

Overview and Scrutiny

10th February 2026

Planning Advisory Service (PAS) Report

Relevant Portfolio Holder		Councillor Kit Taylor
Portfolio Holder Consulted		Yes
Relevant Assistant Director		Guy Revans, Executive Director – Environment and Communities
Report Author	Job Title: as above. Contact email: guy.revans@bromsgroveandredditch.gov.uk	
Wards Affected		All
Ward Councillor(s) consulted		N/A
Relevant Council Priority		All four Council Corporate Priorities.
Non-Key Decision No		
If you have any questions about this report, please contact the report author in advance of the meeting.		

1.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee is asked to **RESOLVE**: -

To note the report and provide comments, reflections and recommendations relating to the findings of the PAS report for consideration by Cabinet at its meeting on 25th March 2026.

2.0 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 In light of the significant reforms introduced through the Levelling-Up and Regeneration Act 2023, Planning & Infrastructure Act 2025 and updates to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). The Bromsgrove Chief Executive, in agreement with the Council Leader, commissioned an independent review of the Council's Planning Service to ensure it was well placed to meet the challenges ahead.
- 2.2 The review, carried out by Planning Advisory Service (PAS) is also in recognition of the need to support Councillors and Officers in responding to the forthcoming legislative changes, requirement to deliver a new local plan and the historical challenges experienced in progressing plan-making. The PAS note that the planning service is operating in a complex environment,

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including that there is in Bromsgrove District 90% green belt and only 2.4 years of housing land supply left, which could lead to speculative development.

- 2.3 The PAS review (published separately) covers BDC Local Plan production and the Development Management decision-making framework. The objectives of the review were as follows: -

- 1) Assess the effectiveness of governance arrangements.
- 2) Evaluate the working relationships between officers, members, and external partners (particularly Worcestershire County Council).
- 3) Identify barriers to successful decision-making.
- 4) Provide practical recommendations to strengthen the decision-making process and improve the likelihood of successful outcomes.

4.0 OPERATIONAL ISSUES

4.1 Key points from the PAS report January 2026.

- 4.1.1 The below provides a summary of the key points from the PAS report against the above objectives.

1) Assess the effectiveness of governance arrangements.

- They have found that the Development Management processes are broadly very sound. But that early engagement between Councillors and Officers is not always consistent with regard to applications.
- There is a need to embed governance arrangements that can foster cross-party consensus around the Local Plan. This means developing a compelling spatial vision, completing the evidence base and working with key partners, especially Worcestershire County Council (WCC).

2) Evaluate the working relationships between Officers, Members, and external partners (particularly WCC).

- There is work to do to rebuild levels of trust between Councillors and Officers. These dynamics are in sharp focus with regard to the Local Plan processes.
- Pre-application discussions and site visits are underutilised and interaction between Councillors and Officers outside of Planning Committee is limited. This results in issues which could be resolved earlier, often surfacing at Committee meetings, leading to lengthy debates and reinforcing a sense of tension rather than collaboration.
- Above all the PAS note that the Council must create an environment where behaviours reflect shared goals, rather than individual or political agendas.

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- They note that Bromsgrove's Planning Service is at a critical juncture, and that the Leadership and Senior Management must have a clear opportunity to address the current risks but also set a new tone for how Councillors, Officers and Senior Leadership work together—collectively taking responsibility for how Planning shapes the future of the District.

3) Identify barriers to successful decision-making.

- They note that Planning is increasingly being viewed through a party-political lens rather than a shared corporate priority.
- They also note that the Council, being in no overall control, has led to a greater need for cross-party collaboration.
- They note that there are significant obstacles to meeting the current Local Development Scheme (LDS) timetable, not least the absence of the national plan-making regulations and Local Government Reorganisation (LGR).
- The report is clear that planning is a key corporate risk. The political Leadership and Senior Managers will need to support and enable Officers and Councillors to make difficult but necessary decisions.
- Progressing the emerging local plan is vitally important if the Council is to provide for a plan-led approach to future development and infrastructure provision. Without an up-to-date local plan, the District will remain subject to the risk of widespread speculative development and 'Planning by appeal' for a prolonged period which would be undesirable and detrimental to local communities. There is also a risk of government intervention in plan-making which would see decisions on the future direction of growth being taken away from the Council.
- Despite the uncertainty, the Council is making progress — including the recent consultation on the draft development strategy, however the plan-making timetable needs to accelerate substantially and we urgently complete an up-to-date green belt assessment and establish an agreed spatial vision and approach to guide development of a preferred spatial strategy.

