESENTATIVE**

Members considered a report detailing a referral that had been received from the Shareholders Committee proposing that the Assistant Director of Environmental and Housing Property Services should be appointed as the Shareholders Committee representative.

Cabinet was informed that there was a shareholders agreement between Spadesbourne Homes Limited and the Council. This agreement permitted the appointment of a Council officer as a lead liaison with Spadesbourne Homes Limited. The Shareholders Committee had considered a report on this subject at their latest meeting held in July 2026 and had agreed that the Assistant Director of Environmental and Housing Property Services would be suitable for this role. However, as a decision on this subject was outside the Committee's remit, a recommendation on this subject had been referred to Cabinet for consideration.

RESOLVED that Simon Parry, Assistant Director of Environmental and Housing Property Services be appointed as Shareholder Committee Representative.

35/26 **QUARTER 1 FINANCIAL MONITORING REPORT 2026/27**

The Chief Finance Officer presented the financial monitoring report for quarter 1 of the 2026/27 financial year.

Members were informed that by the end of quarter 1, the Council was projecting a small overspend. Variances per service area had been recorded in the report alongside comparable data for the 2025/26 outturn budget. Some overspends had been identified. There were also some areas, particularly corporate services such as Council Tax, where it was not possible at such an early stage to assess levels of variance. Where possible, variances were in the process of being reviewed in time to inform the quarter 2 financial monitoring report.

The capital programme had been reviewed as part of the monitoring process. As the Council was at an early stage in the financial year, the level of spend had been included but no breakdown had been provided. Further information would be made available in subsequent monitoring reports.

The Council had healthy balances. The income from VAT returns had been incorporated into the general balances.

Following the presentation of the report, Members discussed the potential for financial information for Planning and Leisure Services to be presented separately in future, in line with different portfolio responsibilities. Clarification was provided that work was being undertaken to enable Members to review financial data by service and portfolio. However, this presentation format would be available later in the year. Cabinet was also asked to note that some service directorates did not match Portfolio Holder remits.

During consideration of this report, the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Board advised that the report had been considered at the latest meeting of the Finance and Budget Working Group. At that meeting of the group, Members had welcomed the new format of the report which had been viewed as an improvement on previous iterations. There had been some areas which the group had noted in particular, and these were highlighted for Cabinet's consideration:

- The £90,000 overspend that had been recorded for homelessness. The group had questioned why this had arisen following an increase in funding for homelessness services earlier in the year and the Section 151 Officer had undertaken to investigate the matter further.
- The saving of £40,000 that had been recorded for Churchfields Car Park. Members had questioned why there was a saving associated with this car park, given it had been closed for a number of years. Officers had agreed to investigate this matter further.
- The decreasing number of temporary agency staff employed by the local authority, which had been welcomed by the group.
- The different approach that had been adopted in 2026/27 compared to 2025/26 in respect of the capitalisation of salary costs.

RESOLVED

1) To note that the full year forecast revenue position for 2026/27 was an overspend of £0.021 million which would be funded by the General Fund Balance at year end if the position remained as an overspend;

2) To note that the 2026/27 actual capital position at Quarter 1 was £1.953 million spend against a total approved programme of £13.692 million;

3) The Ward Budget allocation for 2026/27 of £155,000 had approved allocations at £20,318 as at 30th June 2026;

4) The General Fund Opening Balance of £11.676 million adjusted in year to £11.543 million as a result of the overspend and other adjustments;

5) The balance of Earmarked Reserves as at 30 June 2026 was £14.110 million; and

6) There was an updated procurement position, with any new items over £200k to be included on the forward plan.

36/26 **MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD HELD ON 21ST JULY 2026**

The minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board held on 21st July 2026 were submitted.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board held on 21st July 2026 be noted.

37/26 **TO CONSIDER ANY URGENT BUSINESS, DETAILS OF WHICH HAVE BEEN NOTIFIED TO THE ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF 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 on this occasion.

The meeting closed at 7.42 p.m.

Chairman