

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MEETING OF THE COUNCIL

WEDNESDAY 3RD DECEMBER 2025, AT 6.00 P.M.

PRESENT: Councillors S. M. Evans (Chairman), B. Kumar (Vice-Chairman), S. Ammar, A. Bailes, R. Bailes, S. J. Baxter, J. Clarke, S. R. Colella, A. M. Dale, D. J. A. Forsythe, E. M. S. Gray, C.A. Hotham, D. Hopkins, R. J. Hunter, H. J. Jones, R. E. Lambert, M. Marshall, K.J. May, P. M. McDonald, B. McEldowney, S. T. Nock, D. J. Nicholl, S. R. Peters, J. Robinson, S. A. Robinson, J. D. Stanley, K. Taylor, H. D. N. Warren-Clarke, S. A. Webb and P. J. Whittaker

Officers: Mr J. Leach, Mr. G. Revans, Mrs. C. Felton, Mrs. R. Bamford, D Goodall and Mrs J. Gresham

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TO RECEIVE APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor J. Elledge. It was noted that Councillors D. Forsythe, J. Stanley and H. Warren-Clarke would be in attendance for the meeting, however, they would be arriving late.

67\25

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor R. Hunter declared an other registerable interest in respect of Minute Item No. 75/25 concerning the first Question on Notice for consideration at the meeting in respect of Nailer's Yard in that he was employed by HS2.

Councillor C. Hotham declared a pecuniary interest in respect of Minute Item No. 76/25 concerning the second Motion on Notice for consideration at the meeting in respect of Houses of Multiple Occupancy (HMOs) in that he was the owner of an HMO. Councillor Hotham left the room for consideration of this item and took no part in the debate nor the vote thereon.

68\25

TO RECEIVE ANY ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM THE CHAIRMAN AND/OR HEAD OF PAID SERVICE

The Chairman took the opportunity to wish Members, Officers and residents a merry Christmas and a happy new year.

This was echoed by the Head of Paid Service who wished all in attendance Seasons Greetings.

69\25

TO RECEIVE ANY ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM THE LEADER

The Leader announced that there had been a change of membership to the Cabinet and an update to the portfolios as detailed below:

- Councillor K. May - Cabinet Member for Strategic Partnerships, Economic Development and Enabling
- Councillor S. Baxter - Cabinet Member for Local Government Reorganisation and Climate Change
- Councillor S. T. Nock - Cabinet Member for Finance
- Councillor K. Taylor - Cabinet Member for Planning, WRS and Strategic Housing
- Councillor S. Webb - Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing, Leisure and Culture
- Councillor P. Whittaker - Cabinet Member for Environmental Services and Community Safety

The Leader took the opportunity to welcome Councillor S. T. Nock to the Cabinet and thanked Councillor B. McEldowney for his work whilst a member of the Cabinet. Councillor May also wished Members Season's Greetings.

70\25

TO RECEIVE COMMENTS, QUESTIONS OR PETITIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

There were no comments, questions or petitions from the public for consideration on this occasion.

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URGENT DECISIONS

The Chairman confirmed that no urgent decisions had been taken since the previous meeting of Council.

72\25

TO RECEIVE AND CONSIDER A REPORT FROM THE PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR PLANNING AND REGULATORY SERVICES

The Cabinet Member for Planning, Worcestershire Regulatory Services (WRS) and Strategic Housing presented the report for Members' consideration.

Information was provided on Development Management, and it was noted that the operational scope of the development management services was wide. It maintained a range of environmental and historical information, provided informal and pre-application guidance, as well as undertaking the day-to-day statutory process of determining planning applications and appeals in accordance with the Development Plan. As a measure of work coming into the Planning department, it was reported that eight hundred and sixty-two planning applications had been received in 2024 and to date in 2025 eight hundred and thirty-three planning applications had been received.

In terms of major applications, the Council determined roughly four or five applications each quarter, this number had been consistent over the last few years. In addition, approximately twenty-seven pre-application requests were submitted each quarter. It was noted that these figures were rising when compared to 2024 and 2025. Performance for speed consistently exceeded central Government targets with over ninety-two per cent of major applications and eighty-seven per cent of minor applications being determined within an agreed time scale. Quality measures remained below the ten per cent figure for both major and minor applications.

Members were informed that the Development Management team undertook a restructure of its administrative roles which were implemented in 2025. This had resulted in the successful recruitment of two Senior Planning Officers.

The Development Management team took part in a design coding workshop with Strategic Planning colleagues. This related to the Government drive to see improved design in new developments.

Efforts had been made to assist all Planning Officers to achieve chartership status and it was noted that the Royal Town Planning Institute attended sessions at Parkside to provide support and guidance for Officers.

The Planning Team continued to work with Wyre Forest District Council to support the discharge of biodiversity net gain function on applications.

Members were thanked for their patience and for the substantial time they had given in respect of Strategic Planning over what had been a challenging year. Consultation on the draft Development Strategy had dominated the work for the Strategic Planning Department. Preparing a Local Plan was one of the most significant roles that the department

undertook and Councillor Taylor thanked the Officers who had done an excellent job, particularly when going out to consult with residents. It was noted that there were still uncertainties surrounding this process, but it was clear that the Government expected Councils to bring forward a Local Plan as quickly as possible.

The Local Plan process was set firmly within legislative framework, and this process would continue in line with that and Local Government Reorganisation (LGR). Work was being undertaken as part of the review alongside the Planning Advisory Service (PAS).

Enforcement was also included within this portfolio and Planning Enforcement was part of this, along with several other areas of enforcement. The enforcement procedure was slow due to the quasi-judicial nature of the process. The Development Team provided Members with a regular update on enforcement matters including those that had been resolved and any further cases that had been received.

