



Overview and Scrutiny **ANNUAL REPORT**

2025 - 2026



Bromsgrove
District Council
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FOREWORD FROM THE CHAIRMAN

This year has been as challenging as the previous year, including the number of task groups and workload in general. Once again, additional meetings were held to cope with the increase in work and of course calling upon Members to give up more of their free time. Ensuring scrutiny is carried out in an efficient and robust manner has led to the overwhelming recommendations from meetings and task groups being accepted by the Cabinet, which made it all worthwhile.

There is no doubt the following year will be just as challenging with Local Government Re-organisation (LGR) on the horizon, requiring the number of meetings to increase.

I would like to thank all Members of the Board who have committed their time and energy to the tasks we were confronted with and of course to all those who took part in task groups. I also realise the amount of work this has been placed on our Officers and I am thankful for their help and support.

Councillor Peter McDonald
Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Board

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INTRODUCTION

We are pleased to present the Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report which outlines our work during 2025-2026 (this covers the municipal year from May 2025 to April 2026) and provides general information on the overview and scrutiny processes at Bromsgrove District Council (BDC).

Overview and Scrutiny is a key part of the democratic decision-making process in local Councils, where elected Councillors outside of the Cabinet can contribute to shaping Council policy, community well-being and accountability. This is done by reviewing Council services and policies, community issues and key decisions and making recommendations for improvement.

The four key principles of Overview and Scrutiny, as defined by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) the lead organisation supporting Overview and Scrutiny in the country, are:

- provide constructive “critical friend” challenge
- amplify the voice and concerns of the public
- be led by independent people who take responsibility for their role
- drive improvement in public services

The Members of the Board consider these principles when selecting topics to investigate whether it is holding the Cabinet to account, reviewing policies, policy development or scrutiny of external bodies.

MEMBERSHIP

(The Board is made up of 11 Members)



**Councillor P. M. McDonald
(Chairman)**



**Councillor A.M. Dale
(Vice-Chairman)**



Councillor S. Ammar



Councillor A. Bailes



Councillor R.A. Bailes



Councillor J. Clarke



Councillor B. Kumar



Councillor R.E. Lambert



Councillor S. A. Robinson



Councillor J. D. Stanley



Councillor H.D.N. Warren-Clarke

THE ROLE OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

Overview and Scrutiny is a key part of the Council's political structure and it plays a vital role in improving the services that people of the District use. It does not just look at the way the Council carries out its services, it can look at anything which affects the lives of people within the District and it allows citizens to have a greater say in Council matters.

Overview and Scrutiny allows Councillors to review and scrutinise decisions, look at existing practices and make recommendations to help ensure the residents of Bromsgrove District receive excellent services. The aim is to ensure overview and scrutiny adds value to the Council's decision-making process and makes a positive contribution towards policy development.

The detailed terms of reference and procedure rules for the Overview and Scrutiny Board can be found at Part 5 and Part 12 of the Council's Constitution. The Council's Constitution can be accessed by using the following link.

[Link to the Constitution of Bromsgrove District Council](#)

(Please click on the latest date to access the most recent version of the Council's constitution).

Meetings

Throughout 2025-26, Overview and Scrutiny Board meetings have been taking place in person and were open to the public to attend at Parkside Hall in Bromsgrove. Meetings are live streamed if there is significant local interest in the items being considered at Overview and Scrutiny Board meetings. Meetings of Scrutiny Task Groups and Working Groups continue to be held remotely, since these meetings are private.

REPORTS CONSIDERED BY THE BOARD

The Board continued to receive updates to monitor the progress of recommendations it had made, with the recommendations made throughout the year outlined in this report. This contains both recommendations put forward by Task Groups and accepted by the Cabinet, together with recommendations put forward by the Board itself. In respect of Task Groups, the Board does, where necessary, receive an update report 12 months following acceptance of its recommendations.

During the year the Board had made several recommendations. There has been continued support from the relevant Cabinet Members this year, with regular attendance at Overview and Scrutiny meetings in relation to reports concerning Cabinet Members' areas of responsibility. This has given the Cabinet an opportunity to hear first-hand the debate and any recommendations made by the Board. The Chairman of the Board attends Cabinet meetings to present any recommendations made. On several occasions, whilst the Board had not made any recommendations in respect of an item, it had endorsed and/or supported recommendations which were then considered by Cabinet at its meetings.

The Board is due to consider the Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2025-26 at the meeting due to be held on 14th April 2026.

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SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

During the course of the 2025/26 municipal year the following recommendations were suggested to Cabinet:

Bromsgrove Town Centre Recycling Bins

RECOMMENDED that the Officers proceed with preparing a budget bid to Cabinet to invest in new (recycling) bins for installation in Bromsgrove Town Centre.

Planning Enforcement

RECOMMENDED that Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) be introduced to measure Worcestershire Regulatory Services' (WRS) Planning Enforcement performance in Bromsgrove and that the KPIs be incorporated into monthly reporting to Members together with enhanced information on live enforcement cases data.

Overview and Scrutiny Board Work Programme

RECOMMENDED that the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Board submit a request on behalf of the Board that Cabinet consider, as an item of urgent business, whether to extend the current public consultation period for the Local Plan.