4) Provide practical recommendations to strengthen the decision-making process and improve the likelihood of successful outcomes.

- The PAS team have made 15 recommendations, which can be seen on pages 7 and 8 of the report. Page 8 relate to Development Management and the decision-making process and page 7 relates to the Local Plan review. These aim to build consensus, develop an agreed vision, improve training, improve resources and improve partner relations.

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- The Key recommendations from the PAS review are set out in the table below:

Decision making	
RDM1	There is an urgent need for a reset in the relationships and interaction between Councillors and Officers. This is essential to improve collaborative working between Officers and Members that will improve the quality of decision-making. All the mechanisms and processes are in place to enable this but are not being used as widely and effectively as they could be. This should be led and given the highest priority by Senior Managers and political Leaders with buy-in from all political groups as well as the Planning team.
RDM2	Recommendation: Strengthen and formalise councillor planning training The Council should establish a comprehensive and structured programme of Planning training for both Planning Committee Members and Ward Councillors, designed to strengthen defensible decision-making, clarify roles and responsibilities and ensure decisions are made within a clear legal and governance framework. The training should be mandatory for committee members. This programme should include the following components: • Defensible decision-making training for planning committee members, based on the PAS <i>Defensible Decision-Making</i> resource and where appropriate the use of relevant case studies. The purpose of this training is to ensure committee members are fully aware of their statutory role and responsibilities, to reinforce the principles of sound, evidence-based decision-making and to reduce the risk of challenge. It is recommended that this element of the training is delivered by a suitably experienced external consultant to provide independence and specialist expertise. • An ongoing programme of training for planning committee members focused on emerging national and local planning issues, developed alongside the Council's existing annual training offer. This should include briefings on new and evolving forms of development (for example, grey belt development and battery storage) and reinforce understanding of how key policy concepts, including the application of the '<i>tilted balance</i>'¹, should be applied in decision-making. • A dedicated programme of planning training for Ward Councillors, aimed at improving understanding of how Councillors can appropriately influence planning decision-making the limits and parameters of that influence and the wider council context within which planning decisions are taken. This training should cover the legal framework governing

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	planning decisions, the importance of decisions being robustly evidenced and ensure Councillors are fully cognisant of the Council's Code of Conduct and Constitution as they apply to Planning matters. The programme should also include an overview of the role of planning enforcement and how it interacts with planning decision-making.
RDM3	To continue exploring ways of working more effectively with WCC (especially Highways). The need to cultivate better joint working and engender a more effective role within the decision-making process is recognised by the Council. The Bromsgrove Chief Executive is encouraged to continue to engage with their counterpart at WCC and establish clear expectations and deliverables. This may be achieved via an Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) regarding Highways matters developed by the Planning Service with the support of the Executive Director and Chief Executive.
RDM4	To undertake a review of the processes and performance monitoring associated with Planning Enforcement. This should be undertaken with a specific emphasis on improving the interaction between the Investigating Officers and the Planning Officers responsible for undertaking planning assessments, as well as on how this work is prioritised. In terms of performance, a key objective of Planning Enforcement is to resolve as many breaches as possible without serving a notice and seen as a positive outcome and not a negative one. Performance data and 'numbers of notices served' is not the best indicator of performance – reporting on cases opened and resolved would be a better indicator.
RDM5	To undertake a review of Officer presentations to the Planning Committee. This is to ensure that Officer presentations are proportionate and provide a greater focus on identifying what are the key issues to assist Committee Members' consideration.
RDM6	Review the quality of streaming of Planning Committee meetings and the timescale for retention of recordings. This needs to be aimed at identifying ways of improving the viewing experience and taking note of best practice elsewhere. Previous legal advice around the retention of recordings should be revisited to ensure that the recordings are retained until they cease to perform any useful purpose.
RDM7	To provide greater encouragement for Councillors to contribute to pre-application work and to explore how interaction between Councillors and Officers outside of the Planning Committee more generally can be improved. This should involve reviewing the operation of existing procedures to understand why they are not leading to greater interaction and how further opportunities can be encouraged. This should be supplemented by reinforcement by Senior Officers and Political Party Leaders of the importance