Following the presentation of the report, Members queried several areas. This included:

- What areas were not included in the report – it was felt that there was little detail included in the report in respect of the Local Plan Development, including speculative planning applications, and enforcement matters. Members suggested that the public should have received a more complete overview of what had happened in this space over the previous months, including the challenges faced in the progression of a Local Plan, WRS and enforcement matters in order to reassure residents. In response, it was noted that there was confidence in the Officers who carried out these roles in a challenging environment. Members were urged to engage in the pre-application process in terms of speculative planning applications. Members were reminded that there must be an Officer present in discussions with any developer and such discussions were confidential at the pre-application stage. WRS were investigating several areas at present which included the unauthorised sale of alcohol and tobacco and had listened to residents in these matters and acted appropriately. This was welcomed by Members and WRS Officers were thanked for their hard work in this area particularly in Bromsgrove Town Centre High Street.

Members also raised the risks involved in the preparation of the Local Plan and the timetable attached to the Plan. It was noted

that the submission of the draft Plan was made to Government in June 2025 which had included the preferred sites for development of nine-thousand dwellings. This had provided developers with an opportunity to submit speculative planning applications. The Local Plan was due to be examined by Government in December 2026. If it was not received at this time the Council would be subject to the new planning regulations and there was the potential in the development of the Plan process being restarted. Members raised that the Council's approach to the development of Green Belt land was problematic and the new legislation in respect of biodiversity net gain had increased Officers workload. This might result in applications not being addressed in a timely manner. All these areas were of concern and posed a risk to the Council for the future. It was noted that a response in respect of risk in terms of the Local Plan would be provided following the meeting.

- Five-year land supply – Members stated that there was not a five-year land supply in the District and with the current Government plans for growth this would cause significant issues with land supply and impact on the land within the District due to the changes of definition in respect of Green and Grey Belt.
- 'Informal' Local Plan Consultation – Members queried the term and asked for clarification on this matter. The Assistant Director for Planning and Leisure Services explained at the start of the Local Plan process, the public consultation stage was called 'informal' even though it was part of the whole Local Plan process. Members were aware that Planning Officers had to consider Regulation eighteen to Regulation nineteen when the Plan became more formalised and submitted to the Secretary of State. This was a very important part of the process and was the first step in the process of the Development Strategy in ascertaining how development should be allocated to certain places. It was the Council's first chance to consult with the public about where exactly the nine-thousand dwellings should be located. Officers were currently going through a detailed process of reading each representation and responding accordingly. This would be reported back to Members. So, whilst technically it was an 'informal' consultation in planning terminology it was a very important step for the Council to have achieved and for our residents to have taken part in.
- Agent's Forum – Further information was requested by Members in order to provide transparency for members of the public. It was noted that these sessions were arranged in order to meet with local agents to understand their views on the process, any

upcoming changes to that process and areas of improvement. The sessions were mostly attended by local architects based in the District and surrounding areas. The input was valuable in order to understand whether any changes needed to be made to Council processes.

- Monitoring of mosquitos – Members welcomed the monitoring of mosquitoes by WRS and noted that this would provide valuable insight into what could potentially be a dangerous issue in the future.

At the end of the discussion the process of the Local Plan was questioned robustly by Members. It was felt that it had put residents and Members in a position of uncertainty and stress. However, it was reiterated that the Local Plan development had been undertaken in line with the legislation and that consultation was carried out with Members and residents. Officers continued to look through responses to better understand the residents thoughts and concerns.

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RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE CABINET

Council considered the outstanding recommendations arising from the meeting of Cabinet held on 19th November 2025.

Medium Term Financial Plan Budget Update and Consultation Report

The Cabinet Member for Finance presented the Stage One update of Bromsgrove District Council's Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) for 2026/27 to 2028/29, alongside the proposed budget consultation.

This report was presented to the Finance and Budget Working Group on 17th November 2025 and subsequently at a Cabinet meeting on 19th November 2025.

The report detailed the financial landscape including any significant challenges and the strategy to ensure financial stability for the District.

As in previous years, the budget-setting process was split into two stages:

- Stage One: This was based on known data up to December 2025 and was presented at this Council meeting.

- Stage Two: Was to be finalised in January 2026 and approved in February 2026, following the Local Government Finance Settlement.

Members were informed that the Stage One budget report presented to Cabinet had highlighted a challenging financial position for the upcoming years. The forecast included an approved MTFP position as agreed at full Council in February 2025. At this time, the Council had a projected deficit of just under £1million pounds for the fiscal year 2026- 27 and a projected deficit of just under £400,000 for the fiscal year 2027-28.

There were five key factors which influenced these deficit projections. The first being inflationary pressures. It was reported that the Council had experienced increased costs due to inflation. In June 2024, the rate of inflation in the UK was 2 per cent. This peaked at 3.8 per cent in July, August, and September 2025. Whilst there was a welcome fall to 3.6 percent in October, the rate was stubbornly high and above the government target.

The second factor was pay awards. A high proportion of the Council's costs were salaries and on costs such as pensions and National Insurance contributions. Nationally agreed pay awards had not been fully funded by the Government.

The third impact was a reduction in grant funding. Anticipated reductions in grant funding continued to contribute to the budget gap. The provisional impact of the Fairer Funding Review was still ongoing.

Finally, Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) would inevitably impact on budgets going forward. The move towards unitary authorities in Worcestershire would significantly alter the local government finance landscape in 2026-27. Consequently, the Council needed to be mindful that the Reserves formed part of this proposal, and any use would need to be factored into the budget setting process.

It was reported that the Council had developed a new budget timetable and would take a strategic approach over the coming months. Financial reporting was now all up to date. However, the accounts were still to be audited.

The Council was adapting its operations to be more sustainable in response to economic and environmental conditions.