Housing Task Group

Recommendation 1 – Housing Allocations

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

Recommendation 2 – Housing Allocations

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

Recommendation 3 – Asset Rich and Potentially Revenue Poor

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

Recommendation 4 – Asset Rich and Potentially Revenue Poor

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

Recommendation 5 – Section (S) 106 Contributions

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

Recommendation 6 - Fleeceholding

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

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

Finance & Budget Working Group

RECOMMENDED that future Quarterly Financial Outturn and Performance reports provide:

- i a detailed narrative in terms of variance for each specific service area
- ii for each area of high variance provide detail on the action(s) being taken to address the issue and the officer(s) responsible
- iii information on recharge amounts

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THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD'S WORK PROGRAMME

The following items were considered by the Board during the 2025/26 municipal year:

Overviews

- Local Government Re-Organisation All Member Engagement Session
- Installation of EV Chargers
- Local Plan Consultation Methods
- Bromsgrove Town Centre Re-cycling Bins
- Council Tax Recovery
- Planning Enforcement
- Windsor Street (Options Paper)
- Citizens Advice (Uses of Grant Funding)
- Strategic Overview of Bromsgrove District Housing Trust (BDHT) Services
- Police and Crime Commissioner update
- Planning Advisory Service (PAS)
- Town Centre Parking and ANPR update
- EV Charger Profit Sharing Arrangements update

Pre-Scrutiny

- Contaminated Land Strategy
- Bromsgrove District Plan Consultation
- Bromsgrove Town Centre Strategic Framework
- Expansion of Commercial Waste Collection Services
- Homelessness Prevention Grant and Domestic Abuse Grant
- Windsor Street Site
- Biodiversity Duty Report
- Homelessness Prevention, Rough Sleeper and Domestic Abuse Grants Funding 2027/28 and 2028/29
- Particulate Monitoring

Standard Updates

- Local Government Re-Organisation (LGR) (Regular)
- Local Heritage Action List (Quarterly)
- Levelling-Up Fund Programme (Quarterly)
- Crime and Disorder Scrutiny (Annually)
- Heatwaves Preparedness (Annually)
- Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2025/26

All Member Briefings

- Anti-Social Behaviour (Tools and Powers)

Task Group

In addition to the above, updates were provided throughout the year for the Housing Task Group. The final report which included recommendations was considered by the Board on 18th November 2025.

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OVERVIEWS

Local Government Reorganisation All Member Engagement Session Supported by Mutual Ventures

A stakeholder engagement process was being carried out to inform the appraisal process which included a public and local stakeholder engagement session. This stakeholder engagement session sought that all Members of BDC be invited to ensure that Members had an opportunity to provide their views to Mutual Ventures, who were supporting an appraisal of the options under consideration in Worcestershire for LGR.

The options appraisal process was to assess the performance of two options for a unitary structure in Worcestershire which consisted of a unitary council for the whole county of Worcestershire or two unitary councils in Worcestershire which would consist of a north and south divide.

Key lines of enquiry were discussed as part of the stakeholder engagement process to establish the performance of these options in comparison to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government's (MHCLG) criteria for LGR.

Installation of EV Chargers

The purpose of this report was to outline the Implementation of Electric Vehicle (EV) charging infrastructure across BDC's owned car parks and land. Key objectives of the project were to increase the availability of EV charging points in public spaces, whilst supporting the Council's Carbon Reduction Strategy.

Bromsgrove Town Centre Recycling Bins

This item reported on recycling and waste collection arrangements in the Bromsgrove Town Centre. The report had been drafted to address a request from the Board raised in February 2025 for a review of the implications of no longer recycling waste on Bromsgrove High Street.

The Place Teams audit of the town centre recycling bins had shown poor levels of adherence to the use of each bin, with the contents of recycling bins showing that only one fifth of the entire waste collected was recyclable when sorting by hand was undertaken. The Council was not recycling any waste from Bromsgrove High Street bins because of the cross-contamination of waste.

It was agreed by the Board that a recommendation be put forward to Cabinet asking that Officers proceed with preparing a budget bid, with the view of investing in new (recycling) bins for installation in Bromsgrove Town Centre. The Board proposed the following recommendation:

RECOMMENDED that the Officers proceed with preparing a budget bid to Cabinet to invest in new (recycling) bins for installation in Bromsgrove Town Centre.

Council Tax Recovery

During consideration of this report, Council Tax debt recovery procedures was provided. This followed a request by the Board for a report to explain the legislative framework governing council tax recovery, outline the procedures applied by the Council for council tax recovery and the use of enforcement agents and which identified the actions the Council could take to improve the recovery process and the barriers to improvement.

It was noted that the Money and Mental Health Policy Institute (MMHPI) report entitled "In the Public Interest?" argued that legislation governing council tax collection required reform and identified four areas of improvement. The areas included communication with individuals in

debt, speed at which council debt escalated the over-reliance on automated procedures, lack of flexibility in dealing with debt cases and the enforcement action used. The report clarified and responded to these areas of concern, detailing how the Council managed its debt recovery process.

Planning Enforcement

For this reporting Members were reminded that the delivery of the planning enforcement was largely transferred to Worcestershire Regulatory Services (WRS) on 1st June 2024, with investigation of cases the responsibility of WRS and input provided from planning officers where their professional expertise was required. It was highlighted that prior to the formal takeover of the planning enforcement function by WRS, there had been assistance provided to the Council's planning officers with the investigation officer role since the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic.