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	and benefits arising from greater Officer-Councillor engagement in Planning matters more generally.
RDM8	To undertake a review of the Planning Committee site visit process to encourage better attendance. This should explore and seek to resolve the issue of poor attendance, including reviewing the timing and number of accompanied site visits undertaken.
Local Plan Review	
RLP1	Build political consensus. Reflect upon the challenges arising from the draft development strategy consultation approach and identify lessons learned. Facilitate an impartially chaired cross-party workshop of all Councillors/and or the Strategic Planning Steering Group (SPSG) to address concerns about process, rebuild consensus and develop understanding of risks relating to the 'tilted balance' (see recommendation RDM2 above). This will empower elected members to communicate a strong positive vision for the District's future and consider 'macro' district-wide benefits rather than just 'micro' ward impacts.
RLP2	Review the operation and terms of reference for the Strategic Planning Steering Group (SPSG) to improve governance arrangements and support a genuine cross-party local plan member working group. A review should include: • Defined membership proportionate to group sizes (not open attendance). • Requirement for continuity of attendance (named Councillors with named Deputies). • Clear terms of reference including collective responsibility for recommendations and efficient administrative arrangements. • Authority to make recommendations to Cabinet/Full Council. • Regular meetings with effective and efficient administrative arrangements, which minimise demands on Planning Policy Officers. • Impartial chairing by the Council Leader or Assistant Director, rather than Portfolio Holder to emphasise the corporate priority. • End/avoid separate political group briefings and ensure all Members receive the same information simultaneously.
RLP3	Develop the strategic spatial vision and complete evidence base. Urgently complete an up-to-date green belt assessment and establish an agreed spatial vision and approach to guide development of a preferred spatial strategy. Commission spatial master planning work and utilise design coding to illustrate what development could look like, moving beyond allocation boundaries to show placemaking, design quality and community integration. Ensure employment, retail, community facilities and green infrastructure receive equal prominence to housing in future iterations of the draft plan. Organise Councillor site visits to exemplar developments.

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RLP4	Secure infrastructure delivery commitments as a priority. Build on Chief Executive-to-Chief Executive engagement with WCC with clear expectations and deliverables. Create a formal MOU for transport planning support with agreed timescales and escalation procedures. Work closely with the WCC to jointly identify solutions and agree future plans to fund and deliver new and enhanced education provision to serve planned growth. Produce a robust Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP) endorsed by all providers. Consider adoption of Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and explore front-loading of developer contributions.
RLP5	Strengthen Programme Management and Resources. Develop a comprehensive project plan, aligned to the new planning system Gateway requirements, showing all tasks, critical path dependencies, resource allocation and realistic contingency. Undertake capacity assessment of the Planning Policy Team and secure additional resources (e.g. Assistant Directors have been proactively asked and reminded to submit budget bids, including bids for additional capacity) where needed. Implement regular progress monitoring and actively maintain a risk register. If May 2028 target proves to be unachievable through detailed planning, revise and republish the LDS with realistic timescales.
RLP6	Continue active senior leadership support. Use the corporate risk register to reinforce and recommunicate that the Local Plan is a key corporate risk. There should be regular progress reporting to the Senior Leadership Team from the Assistant Director and the Strategic Planning Manager. The Chief Executive and Executive Director should ensure a consistent dialogue with Planning Policy Officers and attend key meetings where appropriate to provide their support where required. Reinforce clear protocols for engagement and Councillor-Officer interaction and ensure Group Leaders take responsibility for Councillor's following them and continue to provide wellbeing support for Planning Officers.
RLP7	Introduce a training and support programme for councillors. Establish training for all Councillors on the role and importance of the local plan to reduce future risk and enable more effective and collaborative approaches to plan progression in the future. Councillors require sufficient training and strong political group leadership to support them to fulfil their roles appropriately for the long-term benefit of the electorate and the district as a whole. In short, Members need to be supported to make politically, very difficult decisions.

4.1.2 The report was considered by Group Leaders at their Meeting on 28th January 2026.

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The following actions were agreed:

- The Report to go to Overview and Scrutiny Board on 10th February 2026.
- The Report including feedback from Scrutiny will go to Cabinet on 25th March 2026.
- Officers draw up action plan for how the recommendations can best be delivered which will be included in the Cabinet report on 25th March.
- To build a political consensus, a cross-party Local Plan Working Group is established with a defined membership proportionate to group sizes with immediate effect (3 Conservative, 2 Liberal Democrat, 2 Labour and 2 Independent) and that Terms of Reference be drawn up for consideration and agreement at the first meeting of the working group.
- Finally, it was agreed that learning from Warwick University with regards to the operation of the Planning Committee be considered by the Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Planning Committee with support from Officers and where possible, recommendations implemented or referred to the constitution working group as a priority as agreed.