One of the key components of the budget process was public consultation which started on 20th November 2025 and would run through to 2nd January 2026. The consultation would provide feedback to Officers and Members which could be fed into the second stage of the budget setting process. The consultation asked residents to provide their views on the Council's key priorities, including economic development, environmental environment, housing, and infrastructure. The consultation was available primarily online with paper copies available at libraries and at customer service centres within the District. It was noted that a focus group session was planned for December 2025 to encourage further engagement with residents.

In terms of the Capital programme there had been an increase in costs due to inflation and rising interest rates. An updated Capital Program would be provided within the final budget report in February 2026.

It was requested that Members worked together over the coming months to ensure financial sustainability for the Council.

Following the presentation of the report Members requested further information on several areas contained within the report as follows:

- Did the current deficit of approximately £1 million for the financial year 2026-27 include the forecast overspend for the year? – It was reported that the information within the report were the best estimates of the information at the present time within the budget setting process. The Council needed to be cautious throughout the process however it was unlikely that there would be a deficit of £1 million once the process had been undertaken thoroughly and the budget presented in February 2026.
- Play Investment Strategy – Given that there was only £160,000 allocated to this Strategy in 2025-26 and £159,000 allocated in 2026-27, which were the only years that the Council could guarantee investment as a result of LGR, would it be possible to revisit these amounts and look to implement the Strategy with greater funds allocated? It was stated that there was a shared ambition across Members of the Council that the Play Investment Strategy be implemented. It was stated that Members were welcome to attend meetings of the Finance and Budget Working Group meetings in order to look at any areas of change in spending within the Strategy. Members also requested clarification whether there would be the opportunity to upgrade Upland Grove to make it accessible for all residents? A response to this specific query would be provided following the meeting.

- The implementation of a reduction in Council Tax for terminally ill residents – A policy was to be brought forward that would look into this specific matter for consideration by Members in due course.
- The former Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership (GBSLEP) funding – Members queried whether the monies held in trust by Birmingham City Council on behalf of the former GBSLEP should be considered a risk for the Council? - It was reported that there had been a recent Programme Board meeting where this matter had been discussed. It was anticipated that Birmingham City Council would consider the release of the funding at a meeting on 20th January 2026.
- Use of Reserves – was there a policy on how the Council offset any deficit with Reserves and what was the trigger point for this? Members were reminded that these matters could be a potential area of discussion at a future FBWG meeting.

The recommendation was proposed by Councillor S. T. Nock and seconded by Councillor K. May.

RECOMMENDED that

The Consultation on the Budget 2026/27 be noted.

Homelessness Prevention Grant and Domestic Abuse Grant

The Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing, Leisure and Culture presented the Homelessness Prevention Grant and Domestic Abuse Grant report for Members' consideration. In doing so, it was explained that the report related to the Government's plans to award a consolidated homelessness and rough sleeper grant and a domestic abuse grant. The Government had proposed to make changes to how the grant was awarded and had indicated that a proportion of the grant would be transferred to the revenue support grant from 2026 to 27.

The report sought Members' approval to award the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MCHLG) homelessness prevention grant, including rough sleeping prevention and recovery grant and domestic abuse new burdens grant in addition to the Council's own homelessness grant to specific schemes recommended by the Development and Enabling manager. In addition, it was noted that it was proposed that authority be delegated to the Assistant Director of Community and Housing Services in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Strategic Housing to allocate any underspend grant during

2026-27 on schemes to prevent homelessness and assist those who become homeless.

Members were informed that the report had been considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Board prior to its consideration at the Cabinet meeting 19th November 2025.

Councillor Webb thanked the Officers for their hard work with service providers to help prevent homelessness within the District.

Members expressed that this was a positive report about a service that worked extremely well particularly during times of severe weather. Members queried the role of the part-time empty Homes Officer. It was explained that this role had not yet been recruited to however when information became available this would be provided.

It was queried how those people who were on the borders of the District were allocated housing if they found themselves homeless. It was noted that the Council had a duty to home rough sleepers and homeless within Bromsgrove where possible and for those in a domestic abuse situation. However, temporary accommodation was sometimes situated outside of the District.

Members requested further information on veterans that found themselves homeless. It was reported that veterans did appear as a high priority in terms of the housing list. It was agreed that any further information would be provided following the meeting.

The term 'static accommodation' was queried by Members. It was noted that this was a term for temporary accommodation and did not refer to static caravan accommodation.

The recommendations were proposed by Councillor S. Webb and seconded by Councillor K. Taylor.

RESOLVED 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 be ring fenced to the Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Grant.

Homelessness Grant Allocation	2026/27 £ (up to £495,917)
The Council is committed to maintain the spend below to meet its statutory duties under homelessness legislation	
BDHT Housing Agency Agreement Top Up Staffing Costs	52,475
Static Temporary Accommodation for an additional 4 units of accommodation	30,688
Worcestershire Strategic Housing Partnership Co-ordinator – contribution towards county-wide development and delivery of housing initiatives in partnership with other agencies	10,500
Severe Emergency Weather Provision	18,347
St Basils Foyer – provides stable accommodation/support for young people - 14 units – fully occupied during last financial year	50,203
St Basils Crash pad – provides emergency temporary accommodation for 16 and 17 year olds	19,711
Bromsgrove Home Choice CBL and Homelessness Module	14,600
Sub Total	£196,524
The services support the delivery of the Council's Homelessness Service.	
St Basils Young Persons Pathway Worker – support to prevent homelessness for under 25's and Crash Pad to provide a unit of emergency accommodation for young people.	41,116
NewStarts - Provide Furniture and Volunteering Opportunities for Ex-Offenders – supports tenancy sustainment and provides future employment opportunities/reduces risk of reoffending	10,000
GreenSquare Accord Housing Related Support – helping ex-offenders remain housed/seek employment	31,172
Maggs Rough Sleeper outreach and prevention service targeting rough sleepers and those at risk of rough sleeping.	35,607
North Worcestershire Basement Project - Support for young people at risk of homelessness	30,000

