

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MEETING OF THE CABINET

WEDNESDAY 18TH FEBRUARY 2026, AT 6.00 P.M.

PRESENT: Councillors K.J. May (Leader), S. J. Baxter (Deputy Leader), S. T. Nock, K. Taylor, S. A. Webb and P. J. Whittaker

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

Officers: Mr J. Leach, Mr. G. Revans, Ms. J. Lorraine, Mrs. R. Green, Mr. C. Poole and Mrs J. Gresham

Prior to the commencement of the meeting, it was noted that the running order of the agenda would be changed. The running order for the substantive items was agreed as follows:

- Agenda Number 10 - Medium Term Financial Plan 2026-27 including Treasury Management Strategy, Capital Strategy and Investment Strategy
- Agenda Number 5 - Particulate Monitoring – Update Report
- Agenda Number 6 - Inclusive Play Policy
- Agenda Number 7 - Bromsgrove Council Plan update

73/25

TO RECEIVE APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence received for this meeting.

74/25

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

75/25

TO CONFIRM THE ACCURACY OF THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE CABINET HELD ON 7TH JANUARY 2026

Prior to consideration of the minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 7th January 2026, the Leader announced that following the meeting it was confirmed that the number of Cabinet Members on the Shareholders Committee was four. Therefore, of the two nominations made at the previous meeting only one appointment was required. It was confirmed that Councillor S. Webb be appointed to the Shareholders Committee for the remainder of the municipal year.

RESOLVED that subject to the amendment, as detailed in the preamble above, that the minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 7th January 2026 be approved.

76/25

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD HELD ON 6TH JANUARY 2026

Members considered the contents of the minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting held on 6th January 2026.

It was confirmed that there were no outstanding recommendations contained within the minutes.

However, as a result of discussions held at this meeting regarding the Local Heritage report, Members were keen to understand who made the decision as to what assets appeared on the Local Heritage List. It was noted that there had been engagement with local communities including Parish Councils on this matter where assets to be included were discussed. Cabinet was informed that recruitment was underway for a full time Conservation Officer who would provide support for an increasingly development management workload.

Although there had been no recommendations made by the Board at the Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting held on 10th February 2026, Members were keen that a regular update be provided to the Board from the Member representative on the West Mercia Police and Crime Panel. It was suggested, however that it would be more appropriate for Chief Inspector Dave King, to provide an in-depth update on these matters. It was confirmed that this would be investigated further and future arrangements made accordingly.

The Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Board explained that just prior to this Cabinet meeting, there had been two meetings of the Finance and Budget Working Group, with Board Members in attendance at one of the meetings. Both meetings had pre-scrutinised the Medium-Term Financial Plan Stage Two Budget Report 2026/2027 to 2028/2029 (including Capital Strategy, Investment Strategy and Treasury Management Strategy) report which was due to be considered at this Cabinet meeting.

It was reported that there were no recommendations made as a result of this pre-scrutiny. Members were largely in agreement with the proposals contained within the Medium-Term Financial Plan Stage Two Budget

Report 2026/2027 to 2028/2029 (including Capital Strategy, Investment Strategy and Treasury Management Strategy) report. This included the proposed increase in Council Tax of 2.99 per cent for the 2026/2027 financial year. It was requested, that should Members have any technical queries in respect of the report prior to the Council meeting, that these be sent in writing to the Interim Director of Finance and Section 151 Officer and Cabinet Member for Finance in order to provide as much detail as possible for questions at the Council meeting due to take place on 25th February 2026.

RESOLVED that subject to the preamble above, the minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting held on 6th January 2026 be noted.

77/25

MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN STAGE 2 BUDGET REPORT 2026/2027 TO 2028/2029 (INCLUDING CAPITAL STRATEGY, INVESTMENT STRATEGY AND TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY) - REPORT TO FOLLOW

The Interim Director of Finance and Section 151 Officer presented the Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) Stage 2 Budget Report 2026/2027 to 2028/2029 (including Capital Strategy, Investment Strategy and Treasury Management Strategy) for the consideration of Cabinet.

In doing so, the following was noted:

- The report provided transparency on the Council's Budget Setting process. A significant amount of work had been carried out by the Finance team in order to provide the report. All Members had been engaged in this process which had been welcomed. Assistant Directors and budget holders had also been consulted with during this process and had provided detailed information, in order to ensure that information was accurate and clear. It was reported to Cabinet that the Council's Budget was balanced with no reliance on Reserves to fund recurring costs.
- It was proposed that there be an increase in Council Tax of 2.99 per cent for the 2026/2027 financial year.
- Following a comprehensive review process, there were new allocations proposed in respect of the Earmarked reserves. These new allocations were detailed as follows:
 - 1) A new Financial Resilience Reserve of £2.5million – this was to provide stability for the future and in order to mitigate any future risks to the Council.