There were 302 cases of alleged planning breaches in 2024/25 which required WRS to undertake investigations. Of these, 5 cases were assigned as priority 1 cases as they satisfied the criteria for this set out in the Enforcement Policy. Of the valid cases, 173 out of 175 were closed and resolved by informal compliance or no issue in 2024/25. There were 304 open planning enforcement cases as of September 2025.

It was stated that the backlog in open cases had fallen slightly from 320 to 304 over the most recent period. Progress in clearing the backlog was slowed by the need to establish and embed the team within Bromsgrove since 1st June 2024 and the complexity of some cases where evidence of harm (in planning terms) had been identified. The short-term additional resource available to WRS to work on clearing the backlog would end in June 2026.

In relation to the number of valid cases with Community Protection Warnings (CPWs) or Community Protection Notices (CPNs) served, it was stated that since April 2025, four additional CPWs and two additional CPNs were served.

Officers highlighted that planning policy allowed retrospective applications to be considered (i.e. applications after an action had been taken) which necessitated the maintenance of an informal approach to negotiate compliance with planning rules.

The benefits of the current approach to Planning Enforcement were set out including that this allowed Planning Officers to focus on planning matters whilst the investigation and enforcement cases were dealt with by WRS.

Following consideration of this item, Members agreed that it should be recommended that there be more information regarding Planning Enforcement cases including monitoring of the WRS performance through Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). After consideration the following recommendation was agreed:

RECOMMENDED that Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) be introduced to measure Worcestershire Regulatory Services' (WRS) Planning Enforcement performance in Bromsgrove and that the KPIs be incorporated into monthly reporting to Members together with enhanced information on live enforcement cases data.

Windsor Street (Options Paper)

The purpose of this report was to inform the Board on the options for the delivery of housing on the Windsor Street site in Bromsgrove. It was noted that the Windsor Street site had stood derelict since 2014 and that the Council had been successful in obtaining £3,490,000 for the redevelopment of the site from various sources. No BDC funding had been used in the project to date.

It was noted that residential use was considered as most appropriate for the site and only development opportunities for housing had been considered in the report. The three potential delivery options were:

- Option A: Obtain outline planning permission and dispose of the site on the open market.
- Option B: Develop through Spadesbourne Homes Limited and retain market value properties (dispose of affordable units).
- Option C: Enter into partnership with a private developer or a registered social landlord (RSL).

Citizens Advice (Uses of Grant Funding)

During the meeting Members were updated on the uses of grant funding for the Citizens Advice Bromsgrove and Redditch (CABR) charity within the Bromsgrove District.

The following key points were presented to the Board:

- The four key support areas provided by CABR were Core Services, Household Support Fund Distribution, Affordability Assessments and Outreach Development Projects.
- The Funding contribution from BDC was £123,400 with Worcestershire County Council (WCC) adding £23,606 per year.
- BDC was the highest funding contributor in Worcestershire.
- The national average for funding the CABR was £1.34 per head in 2023/2024.
- CABR provided advice which was regulated by the Advice Quality Standard (AQS), Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) and Money and Pensions Service (MaPS).
- The charity was supported by 50–60 volunteers. The call answer rate had improved from 24% in 2020 to 38% in 2025.
- In total, 4,710 households within the District received full advice and 773 households received light-touch advice.
- £388,601 income had been gained and £676,674 worth of debts had been managed for local residents.
- The Household Support Fund (HSF) costed £7,000 per annum to deliver with £50,000 of funds distributed.
- £2,745 had been provided a year to carry out affordability assessments for Bromsgrove District Housing Trust (BDHT) clients.
- £62,000 had been provided by the Council for an Outreach project over 18 month with regular sessions held in the areas of Charford, Catshill, Rubery, Wythall, Alvechurch, Sidemoor and Clent.
- There were future challenges to consider such as increased demands, funding sustainability and the LGR implications.
- There were potential outsourcing opportunities for the follow-on funding from the HSF Scheme, including discretionary housing payments and tenancy support.

Strategic Overview of Bromsgrove District Housing Trust (BDHT) Services

During this item Members were given a strategic overview of the BDHT Services within the Bromsgrove District which included the following key points:

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

- Complaints were increasing, partly due to external claim companies and rising customer expectations.

Police and Crime Commissioner (Update)

Following a request from a Board meeting held on 18th November 2026 the representative for the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC), accompanied remotely by a local inspector provided a strategic update to the Board with the key points discussed as follows:

- Policing remained predominantly people based, however, pay pressures continued to exceed central grant increases.
- West Mercia Police had grown in officer numbers significantly but rising pay scales created budget strains.
- Civilian workforce reductions had been actioned but frontline focus was being protected.
- Overall crime continued to fall across the District but outcomes of successful investigations remained a key area for improvement.
- Focus centred on prompt investigations, file quality and improving justice outcomes for victims.
- The PCC emphasised the importance of cooperation with District Councils on community safety and early prevention.
- A renewed emphasis was placed on Councils to raise localised concerns directly.

Planning Advisory Service (PAS)

Following discussions at its Board meeting held on 6th January 2026, Members requested the Planning Advisory Service (PAS) findings report be provided. This session sought to include all Members of BDC to ensure they had an opportunity to hear the presentation and to provide their views and questions to the consultants in person.