BDHT - Sunrise Project intensive support	46,886
Mental Health Link Worker (part funded)	21,554
CAB – Debt Advice for Home Owners and Private Renters	27,611
CAB – Affordability Assessments	6,021
Housing First/Housing Led Service	29,563
Part time Empty Homes Officer	7,680
Spend to Save Top Up	5,683
County Rough Sleeper Coordinator	5,500
Rough Sleeper Access to Accommodation Fund and NFNO/NSNO	1,000
Sub Total	299,393
Total committed expenditure	£495,917
Underspend	£0

Quarter Two 2025/26 Finance and Performance Monitoring Report (including Financial Savings and Half Yearly Treasury Management Report)

This report provided a comprehensive overview of the Council's financial position, capital programme, savings delivery, and performance against strategic priorities to the end of September 2025. It was reported that the report had been considered at the Finance and Budget Working Group meeting on 17th November 2025 prior to its consideration at the Cabinet meeting on 19th November 2025.

During consideration of report the following areas were highlighted:

- As of the end of Quarter 2, the Council was forecasting a £336,000 revenue overspend for the full financial year. This was primarily driven by the following:
 - Increased costs in Waste Management, due to the aging fleet and agency staffing.
 - Additional costs in Finance, including agency cover and VAT consultancy.
 - Shortfalls in parking income and increased costs in Lifeline Services.

It was reported that these pressures had been partially offset by:

- Vacancy management savings.
- Increased income in waste services.
- Underspends in Corporate Financing.

- In terms of savings delivery, at the time of the meeting, £894,000 of £1.213 million savings target had been delivered. Leaving a further £319,000 to be achieved. Work was ongoing to meet this target by year-end.
- The Capital expenditure stood at £4.872 million against a revised budget of £21.876 million, which included £14.891 million of carry forwards from 2024-25.
- Key projects included:
 - Windsor Street: Phase one remediation was complete and awaiting Environment Agency feedback on PFAS levels prior to the commencement of phase two.
 - Nailers' Yard: Construction was progressing well, with a revised completion date of 6th May 2026. A further £500,000 had been committed to this scheme.
- Reserves and Treasury – there was currently earmarked Reserves of £11.266 million. There had been no new borrowing undertaken. There was £7 million held in short-term investments and Treasury performance and prudential indicators were compliant and stable.
- Ward Budgets – At the time of the meeting eighteen Members had allocated a total of £15,968.80 of available funding. It was noted that £46,031.20 remained unallocated and must be spent by 31st March 2026. It was confirmed that any unallocated funds would not be carried forward into the next financial year.
- Collection Fund Performance
 - Council Tax collection was slightly below target at 56.58% for Quarter Two.
 - Business Rates collection was strong at 56.82 per cent, which exceeded the national average.
- Benefits Processing – on average new claims were processed in sixteen days. Any changes to claims were processed in nine days. This was well within the Department for work and Pensions expectations.
- Procurement Pipeline – There were ten contracts that exceeded the £200,000 key decision threshold on the pipeline. Five contracts had been procured by Redditch Borough Council on behalf of Bromsgrove District Council.
- Strategic and Operational Implications - Financial monitoring was fully aligned with the Council's strategic purposes. Managers continued to work closely with Finance to mitigate risks and ensure delivery of priorities.

Following the presentation of the report Members raised several areas, as follows:

- Vacancy management savings – was this a risk in terms of providing quality of services if these vacancies were not managed effectively. It was agreed that this was an area that would continue to be monitored.
- Clarification provided on the £9,000 underspend car parks – it was agreed that this would be provided to Members following the meeting.
- Windsor Street Site – whether the level of groundwater at this site was acceptable and if not, would remediation works be necessary and what would the costs be for these works – it was reported that the level of PFAS was still being monitored on this site by the Environment Agency. Any remediation works would be covered within current monies allocated to the project. Members were concerned that due to the possible areas raised that the site might not be ready for completion by the deadline of May 2026. It was noted that the Planning process could still commence alongside any continued monitoring whilst any areas of snagging could be completed if necessary.
- Dog Kennelling – There were costs of £45,000 for the kennelling of dogs within the procurement pipeline appendix. It was noted that Bromsgrove was the host Authority for Worcestershire Regulatory Services (WRS) who required kennelling services. However, it was confirmed that this amount would be split across all partner authorities.
- Details of the overspend in car parking – it was noted that a briefing paper would be provided in due course on car parking matters.

The recommendations were proposed by Councillor S. T. Nock and seconded by Councillor K. May.

RESOLVED that

- 1) That the Balance Sheet Monitoring Position for Quarter Two be noted – which is the Treasury Monitoring Report and required to be reported to Council.
- 2) The Council's Treasury performance for Q2 of the financial year 25/26 be noted.
- 3) The position in relation to the Council's Prudential indicators be noted.

74\25

TO NOTE THE MINUTES OF THE MEETINGS OF THE CABINET HELD ON 19TH NOVEMBER 2025

Members queried a recommendation in respect of the Windsor Street report considered at the meeting held on 19th November 2025.

- 1) The Assistant Director for Regeneration and Property and the Assistant Director for Legal, Democratic and Procurement Services be given delegated authority to explore this option further and to report back to Cabinet on the outcomes at a later date.

Members requested clarification as to whether the report in respect of Windsor Street would also go to the Overview and Scrutiny Board prior to its consideration at Cabinet. It was confirmed that this was the case.

The minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 19th November 2025 were noted.

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QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

The Chairman explained that five Questions on Notice had been submitted for this meeting.