- 2) A Local Government Reorganisation Reserve of £1million – this allocation was to provide any areas of funding required as a result of the LGR process currently underway (at this current early stage).
 - 3) A Community Investment Fund of £1.250million - This would provide funding for any emerging needs for local communities and for which Members wished to provide funding. Members were keen to note that any funding distributed from this earmarked reserve needed to be in line with the Council's Strategic Priorities and subject to strict criteria and allocated accordingly. The governance of this funding would be robust in order to provide the best outcomes for local communities. It was noted that all Members should be made aware that this must be the approach taken in respect of this funding. It was noted that if this reserve allocation was approved by Members at the full Council meeting on 25th February 2026, a formal report would be provided to ensure Members were aware of the strategic nature of this funding and the clear criteria under which it would be allocated. Officers stated that similar funding had been made at other Councils and Officers agreed to provide Members with further information following the meeting. Lessons could also be learnt from the successful allocations and projects funded by the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) previously. This, it was noted, had been a successful initiative for the Council.
- The Council was in a sound position in terms of Reserves with General Fund Balances of £13.38million and Earmarked Reserves of £11.27million.
 - There was a small clarification to the Pay Policy and Members confirmed their commitment to the real living wage for the coming budget year.

A typographical error was highlighted within the report at paragraph 3.46. This would be amended prior to the publication of the report for the Council meeting to be held on 25th February 2026. In addition to this, any comments or amendments as a result of discussions at this Cabinet meeting would be included in the updated report.

It was reported that this had been a complex Budget setting process for the Council in terms of Council Tax setting. Worcestershire County Council had proposed to set their Council Tax later than anticipated which had resulted in more uncertainty than in previous years. However,

it was noted that the Finance team had worked hard to ensure that all areas that were known at the time had been included in the proposals. The Democratic Services Team were thanked for their significant support and flexibility during this process which had been greatly appreciated by both Officers and Members.

Following the presentation of the report, Members discussed the following in detail:

- The collection of Council Tax and any potential difficulties as a result of the proposed increase – It was reported that this would be mitigated by provision of signposting to residents who found themselves in financial difficulties. Work would be undertaken by the Council's Collections Team to look at additional areas of support that the Council could provide in the future and proposals provided to Members in due course. This might include advice on managing debt and access to alternative benefits. Members were encouraged by this approach. It was queried whether any advice could be included when the Council Tax bills were sent to residents such as information and contact details for the Citizens' Advice Bureau (CAB). It was stated that this kind of information would perhaps be more useful further along in the financial year as usually residents started off the Council Tax billing cycle being able to pay, however difficulties might arise three or four payments into the payment cycle. Therefore, the work undertaken by the Collections Team, as detailed above, would provide necessary support.
- Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) – It was noted that this was a complex area of Local Government finance.
- Capital Programme – Members queried specific projects which had been included in the Capital Programme. It was noted that the Sweetpool Lane project was included as the Council was responsible for this land. It was hoped that the allocated funding would result in works being carried out to alleviate flooding risks in the area and prepare it for potential adoption of the road in the future. Members also requested clarification on the status of Sherwood Road. Officers undertook to provide further information on this matter following the meeting.
- Planning Appeal Costs – this was taken into account in preparing the budgets for the Planning service area.
- Tech1 System – Members were concerned about the system and the issues surrounding the cash receipting module which had been reported previously and had resulted in manual interventions by the Finance team. The Finance team had worked

hard within the system to ensure the information was correct although it was accepted that there had been limitations whereby Officers had to create work arounds for. It was noted that the Finance service area had experienced a turbulent time recently and it was important to ensure that the service was resilient and reliable going forward. Recruitment was currently underway for a Director of Finance who would provide stability with a view to looking at the structure of the whole team in the future.

- External Auditors – Members requested that the external auditors, Ernst & Young meet with the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee and the Leader of Bromsgrove District Council.
- Value Added Tax (VAT) – Members queried the status of the Council's VAT claim to His Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC). Cabinet was informed that the VAT claim was currently being looked at in liaison with HMRC and other Council finance advisors. It was suggested that a report be provided to the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee on this matter in the future.

In conclusion, Members felt that this was an upbeat Budget for the Council and despite the risks and uncertainties in terms of WCC Council Tax setting Bromsgrove District Council had a lot to be proud of in terms of how finances were managed.

The Cabinet Member for Finance took the opportunity to thank the Interim Director of Finance and Section 151 Officer and the Assistant Director of Finance and Customer Services for their hard work during this period. They had provided significant support during the Budget setting process and had gone above and beyond in providing answers to queries from Members.