An initial overview was provided and it was explained that the PAS review had been commissioned to assess governance, relationships, barriers to decision making and improvements required for Development Management, Local Plan preparation, Officer-Member working and Readiness for forthcoming planning reforms.

A presentation to discuss the Development Management Workstream was carried out with the key points highlighted as below:

- Procedures and protocols were generally sound.
- Key issues related to strained Officer–Member relationships.
- There was insufficient early engagement prior to Planning Committee.
- There was a need for a “reset” of working practices.

Recommendations included:

- Improved collaboration.
- Training on defensible decision making.
- Addressing relationships with WCC Highways.
- Review of enforcement processes.
- Improving Planning Committee focus.
- Reviewing livestream retention.
- Increasing Member involvement at pre application stage.
- Improving attendance at site visits.

A presentation was also provided to Members to discuss the Local Plan Workstream. The main points highlighted were:

- A significant divergence between Members on the draft development strategy.
- Lack of political buy in and sense of “ownership” of the plan.
- Insufficient shared vision for the District’s future.
- Evidence base gaps (e.g. Green Belt assessment, infrastructure planning).
- Poor relationships with WCC on transport and education.
- Requirement for clearer governance of the Strategic Planning Steering Group (SPSG).
- Importance of a 30-month statutory timetable under the new system.
- Emphasis on risk management, programme management and Member training.
- Need to develop a spatial vision and place making objectives.

Town Centre Parking and ANPR (Update)

During a Board meeting held on 18th November 2026, it was requested and agreed that a Town Centre Parking and Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) update be provided.

During the Board’s meeting held on 10th February 2026 it was reported that Town Centre parking capacity remained sufficient, with peak demand significantly below the 1,013 available spaces. St John Street and Windsor Street car parks continued to experience the highest utilisation, while School Drive, North Bromsgrove and Stourbridge Road remained underused.

The Board noted the following redevelopment considerations:

- Churchfields remained closed due to Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) risks, with high costs required for reopening and ongoing maintenance.
- Stourbridge Road was subject to an existing development agreement and observed usage indicated high weekday occupancy by season ticket holders.
- School Drive was identified as suitable for redevelopment due to consistently low usage and a potentially higher capital receipt.

Even with redevelopment of one or more sites, overall parking demand was predicted to remain comfortably met.

Sanders Park Car Park was being used by Town Centre workers for all day free parking, however, options were presented to introduce time limit charges or MiPermit only operation.

Season ticket usage at Parkside had raised concerns from local businesses. Survey findings indicated most users were season ticket holders rather than Council Staff. Options included amending which car parks accepted season tickets.

ANPR implementation was reported as not viable due to legal constraints, operational requirements for barriers, cost implications and no reduction in enforcement workload.

Out of town enforcement had met the agreed minimum requirement, with between 26% to 29% of patrol time spent outside the Town Centre. Increasing enforcement would require additional staffing at significant cost.

Financial implications were highlighted, including income levels, resurfacing costs and the financial impact of potential car park redevelopments.

The report concluded that a strategic, place-based approach was required to support Town Centre accessibility and economic activity, with further on-site counts recommended.

EV Charger Profit Sharing Arrangements (Update)

During a Board meeting held on 6th January 2026 Members raised frustrations regarding delays in progression for the update on Electric Vehicle (EV) Charger profit sharing arrangement negotiations which had been requested during previous Board meetings. Members noted that a meeting had been held with the Leader and relevant Officers to discuss progression and that a briefing paper would be provided to Members of the Board at the next meeting to be held in February 2026.

During the Board meeting held on 10th February 2026 an update was provided with the main points considered by the Board:

- The Council had sought to utilise its own land to provide Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure (EVCI) for financial viability.
- Zest Eco Limited procured the contract to undertake a further exploration to expand EVCI across land that were not covered by the taxi scheme.
- Three sites were identified as being viable; two sites had completed installation and one site was in progress.
- Following queries from the Board, a review had been carried out to explore the income terms and conditions of the contract.
- Barnt Green Parish Council advised that they had used the same Council supplier Equans as used for the Plug-in Taxi Programme.
- There were legal implications and both parties would need to agree to vary the agreement if seeking early payment. Alternatively, a break notice/termination clause within the contract was suggested as another option, however, compensation costs may be payable, given the expenditure incurred to date for installations.

Other Overview items due to be scrutinised at its April meeting are as follows:

- Envirocrime (to include Environment Crime update, Environmental Crime Enforcement Policy and Littering from Vehicles).
- Permission to Revoke the First Homes Policy
- Renters Rights Act 2025

PRE-SCRUTINY

Contaminated Land Strategy

During this meeting the Contaminated Land Strategy was presented with the key points discussed:

- The new inspection strategy aimed to replace the previous version and meet the requirements of the statutory guidance which was issued in 2012.
- The strategy outlined the process for the review of potential contaminated land sites within the District and the prioritisation methodology used.
- The report aimed to provide an overview of the framework that existed in respect of contaminated land.
- Part 2A of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 placed a duty on Local Authorities to review and assess the significant possibility of harm to human health arising from contaminated land.
- Contaminated land legislation should only be used when there were no other alternative mechanisms available. However, the framework was predominately reviewed through the Planning and Development Control process.
- The revised report reflected the gradual reduction and withdrawal of funding from Central Government.
- To date no sites had been declared as “Contaminated Land” by BDC, however, several sites of concern had been subject to detailed inspection.
- Planning policies encouraged the reuse of Brownfield land.