Question submitted by Councillor C. Hotham

“The Market Hall (Nailers Yard) development appears to be turning into Bromsgrove’s HS2. A vanity project with a huge overspend. Originally, the cost was expected to be £10,399,000. In March 2025 this had risen to £13,474,000. In August 2025 we are told it will now cost around £15,742,000. This is a £5,343,000 funded by the council taxpayers of Bromsgrove. What actions is the Cabinet Member responsible taking to control this 51% cost increase?”

The Cabinet Member for Strategic Partnerships, Economic Development and Enabling provided a detailed response for Members’ consideration.

In doing so, Members were reminded that Levelling Up Funding was allocated to areas to ‘level them up’ and the purpose of this funding was to create jobs and drive growth in areas to give people pride in the places where they lived.

Bromsgrove District Council had £17.694 million of funding committed to the Levelling Up Programme with the understanding that a further

£2.425 Million was to be made available via Birmingham City Council as Bromsgrove's allocation of funding from Greater Birmingham & Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership. The total funding in relation to the Levelling Up Programme was £20,118,612 once the anticipated LEP funding was confirmed. The LEP funding was approved by the Enterprise Zone Partnership Board in November 2025 and would be progressing to Birmingham City Council's Cabinet for consideration on 20th January 2026.

The cost for the Nailer's Yard project was estimated in 2021 to be £10,399,000 and was now £15,004,552. This was a 44.29 per cent increase due to inflationary cost increases, the cost of underground obstructions and additional necessary work associated with the culvert that ran through the site.

The additional £4,605,552 had been funded by additional grant funding secured by the Council, an underspend on the public realm project, the LEP funds and a small increase of £165,000 in terms of the Council's contribution plus a £335,000 contingency should that be required. The Council committed to contributing 10 per cent towards the Levelling Up Programme. It was confirmed that based on the latest figures the Council's contribution was confirmed to be just under 10 per cent.

The cost increase to the Bromsgrove council taxpayer was therefore £165,000 not £5,343,000 as suggested.

The Council had already delivered public realm projects in the High Street under budget; a clean site would be delivered at Windsor Street for housing development which was within budget and a new community hub and commercial building at Nailer's Yard would be open by summer 2026.

It should also be noted that the Nailer's Yard site would produce an ongoing revenue stream for the Council once completed through rental income that could offset the Council's contribution of up to £2.1m.

Over £1 million of additional funding linked to delivering the package of important regeneration schemes for the people of Bromsgrove had been achieved.

In terms of governance of Levelling Up projects, the programme was closely monitored by the Levelling Up Fund Board and quarterly Overview and Scrutiny Board meetings.

On a recent visit to the town centre, officials from Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), the main funding body for the programme, had been very impressed with delivery to date and the advanced progress made in comparison to other areas of the country.

A supplementary question was asked by Councillor C. Hotham. It was stated that the risks of inflationary costs of the Nailer's Yard project had been highlighted previously. Therefore, what action was being taken to control the costs of the project for the residents of Bromsgrove?

The Leader responded that the projects were monitored very closely by the MHCLG. In addition, the costs that were being suggested by Councillor Hotham had Value Added Tax (VAT) included. However, the Council could claim back VAT.

Question submitted by Councillor J. Clarke

“The national advocacy charity Disabled Motoring UK has highlighted the serious impact that misuse of disabled bays is having on disabled people who face additional daily challenges in accessing local amenities. What action is this Council taking to enforce Blue Badge parking and prevent the misuse of disabled bays?”

The Cabinet Member for Strategic Partnerships, Economic Development and Enabling provided a response and stated that the Council's Civil Enforcement Officers, when patrolling both the highways and car parks, always ensured that a valid Blue Badge was displayed correctly in the appropriate vehicle when parked in a disabled bay. If this was not the case, then a Penalty Charge Notice would always be issued.

A supplementary question was asked by Councillor J. Clarke in respect of how private car parks were able to monitor the use of disabled parking spaces as often Blue Badge Holders were not always able to find a disabled parking space. Members were informed that there were not many private car parks within the District where this private enforcement would be applicable.

Question submitted by Councillor S. Robinson

“As part of local efforts to tackle climate change, we welcome this Council's ongoing commitment to delivering a Bromsgrove Zero Carbon District Heat Network, working in partnership with other organisations in the community. In light of imminent local government reorganisation,

what are the next steps this Council needs to take to ensure this project is seen through to fruition?"

The Cabinet Member for Local Government Reorganisation and Climate Change responded to the questions and in doing so explained that the District Heat Network project remained a cornerstone of the Council's Climate Emergency commitments and would deliver significant environmental, economic, and social benefits for Bromsgrove.

It was explained that this was one of a number of key climate change activities for the Council, which included:

- the development across services and with Members the new five-year Climate Change Strategy, including an interactive Cabinet Advisory Group (CAG) meeting held on 23rd October 2025. The final report was due to be considered by Cabinet in February 2026.
- The set up for delivery of the Warm Homes Local Grant in Bromsgrove to support households in fuel poverty and help with the reduction in household carbon emissions.
- Awarding 'Act On Energy' the contract for the energy advice service available to Bromsgrove residents. Data on this was provided in our quarterly performance reports, with 382 households supported in the first six months of this year.
- Supporting communications activity around days like clean air day, national recycling week, World nature conservation day, cycle to work and active travel international repair day, plastic free July, and fuel poverty awareness day with Act on Energy.

The Council was adopting a concession route for delivering the District Heat Network. This meant that a private sector partner, selected through a competitive procurement process, would be responsible for the construction, ownership, and operation of the network. The Council would retain strategic oversight to ensure the project aligned with its objectives.