In proposing the recommendations, it was noted that along with the recommendations contained in the report, two further recommendations had been tabled at the meeting in respect of the proposed level of Council Tax for 2026/2027 and the Fees and Charges for Commercial Waste.

RESOLVED that

- 1) **The updated position and assumptions be noted in respect of the 2026/27 annual budget and for the Medium-Term Financial Plan up to 2028/29.**

- 2) Cabinet has considered and noted the comments and implications set out in the Section 151 Officer's Robustness (Section 25) Statement of the 2026/27 to 2028/29 Medium Term Financial Plan in its commitment to maintaining the delivery of good quality services and investment to meet local needs within a sustainable financial position.

RECOMMENDED that

- 3) The Growth proposals of £67,639 in 2026/27, £64,719 in 2027/28 and £64,719 in 2028/29 approved.
- 4) The Directorate Pressures of £565,655 in 2026/27, £545,295 and £741,514 in 2027/28 and 2028/2029, be approved.
- 5) The Savings proposals of £621,899 in 2026/27, £665,991 in 2027/2028 and £690,206 be approved.
- 6) The Capital Programme 2026/2027 to 2029/2030, including bids of £4.738m for new capital projects, be approved.
- 7) Earmarked Reserves of £12.245m be carried forward into 2026/2027, be approved.
- 8) The new allocations within the carried forward earmarked reserves as set out in paragraph 3.30, namely the creation of a new Financial Resilience Reserve of £2.5million, a Local Government Reorganisation Reserve of £1m, a Community Investment Fund of £1.250m and a reserve for Particulate Monitoring of £102k be approved.
- 9) Increases relating to Worcestershire Regulatory Services of £25k for the Food Standards Agency on an ongoing basis be approved.
- 10) The Flexible Use of Capital Receipts Strategy be approved.
- 11) the proposed Council Tax increase of 2.99% for the 2026/2027 be approved.

12) The updated fees and charges for Commercial Waste Services be approved for adoption in the 2026/2027 financial year.

78/25

PARTICULATE MONITORING

The Acting Principal Officer (Technical Pollution) presented the Particulate Monitoring (PM) report.

Members were reminded that a report on this matter had previously been considered by Cabinet at its meeting on 7th January 2026. The report proposed options for additional PM Monitoring within Bromsgrove District Council (BDC) area. Five options were presented and Members agreed to Option E within the paper, which had proposed maintaining current sensors and extended monitoring life for a further period of time, and a source apportionment study with University of Birmingham – mobile supersite. This would provide a unique insight into PM profile in Worcestershire utilising state of the art air quality monitoring equipment and supported by academic expertise alongside the University of Birmingham. A further report had been requested in order to ascertain more detailed funding information to be included in the Medium-Term Financial Plan 2026/2027 including Treasury Management Strategy, Capital Strategy and Investment Strategy report considered earlier during the course of the meeting.

Members were informed that these costings had been investigated and a one-off amount of £145,234.04 was needed to support Option E. However, following a request from Worcestershire Regulatory Services (WRS) on behalf of the Council, the Director of Public Health committed to contributing £40,000 towards this project should approval by the Council be given. Thus, the recommendation was for £105,234.04 which equated to the cost of the project minus the contribution from the Director of Public Health.

Members welcomed this proposal and the funding provided by Public Health. The Overview and Scrutiny Board was thanked for their detailed scrutiny of this report when considered at the Board meeting held on 6th January 2026.

In discussing the funding allocation within the Budget, it was noted that £145,234.04 had been originally allocated within the Budget. However, this would be adjusted to reflect the updated amount of £105,234.04.

Members queried where the sensors were located and it was reported that they were situated in Rubery, Hagley and within the Air Quality Management area (AQMA) on the Worcester Road.

RECOMMENDED that

- 1) Additional funding of £105,234.04 be added to the revenue budget for 2026/2027**

RESOLVED to NOTE that

- 2) subject to agreement of recommendation 1 as detailed above, that the recommendations arising from the Particulate Matter report considered by Cabinet on 7th January 2026 to be presented for Council's consideration alongside this recommendation at the meeting to be held in February 2026.**

79/25

INCLUSIVE PLAY POLICY

The Executive Director presented the Inclusive Play Policy report for Cabinet's consideration.