Bromsgrove Town Centre Strategic Framework

A strategic framework for Bromsgrove Town Centre was presented to Members which had been developed in collaboration with the Portfolio Holder and shaped through two stakeholder workshops. The framework aimed to consolidate various existing policies and plans into a unified vision for the town centre’s future. It was designed to be inclusive and community owned, rather than solely a Council initiative, to ensure resilience and relevance post LGR.

The framework was grounded in placemaking principles and intended to guide regeneration activity, partnership engagement and investment priorities. It incorporated elements from the Bromsgrove Town 2040 Vision, Local Plan and regeneration projects funded through the Levelling-Up project.

Key strategic aims included:

- Transforming public spaces and connectivity
- Celebrating Bromsgrove’s unique identity
- Enhancing town centre links and visitor access
- Building a safe and inclusive community
- Cultivating a thriving local business ecosystem
- Creating vibrancy to attract more visitors

The vision had been previously considered by Stakeholders and Members during various group activities to ensure all the aims and objectives were included. An action plan encompassing the key strategic aims was to be developed under the oversight of a newly formed Town Centre Steering Group, comprising various stakeholders. This group would define Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), milestones, resource implications and explore the feasibility of establishing a Business Improvement District (BID). Progress would be monitored through an annual “State of the Town” health check which would link in with planning policies and quarterly reports would also be provided as and where necessary.

Expansion of Commercial Waste Collection Service

This report set out proposals for the expansion of the Council's commercial waste collection service. It was stated that with the provisions of the Environment Act 2021, businesses were required to separate food waste (and microbusiness due to be required to do the same from April 2027), which afforded increased opportunities for service growth as there would be growth in demand for commercial food waste services.

It was highlighted that the Council's Commercial Waste Collection Service had expanded considerably since its inception in 2015, however, in excess of an £800k annual income would be placed at risk if the Council could not provide a compliant service.

The commercial waste service had been a profit-maker for the Council and only recently saw increased costs as a result of wider fleet and maintenance issues within the service. The recommendations in the report were to address this with the purchase of two Refuse Collection Vehicles (RCVs) designed to reduce reliance on hire vehicles in the long term.

Homelessness Prevention Grant and Domestic Abuse Grant

The purpose of this report was to approve how BDC would allocate government homelessness related grants for 2026/27 and to seek delegated authority to manage any unallocated funding during the year.

Key Points were highlighted as follows:

- From 2026/27 Government would merge several homelessness grants into a single Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Grant, expecting to be in a three-year settlement.
- Around 51% of the current Homelessness Prevention Grant would be moved into a Revenue Support Grant but the Council proposed ringfencing this money for homelessness prevention.
- Total expected funding for 2026/27 included:
 - o Homelessness Grant: £112k
 - o Homelessness Prevention Grant: £349,018k
 - o Rough Sleeping Prevention & Recovery: £34,899k
 - o Domestic Abuse New Burdens Funding: £35,744k
 - o Total: £531,661k

Funding was allocated to a mix of temporary accommodation provision, voluntary sector partners, youth homelessness services, tenancy sustainment and support, debt advice, rough sleeper outreach, mental health work and commissioning specific posts.

The Homelessness Grant Allocation of approximately £495,917k included:

- BDHT Housing Agency staffing
- Temporary accommodation units
- Severe Weather Emergency Provision
- St Basils Foyer and Crash Pad
- Support for young people, ex-offenders, rough sleepers and tenancy sustainment
- CAB debt advice & affordability assessments
- Housing First/Housing Led model
- Empty Homes Officer (part-time)

The Domestic Abuse Grant of £35,744k included:

- County domestic abuse co ordinator and research officer
- Housing Options top up
- Furniture project (NewStarts)
- Basement Project support

Without this funding many voluntary sector services would cease, increasing homelessness and pressures on council services. Funding helped to maintain existing accommodation, reduce rough sleeping, mitigate financial hardship and enable victims of domestic abuse to access safe accommodation. The funding was provided as a recognition of affordability challenges, reducing housing turnover and limited social housing availability.

Windsor Street Site

The purpose of this report was to recommend that the Windsor Street brownfield site in Bromsgrove Town Centre be redeveloped for residential use and to identify the preferred delivery model. The site had been vacant since 2014, posing issues with vandalism and anti-social behaviour. Redevelopment had previously failed due to abnormal contamination costs and planning concerns.

The Council had successfully secured £14.5m of Levelling Up Funding with £3.49m allocated to Windsor Street, plus extra funding from UKSPF of £84k, One Public Estate (OPE) of £100k and Brownfield Land Release Fund (BLRF) of £722k.

Phase One remediation was completed, however were awaiting an Environment Agency review. Phase Two remediation works were expected to be completed in approximately 6 months' time. Housing delivery would not be delayed due to planning works which were still required to be completed.

The Board considered the various options, however, Option D - Partner with a Registered Social Landlord was considered the preferred option for the following reasons:

- Allowed 50% affordable housing, modern low carbon homes and better alignment with local housing need.
- Funding opportunity through Homes England.
- Construction was expected to begin early 2027.
- Regenerated a key town centre site.
- Met the housing need while protecting the Green Belt areas.
- Increased footfall and supported local businesses.
- Delivered environmental improvements through brownfield remediation.