Officers were currently finalising procurement specifications and contractual documents. The Council was seeking a strong and experienced partner organisation to collaborate with and would be focused on experience, financial stability, and sustainability commitments.

The Council was awarded a total of £247,500, held in Reserves, through a government grant and funding from Bromsgrove School and

Worcestershire NHS Trust to complete the detailed project design phase and full business case. This work would explore alternative Phase One locations and prepare for procurement. In addition, Officers would continue to pursue external funding opportunities, including the Green Heat Network Fund.

The scheme was a complex multi-agency project and the Council wanted to ensure that a governance framework be established that secured continuity through any future structural changes. This included maintaining strategic oversight of the concession route, ensuring the project aligned with the Council's objectives and any new authority's priorities.

Councillor S. Robinson asked a supplementary question requesting an indication of any timelines for the progression of the project. Cabinet Member for Local Government Reorganisation and Climate Change responded that the project was expected to progress through procurement and design phases in 2026, with construction commencing at the completion of the design phase. The design phase and business case was to be completed before the shadow authority was in place as part of the Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) process.

Question submitted by Councillor D. Nicholl

“We note with concern the reduction in membership numbers at Bromsgrove Sport and Leisure Centre. What actions is this Council taking to support the ongoing success of this vital community facility and to protect much needed future income streams for the Council?”

The Cabinet Member for Strategic Partnerships, Economic Development and Enabling replied to the question and in doing so reported that there were currently 2414 fitness members registered to use Bromsgrove Sport and Leisure Centre. It was noted that membership levels had been higher and the Council and Everyone Active who managed the centre were discussing plans to make sure the offer provided at the centre was the best it could be. Members were informed that it was important to note that the centre had a very strong post Covid-19 pandemic recovery with an increase of 18 per cent in memberships in 2022 compared to a national trend of 6 per cent and in 2023 this was still double the national trend at four per cent. The decline in numbers since 2024 was from a very strong position. In Quarter Two the attrition rate of members at the centre was lower than the regional trend (Bromsgrove Sport and Leisure Centre 5.21 per cent and regionally 5.71 per cent) and the length of stay was also five months more than the regional average.

It was also noted that once members joined, they stayed, so there was a big push for new members.

The centre was also offering a more holistic offer through a new You+ membership to meet the wider needs of their existing and new members. There had been two new facilities open in the town since 2020, so there was certainly a positive trend in the number of residents engaging in gym-based health and wellbeing activities.

The Council was supporting the financial sustainability of the centre to safeguard the income to the Council through a number of schemes including the successful Sport England grant received this year to install Solar PV to the centre, this reduced the consumption in Quarter Two by over 17,000 kWh compared to 2024. This followed on from the financial support given to assist the centre following the Covid-19 pandemic and the energy crisis.

The Council and health partners were also supporting the centre to work with residents to engage them in activity with over 150 residents supported into regular activity through the Physical Activity Voucher Scheme. Also 345 young people attended the centre over the summer for the Holiday Activity and Food Programme.

Councillor D. Nicholl asked a supplementary question regarding the parking at BSLC and whether there had been any further progression of the potential for gym members to purchase an annual parking permit to park at the centre.

The Cabinet Member for Strategic Partnerships, Economic Development and Enabling responded that discussions were currently underway on parking matters.

Question submitted by Councillor J. Robinson

In October this Council passed a Motion to ensure all new and refurbished playgrounds are inclusive by design. What actions are being taken to make this vision a reality?

The Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing, Leisure and Culture responded to the question. In doing so, it was clarified that the wording of the resolution in respect of the Motion considered at the Council meeting on 8th October 2025 was as follows:

“This Council resolves to ask Cabinet if they can undertake to always consider from the outset, inclusivity as part of the planning and design process of new and refurbished playgrounds.”

In terms of investment for play provision within the District, it was noted that since the end of 2024 the Council had an up to date Play Audit and Implementation Plan. Amongst other things this documentation provided an audit of all eighty-five play areas in the District and set out a rationale for which of the forty play areas managed by the District Council should be improved or enhanced and in what order. The costs of all improvements and enhancements had been identified and funding of £2 million had been made available.

In terms of the standards of new play provision secured it was pointed out that the procurement process required that the play area provider to engage with residents and provide Accessible Play Space, i.e. a space which was barrier free, allowed users access to move around the space and offered participation opportunities for a range of differing abilities. It should be noted that not every child of every ability would be able to use everything within an accessible play space.

Since, the adoption of the Play Audit and Implementation Strategy there had been new play areas provided at Charford and Foxglove Way and a public engagement event had been held at Upland Grove.

In addition to using the Council's own finances for play improvements, use had also been made of Section 106 monies and UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) monies.

In addition to the work stream that had already been put in place, Leisure Officers were engaged in the preparation of a policy approach about equipped play areas and children with disabilities. Amongst other things, the intended policy document would set out an approach to having more Inclusive Play spaces so that there could be more opportunities for disabled children and non-disabled children to enjoy high levels of participation opportunities equally rich in play value across the District. This ensured that a structured, strategic approach to this important matter was in place and would include those play areas managed by Parish Councils and third-sector organisations.

It was anticipated that the Play Policy Statement would be ready for Members to consider at Cabinet in February 2026.

In terms of funding for more inclusive Play Spaces, some of the monies originally identified for the implementation for the play audit and investment plan on Bromsgrove District managed play areas over a ten-year period could be used.

Councillor J. Robinson asked a supplementary question in relation to the cost to produce the Inclusive Play Policy. The Cabinet Member for Finance responded that having only recently been appointed to Finance Portfolio he would provide a response to Members following the meeting.

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MOTIONS ON NOTICE

The Chairman advised Members that two Motions on Notice had been submitted for consideration at this meeting.