In doing so, the following was highlighted for Members consideration:

- The Inclusive Play Policy had been developed to deliver better outcomes for accessible and inclusive outdoor equipped play areas across Bromsgrove District. It included specific recommendations for Strategic Parks and a design checklist to improve other play spaces.
- Definitions of 'Accessible' and 'Inclusive Play' were included in the Policy. It was explained that inclusive play went beyond accessible play to support more equitable provision allowing disabled and non-disabled children to enjoy high play value.
- Good practice guidance from the Fields in Trust, Sensory Trust, Scope UK and Play England had been reviewed. However, there was a lack of national standards for inclusive play provision (for outdoor equipped play).
- Plan Inclusive Play Areas (PiPA) was the UK's only independent accreditation system for evaluating accessible and inclusive play area design. It was reported that this was an exceptionally high standard to achieve with only one site in the West Midlands, at Cannock Chase being a recipient of PiPA accreditation. It was proposed that an audit / assessment of Sanders Park play

provision be carried out against the PiPA standard and then implement improvements within twelve months. Achieving the PiPA standard for Sanders Park would clearly demonstrate the Council's commitment to inclusive play, providing a centrally located destination play space with good car parking and accessible toilet provision, which was important for many disabled visitors (both children and carers). The learning from Sanders Park would then be applied to other strategic parks in Bromsgrove e.g. St Chad's Recreation Ground, King George V Playing Field and Lickey End Recreation Ground. However, only St Chad's Recreation Ground had accessible toilet provision. It was further noted that future development at Perryfields may create opportunities for inclusive play and supporting facilities at King George V Playing Field.

- Other BDC play spaces in receipt of investment through the Play Investment Strategy, as approved by Cabinet in December 2024 would be assessed to consider how the investment could be used to improve the accessibility and inclusiveness of the play offer. A Design Checklist had been developed to assist officers and play companies to audit existing provision and consider opportunities. This had a numerical scoring system (with the scoring system based on similar criteria to PiPA) to allow change to be recorded and monitored.
- The proposed approaches in the policy were considered to be a good balance between the ambition to deliver more inclusive play and the challenges of investing in and improving existing play provision. Consideration needed to also be given to high levels of use, anti-social behaviour, vandalism and limited maintenance budgets for outdoor equipped play provided in public open space.
- The proposed approach had been reviewed by Members at Cabinet Working Group in December 2025 and at a Cabinet Advisory Group meeting in January 2026. The Policy had been revised based on comments from Members.
- The costs of the project to support the aspirations set out in the policy was £500,000. An amendment to the recommendation in respect of the Capital Programme 2026/2027 to 2029/2030 contained within the Medium-Term Financial Plan 2026/2027 including Treasury Management Strategy, Capital Strategy and Investment Strategy to reflect this cost would be made prior to its consideration at the Council meeting on 25th February 2026.

RESOLVED that

- 1) the Inclusive Play Policy Statement be adopted**

- 2) the detailed audit of play provision at Sanders Park (against the Plan Inclusive Play Areas [PiPA] accreditation criteria/checklist) be approved**
- 3) the proposals for Sanders Park be implemented within a 12-month period, strategic and local sites within the next 24 months.**
- 4) subject to completion of resolution 3 above, authority be delegated to the Assistant Director of Planning, Leisure and Culture Services to apply for accreditation for Sanders Park play area against the PiPA standard;**
- 5) authority be delegated to the Assistant Director of Planning, Leisure and Culture Services to develop plans to make the play space in Sanders Park a District wide exemplar for accessible and inclusive play;**
- 6) authority be delegated to the Assistant Director of Planning, Leisure and Culture to commission an assessment of the other strategic parks and other play areas against the PiPA standard/checklist and to establish the viability of gaining accreditation;**
- 7) the Design Checklist be approved as a tool for improving the accessibility and inclusivity of all other play spaces; and**
- 8) To NOTE that a budget bid of £500,000 in the capital programme had been submitted to pay for inclusive play improvements and for additional officer support.**

80/25

COUNCIL PLAN UPDATE REPORT

The Policy Manager presented the Council Plan Update report. Members were informed that the report highlighted the work and projects currently being undertaken in line with the Council's Priorities as detailed in the Council Plan. Several areas were highlighted including:

- Vision including - Community Safety
- Organisational Priorities including Financial Stability
- Economic Development including the UK Shared Prosperity Funding (UKSPF)
- The impact of Local Government Reorganisation (LGR)

- Innovation & Technology
- Key development projects

Contained within the report was a Red, Amber and Green table for each Council Priority and reflected the RAG status for all the key areas within the Priority. All projects were at either Green or Amber status. One of the projects had a Red status.

Members thanked the Policy Manager for the report. It was requested that further data be provided to Cabinet Members prior to the Council meeting to answer any specific questions that might arise during consideration of this report at the Council meeting.

A further request was made that the RAG document be provided to Members in colour on this occasion for consideration at the Council meeting. This would be arranged and circulated with any supplementary papers.

RECOMMENDED that

- 1) **The Council Plan report and update table be noted.**

81/25

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 on this occasion.

The meeting closed at 8.16 p.m.

Chairman