Biodiversity Duty Report

This report outlined the statutory requirements under the Environment Act 2021 for all public authorities to conserve and enhance biodiversity. Members noted that the Council was legally required to publish a Biodiversity Duty Report by March 2026.

The following key actions which had been completed included:

- Green Flag Awards for Sanders Park and Lickey End Recreation Ground.
- Grass verge biodiversity initiative.
- Tree planting programme with a target of 100,000 trees over 15 years.
- Pesticide reduction and alternative weed control.

- Integration of biodiversity monitoring into the Climate Change Strategy.
- Compliance with Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) monitoring for planning applications.

Homelessness Prevention, Rough Sleeper and Domestic Abuse Grants Funding 2027/28 and 2028/29

Reporting on the three-year Government grant for homelessness prevention, rough sleeper outreach and domestic abuse services was presented. The Board were informed that the funding had been more generous than anticipated, allowing for stability and potential expansion of services.

A summary of proposals was highlighted as follows:

- Confirmation of three-year funding for existing providers.
- Removal of temporary accommodation funding from this grant and would be covered by separate revenue funding.
- Government targets were to reduce rough sleeping by 50% and reduce families in bed and breakfast accommodation.

Particulate Monitoring

The Board were presented with options for additional particulate matter monitoring following a Council motion. Current provision included three low-cost sensors in the Bromsgrove District. The proposed options ranged from extending existing sensors to commissioning a source apportionment study with the University of Birmingham. The recommended option included a combination of extended sensors and a mobile “super site” study with an estimated cost of £150k.

STANDARD UPDATES

Levelling-Up Fund Programme (Quarterly)

During various meetings, updates on the Levelling Up Projects at Windsor Street, Nailers Yard (former Market Hall site) and the Public Realm works were discussed.

The following key areas were discussed during the course of the municipal year:

22 July 2025

Windsor Street

- Groundwater monitoring was ongoing until mid-August 2025. If PFAS/PFOS (per and polyfluorinated alkyl substances) levels were high, six months of remediation would follow which was due to finish in January 2026.
- The project remained on track and within budget.
- Options paper on future housing delivery was scheduled for September 2025 to the Board and in November 2025 to Cabinet.

Nailers Yard

- The project had been delayed six weeks due to ground obstructions.
- SCP Transport Planning were preparing a travel plan and welcome pack. Some planning condition wording could change due to WCC ending Modeshift STARS.
- GJS Dillon was appointed in December 2024 to market the commercial space with early interest reported.
- The Full Business Case (FBC) was being prepared to draw down £2.425m of former Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership (GBSLEP) funds which was expected in 2026/27.
- The programme budget was originally £16.103m with an additional £1.08m awarded and planned GBSLEP funding.
- The total estimated programme costs at this stage were £18.65m.

28 October 2025

Windsor Street

- Phase One remediation was completed and Environment Agency (EA) technical feedback was expected in October 2025.
- Phase Two remediation was likely with completion estimated in May 2026.
- Cabinet was due to review housing options in November 2025.

Nailers Yard

- Culvert works costs rose to £1.6m, increasing programme costs by £165k. An urgent decision was due in August 2025 which added £500k which included £335k contingency costs.
- Completion date had moved from January to 4th May 2026.
- Strong commercial interest continued and service charge arrangements were progressing.
- FBC for GBSLEP funding was ongoing.
- Total secured funding increased to £17.694m with an estimated final cost of £19.8m.
- Potential risks identified at both Nailers Yard were culvert, electrics and layout works and Windsor Street were EA sign-off with delivery options.

6 January 2026

Windsor Street

- Phase Two remediation required six months treatment plus six months monitoring.
- Cabinet approved redevelopment in partnership with a Registered Social Landlord (RSL).

Nailers Yard

- Construction was progressing towards May 2026 completion date.
- Bruton Knowles was appointed as the property management agent.
- The pavilion building operational model was under review.

Local Heritage Action List (Quarterly)

During various quarterly updates for the Local Heritage Action List the following key areas were considered:

22nd July 2025

Following the adoption of the first tranche earlier in the year the following were noted:

- Property owners had been notified.
- The website had been updated.
- Development Management colleagues had been briefed on the local list and its implications for planning applications.
- A draft list for Wythall had been completed with consultation planned post-Local Plan consultation completion.
- Work on Lickey and Blackwell and Bromsgrove continued but progress had slowed due to staff absences and departures.
- Engagement with the Bromsgrove Society was ongoing.
- Public outreach efforts included a talk at Lickey End. Nomination forms would also be made available as part of the engagement process.

28th October 2025

- Progress on the Local Heritage List had been delayed but there were mitigation steps in place at the application stage to identify any buildings of local significance.
- The first tranche of parishes had been adopted with the website updated and owners had also been notified accordingly.
- The draft list for Wythall had been completed and work was ongoing for the Lickey and Blackwell areas.
- There were staffing challenges as two Conservation Officers had resigned. The part-time Principal Conservation Officer remained to cover the work. A consultant had been appointed to assist with the Local Heritage Lists and recruitment was also underway to fill the vacant posts.

6th January 2026

- Four parishes had adopted local heritage lists.
- The Bromsgrove draft list was expected in mid-January 2026.
- Recruitment was underway for a full time Conservation Officer who was due to start in March 2026.
- There had been an increase in development management workload.