Council considered the following Motion on Notice that was submitted by Councillor S. Ammar:

Christmas Light Switch on

“Timely and effective planning is essential for the success of community events that support our local economy. Council expresses concern about the planning process for this year's Bromsgrove Christmas light switch on event, where insufficient notice meant some hospitality businesses missed out on vital opportunities to generate additional income.

Council calls on the Cabinet to ensure that officers set a definitive cut-off date of 30 April 2026 to announce the Christmas lights switch-on date for 2026. This timeline is critical for aligning with hospitality businesses' needs and ensuring they can prepare adequately for the Christmas season.

A proactive approach will enable all our restaurants, cafes, pubs, and shops to participate fully, thus creating a vibrant festive atmosphere while giving local businesses a much-needed boost.”

In presenting the Motion, Councillor Ammar thanked those who had taken part in the Christmas Light Switch on in Bromsgrove High Street, in particular the schools and Members who attended. It had been a successful event however there were some concerns in respect of the planning of the event which had given rise to the Motion presented to Council.

The Motion was proposed by Councillor S. Ammar and seconded by Councillor J. Robinson.

The Leader of the Council provided information on the timeline for the Christmas Light Switch on and explained that this event always took place on the penultimate Saturday in November and that the Rubery Christmas Light Switch on always took place on the last Saturday in November. Therefore, the date for the event in 2026 was 21st November.

The Leader took the opportunity to thank all those involved for making this year's event a great success, despite the rain during the day.

The details for the light switch on were later than usual this year because of the need to differently manage this very popular event so that there could be a countdown for the light switch on without residents congregating in one place.

Members were assured that dates for the event for 2026 would be shared with businesses in the new year via the business mailing list. The Bromsgrove Centres Manager and Communications team were currently planning a broader communications piece for the new Bromsgrove Town Centre Strategic Framework. This would include a request for businesses to provide updated information to ensure they were informed about high street activities.

The intention was to send this out before Christmas and the mailing list would be monitored and reviewed by Centres Manager.

In the run-up to Christmas events, the Events Team sent display material to those businesses operating near their locations of the light switch. Currently feedback was invited on the recent light switch on event through a recent press release which all Members received from the Communications Team and encouraged to respond to.

The clarification on the date was welcomed; however, it was raised that there had been concerns raised by businesses on the High Street and efforts made to try to better understand any issues. It was stated that this event had not been as well attended as in previous years and that there had been problems with hearing the countdown to the light switch on.

In summing up, it was noted that there had been issues in terms of communications for this event. However, the residents would be pleased to have clarification on the new date for this and future years events.

RESOLVED that the date for the timing of the annual Christmas Light Switch on events provided by the Leader be noted.

[As detailed at Minute Number 67/25 – Declarations of Interest - Councillor C. Hotham left the meeting prior to the consideration of this item and took no part in the vote thereon].

Council considered the following Motion on Notice that was submitted by Councillor J. Clarke:

Additional Licensing of Houses of Multiple Occupancy (HMOs)

"This Council calls on officers to explore the introduction of a local additional licensing scheme for HMOs in Bromsgrove, using powers under the Housing Act 2004. This would help ensure HMOs in Bromsgrove that are not subject to mandatory licensing are still well managed and meet all fundamental basic standards of accommodation."

In presenting the Motion, Councillor Clarke expressed that the current licensing system for HMOs occupation did not go far enough to protect residents or ensured that all HMOs met basic standards. At present only larger HMOs, with five or more occupants required a license. This resulted in a significant number of smaller properties outside the scope of regulation. Even though these properties could have just as much impact on the quality of life for people in the community,

It was felt that the scale of the issue was growing. Bromsgrove had 21 licensed HMOs and 33 unlicensed properties. It was suggested that the figure could be much higher than this.

The HMOs operated without any formal checks on safety, overcrowding or management standards. This was a growing problem particularly since June 2022 as the number of licensed HMOs in Bromsgrove had more than doubled in that period.

Councillor Clarke reported that he had received complaints regarding several matters in respect of HMOs including overcrowding, antisocial behaviour (ASB) and parking pressures.

The problems seemed to be more common as the number of HMOs increased in the District. The Housing Act 2004 gave Councils the power to introduce additional licensing schemes. It was noted that other Councils had introduced more powers around the country. These schemes had resulted in raising safety standards and improved overcrowding. There had also been improvements seen in terms of rogue landlords and housing quality. In addition, the schemes gave Councils the tools to deal with poor management before problems increased.

It was clarified that the schemes were not introduced to penalise landlords but created a level playing field and ensuring that every HMO, regardless of size, was well managed and met fundamental safety and quality standards.

The Motion was proposed by Councillor J. Clarke and seconded by Councillor R. Hunter.

The Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing, Leisure and Culture responded to the Motion and reiterated that the Housing Act 2004 gave powers for Local Authorities to introduce a local additional licensing scheme for Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMOs). The introduction of an additional licensing scheme was discretionary and only permitted when there was a legitimate and proportionate reason. This placed a responsibility on the Local Authority to make a clear, evidence-based reason for introducing additional licensing, and any conditions imposed must be reasonable and not excessive.

To meet this test, the Council would need to demonstrate that: -

- There was a real and valid reason for additional licensing (e.g. significant management failings, persistent ASB)
- The proposed conditions were necessary and not disproportionate.

To apply any such condition, the law required the Council to evidence that a significant proportion of HMOs were poorly managed and caused problems for tenants or the wider community e.g. large waste accumulation or repeated ASB complaints.

To progress discretionary licensing schemes a strong evidence base and business case was required. This required detailed work over a period of time and the likely employment of a consultancy firm to assist. The trigger for such work would link to the Council receiving complaints.

At present, no key evidence had been presented that non licensable HMO's were creating problems for the occupiers or causing ASB for neighbours, as the Council only received a limited number of concerns or complaints.