Worcestershire Health Overview & Scrutiny Committee (HOSC)

The Council's representative on the Worcestershire-wide Health Overview and Scrutiny must be a Member of the Overview and Scrutiny Board and is required to provide the Board with regular updates on the work being carried out. The Board's representative for the municipal year 2025-26 was agreed as Councillor B. Kumar.

During the year Councillor Kumar provided comprehensive and informed updates on meetings of HOSC and responded to questions from Members on matters including:

- Routine immunisation
- Engaging Neighbourhoods and Community in Health Improvements
- Pharmaceutical Needs Assessment (PNA)
- Winter Planning
- Annual review of Public Health
- Overview from West Midlands Ambulance Service
- Access to GP Appointments (including out of hours)
- Access to NHS Dental Services

Local Government Re-organisation (LGR) (Update)

During a meeting held on 6th January 2026 the Board requested that regular updates and progress on LGR be provided.

During a meeting held on 10th February 2026 an update was provided which included:

- Worcestershire remained at Stage Three of the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) process.
- Two proposals had been submitted and the statutory consultation had been launched the previous week.
- A decision on implementation was expected in July 2026.
- A Countywide Programme Management Office (PMO) had been set up with Bromsgrove's Transformation Lead as Senior Responsible Officer (SRO). The focus areas included: Finance, Legal, HR, IT and Service Delivery (cross-cutting).
- An internal LGR Roots programme was supporting staff through change.
- Externally, District Councils had refreshed the partnership website for TransformingWorcestershire.co.uk.
- A new corporate LGR risk had been added to the Council's risk register.
- Residual risk was assessed as Medium, largely due to uncertainties in costings and capacity.
- Corporate risks had been redeveloped and would be reported to the Audit, Standards and Governance meeting which would be held on 17th February 2026.

During a meeting held on 24th March 2026, an update report outlined Bromsgrove's position within the Government's seven stage LGR process with Members noting were at the Statutory Consultation Stage 3, which closed on 26th March 2026.

The key points raised were as follows:

- Worcestershire remained at Stage 3 of the MHCLG process.
- Workstreams on Finance, HR, Legal, IT and Services were progressing.
- A MHCLG "Listening Meeting" took place on 11th March which was supported by KPMG.

- Devolution footprint discussions had advanced with Worcestershire Leaders having agreed a joint position with Herefordshire and exploring alignment with Warwickshire/Gloucestershire.
- Future updates may be limited until Government decisions were provided which were due in the Summer of 2026.
- LGR and Devolution remained a key Corporate Risk.
- District involvement in strategic planning (SDS) would be retained until at least April 2028.

Crime and Disorder (Yearly)

The annual statutory review outlined partnership activity from January 2025 to February 2026.

The key priority areas were outlined as follows:

- Public place violence and serious violence duty
- Anti-social behaviour (ASB), nuisance and environmental issues
- Shoplifting and neighbourhood crime
- Protecting vulnerable communities
- Serious organised crime (SOCJAG model)

The key activity delivered were outlined as follows:

- 'Right Path' youth violence intervention (with 21 young people being supported).
- Respect Programme engaging 250+ vulnerable young people.
- Redeployable Close Circuit Television (CCTV) deployments district-wide.
- Nominated Neighbour Scheme and targeted support for older/vulnerable residents.
- Domestic abuse support through R.U.N Our Space CIC.
- Significant partnership work with the Police on hotspot patrols, knife crime (Sceptre Week) and illegal vape enforcement.

It was also reported that progress was strong across priority areas despite reduced Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) ring-fenced funding of 15% reduction. The Partnership continued to respond to complex ASB, crime prevention needs and safeguarding vulnerabilities.

Other Standard items to be heard at its April meeting were as follows:

Heatwaves Preparedness (Yearly)

The purpose of this yearly heatwave preparedness report is to ensure accountability, evaluate readiness and enhance the Council's response to rising extreme heat risks.

Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2025/26

This annual report.

WORKING GROUPS

Finance & Budget Working Group (FBWG)

This Group met on six occasions during the year with the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Enabling in attendance at all the Group's meetings, together with the Deputy Chief Executive (Section 151 Officer) and the Head of Finance and Customer Services.

The list below contains some of the topics/reports which the Working Group had considered and gives an insight into the work that has been carried out:

- 2025-26 Budget
- Medium Term Financial Plan 2025-26 to 2027-28 – Tranche 1 and Tranche 2 Reports
- Finance and Performance Monitoring Reports
- The Financial Outturn Report
- Council Tax Empty Homes Discounts and Premiums report
- Council Tax Support Scheme
- Council Tax and Non-Domestic Rates Discretionary Relief Policy
- Council Tax and Business Rates Yield 2025-26
- Financial Recovery Plan
- Blue Badge Holders Parking Proposal
- Ward Funds Proposal

During the course of the municipal year the following key areas were considered by the Board:

17th June 2025

Members received a report requesting for the Chairman and Members to be appointed to the Finance and Budget Working Group for the 2025/26 municipal year. Members that expressed an interest in joining the group were Councillors S. Ammar, R.J. Hunter, S.T. Nock and P.M. McDonald. The Board noted that Councillor C.A. Hotham also expressed an interest, should there be a relevant vacancy available.

22nd July 2025

With respect to membership of the Finance and Budget Working Group, it was acknowledged that interest in joining the Working Group had been expressed by Councillors S. Ammar and C. Hotham to date. The Board felt that a follow up communication was required to Members of the Overview and Scrutiny 'pool' (i.e. all elected members who were not represented on Cabinet) to ascertain if there were any further expressions of interest. It was commented that this would ensure all elected members had time to consider on whether they wished to sit on the Working Group. In this case, it was agreed that consideration of further appointments to fill vacant positions on the Working Group be deferred to the next meeting of Overview and Scrutiny Board.

The Quarter 4 Financial Outturn and Performance Monitoring Report was discussed, and Members of the Working Group had agreed that more detailed narrative was required in these reports going forward in order for Members and the public to better understand the content. The following was agreed as recommendations:

RECOMMENDED that future Quarterly Financial Outturn and Performance reports provide:

- i a detailed narrative in terms of variance for each specific service area
- ii for each area of high variance provide detail on the action(s) being taken to address the issue and the officer(s) responsible
- iii information on recharge amounts

9th September 2025

The update on membership of the Finance and Budget Working Group was discussed and Members were reminded that there were four Councillors currently represented on the Working Group as Councillors A. Bailes, E. Gray, P. McDonald and S. Nock and there remained three vacant seats. It was noted that since the last meeting of Overview and Scrutiny Board, three Councillors had expressed an interest in joining the Working Group as Councillors S. Ammar, S. Colella and C. Hotham. The Board considered these requests and on being put to the vote it was agreed that the Councillors were to be appointed to the Finance and Budget Working Group.

The Chairman of the Finance and Budget Working Group, Councillor P. McDonald, updated the Board on the recent meeting which took place on 5th September 2025.

18th November 2025

After consideration of the Finance and Budget Working Group Membership Report and terms of reference the Board agreed to maintain six Members on the Working Group. The Chairman explained that should the three current vacancies as reflected in the report remain after the Board had been approached, Members who did not sit on the scrutiny board and were also not a Cabinet Member may be appointed to fill the vacancies.

6th January 2026

After consideration of the Finance and Budget Working Group Membership report and terms of reference the Board agreed to the proposed membership of the working group for the 2025/26 municipal year. The newly appointed members included Councillors B. Kumar, C.A. Hotham and B.M. McEldowney.

10th February 2026

The Board received an update on information which was in progress for the forthcoming FBWG. Members of the Board agreed to a meeting prior the Cabinet meeting to be held on 18th February 2026 to discuss its recommendations.

TASK GROUPS

Housing Task Group

During various meetings the Board were informed of progress of the Housing Task Group. Members noted that the group were on track and had covered each of the terms of reference items for investigation in various meetings with Officers.

The Housing Task Group's final report was presented to the Board on 18th November 2025. The report would also be subsequently considered at the Cabinet meeting held in January 2026.

The following recommendations were included in the final report as follows:

Recommendation 1 – Housing Allocations

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

Recommendation 2 – Housing Allocations

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

Recommendation 3 – Asset Rich and Potentially Revenue Poor

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

Recommendation 4 – Asset Rich and Potentially Revenue Poor

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

Recommendation 5 – Section (S) 106 Contributions

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

Recommendation 6 - Fleeceholding

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

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

For Task Groups the detailed final reports of all these investigations can be found on the Council's website within the Overview and Scrutiny section.

CONCLUSION

A significant amount of pre-scrutiny work had been carried out by the Board throughout the year and based on detailed discussions, a number of recommendations had been made to Cabinet and Full Council. Some of these recommendations were subsequently approved by the decision-making bodies. In addition to this, the work of the the Finance and Budget Working Group has been useful in providing Members with an opportunity to look at complex finance reports in some considerable detail.

During the year the Housing Task Group had completed its final report along with recommendations which were considered at the Board meeting held on 18th November 2025 and subsequently considered at the Cabinet meeting held in January 2026.

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FURTHER INFORMATION

Overview and Scrutiny Board Meetings

Overview and Scrutiny Board meetings are open to the public. To find out more visit our website at <http://www.bromsgrove.gov.uk/council/the-council/overview-and-scrutiny.aspx> or telephone 01527 881288 and ask to speak to the Democratic Services Officer.

Public Involvement

If you would like to have your say on issues being considered by Overview and Scrutiny or to suggest a topic for consideration you can email scrutiny@bromsgrove.gov.uk or complete the form on the Council's website at <https://www.bromsgrove.gov.uk/council/the-council/overview-and-scrutiny/public-participation.aspx>

Giving Evidence

Members of the public or organisations with a special interest or knowledge about a particular topic being considered by Overview and Scrutiny can put forward evidence to a Committee or appear as a witness to give evidence for an investigation. If you think you or your organisation might be able to participate in an issue currently under review, please contact us.

If you have a personal issue with a Council service you may find it more useful to contact your local ward Councillor who can help you decide the best way to take it forward.

Contact Overview and Scrutiny

If you would like to find out more about any aspect of the Overview and Scrutiny Board then you can email scrutiny@bromsgrove.gov.uk or telephone 01527 881288 and ask to speak to the Democratic Services Officer.

Overview and Scrutiny

Legal, Democratic and Property Services

Bromsgrove District Council

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