If this situation should change in the District, Officers could further explore the Scheme. In the meantime, should Members and/or residents have concerns regarding the management of an HMO they should report it to the Private Sector Housing Team. This team met with local Police officers on a regular basis and work was carried out across multi partner organisations.

Members queried whether the extra licensing would increase costs for the Council particularly in an area that the Council was not required to increase powers. It was noted that the Renter's Rights Act was due to be introduced in 2026. This Act would introduce a national database for landlords which would enable easier identification of private rental properties including HMOs and would support more proactive inspection of these properties. It would also enable the Council to ascertain whether additional licensing was necessary.

Members were concerned if landlords for HMOs were acting unreasonably and causing problems for tenants, however, was this applicable to HMOs within the District. If not, then the Council was not obliged to implement new powers particularly at a cost to the Council. It was reiterated that any new powers that were introduced would need to be based on evidence provided that there were issues that needed to be addressed more robustly.

The Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Board stated that when the Renters Rights Act 2026 report was due to be considered it would be pre-scrutinised by the Board prior to any consideration by Cabinet and / or Council.

It was raised that the wording in the Motion was to 'explore the introduction of a local additional licensing scheme for HMOs in Bromsgrove'. There was no suggestion that powers be implemented, but that evidence be explored only. As there had been concerns raised by residents it would seem proportional to explore these matters further in a non-prejudicial way. In terms of extra costs for the Council if these powers were introduced, there had been evidence across other Councils that this kind of additional licensing could be an addition revenue stream. There had been some significant issues with HMOs across the country,

and it seemed worthwhile to explore any areas of improvement further. Although there was a suggestion that this could be explored through a report by Officers, it was reiterated that looking at the Renters Rights Act at the Overview and Scrutiny Board when it had been passed was a more appropriate way to understand the new rights and the best way forward for the Council.

It was suggested that the number of complaints might not be as high as they could be due to residents being unsure of how to raise concerns with the local Council appropriately and that the evidence could be there just not being recorded through Council channels.

Some Members felt that this might be a premature Motion and that there needed to be several formal complaints made to the Council by exploring this any further to avoid any presumption that these powers needed to be introduced. Otherwise, this could result in searching for evidence that was not there and appearing to be acting in a punitive way as a Council. It was stated that the research could be carried out in a variety of ways in order to truly understand the nature of the complaint that had been raised with Members.

Therefore, an amendment to the Motion was proposed as follows:

“The Council calls on officers **and the Overview and Scrutiny Board** to explore the introduction of a local additional licensing scheme for HMOs in Bromsgrove, using powers under the Housing Act 2004. This would help ensure HMOs in Bromsgrove that are not subject to mandatory licensing are still well managed and meet all fundamental basic standards of accommodation.”

This amendment was accepted by Councillor Clarke and therefore the debate continued with this amendment as the substantive Motion.

Members continued to debate this matter and noted that the Private Sector Housing team had enforcement powers and enforcement could be taken where appropriate. There had been an example of successful enforcement in the recent weeks as a direct result of reporting through the appropriate channels as detailed earlier in the meeting.

A further amendment to the Motion was proposed as follows:

“The Council calls on officers and the Overview and Scrutiny Board to explore the **possibility** of the introduction of a local additional licensing scheme for HMOs in Bromsgrove, using powers under the Housing Act

2004. This would help ensure HMOs in Bromsgrove that are not subject to mandatory licensing are still well managed and meet all fundamental basic standards of accommodation.”

This amendment was accepted by Councillor Clarke as the proposer the original Motion.

In summing up, it was noted that this Motion would move forward the exploration of the current situation of HMOs in better understanding any issues in respect of this matter. Alongside the scrutiny of the Renters’ Rights Act at the Overview and Scrutiny Board the Council could have a clearer picture of unlicensed properties including HMOs within the District including numbers within the property and the state of the housing provided.

RESOLVED that

“The Council calls on officers and the Overview and Scrutiny Board to explore the ***possibility*** of the introduction of a local additional licensing scheme for HMOs in Bromsgrove, using powers under the Housing Act 2004. This would help ensure HMOs in Bromsgrove that are not subject to mandatory licensing are still well managed and meet all fundamental basic standards of accommodation.”

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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

It was noted that there was one item of Urgent Business for Members consideration at this meeting in respect of a review of the Political Balance.

The purpose of the item of business was to provide Members with an opportunity to consider the political balance figures following a change to the membership of political groups at the Council since the last full Council meeting.

It was confirmed that this item was being considered as Urgent Business with the agreement of the Chairman of the Council as there was a requirement for the Council to consider the political balance figures as

soon as was practicable after a change occurred to the membership of political groups.

In this instance, a change to the Council's political balance occurred after the main agenda for this meeting had been published and therefore the item could only be brought forward as Urgent Business.

It was noted that discussions had been held with group leaders about the figures and that the final figures had been tabled for Members' consideration this evening. These proposed changes were for the remainder of the 2025-26 municipal year

Members were invited to consider two proposals on page three of the supplementary pay papers pack. These were for the remainder of the 2025 - 2026 municipal year until the next annual meeting of the Council or until the next review of political representation under Section 15 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 whichever was earlier.

The recommendations were proposed by Councillor K. May and seconded by Councillor P. Whittaker.

RESOLVED that

- 1) for the remainder of the 2025/26 Municipal Year, the Committees set out in the table in the appendix to the minutes be appointed and that the representation of the different political groups on the Council on those Committees be as set out in that table until the next Annual Meeting of the Council, or until the next review of political representation under Section 15 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989, whichever is the earlier.
- 2) Members be appointed to the Committees and as substitute members in accordance with nominations to be made by Group Leaders.

The meeting closed at 8.35 p.m.

Chairman