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

MEETING OF THE ELECTORAL MATTERS COMMITTEE

24TH SEPTEMBER 2026, AT 6.00 P.M.

COMMITTEE ROOM 2 - PARKSIDE

PRESENT: Councillors S. M. Evans (Chairman), C.A. Hotham (Vice-Chairman), E. M. S. Gray, K.J. May, S. T. Nock and J. Robinson

Officers: Mrs. C. Felton, Mr D. Whitney, Mrs. J. Bayley-Hill and Ms M. Bassett

9/26 **TO RECEIVE APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTES**

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

10/26 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor S. Evans advised that Finstall Parish was located within his Worcestershire County Council division.

11/26 **TO CONFIRM THE ACCURACY OF THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE ELECTORAL MATTERS COMMITTEE HELD ON 11TH JUNE 2026**

The minutes of the meeting of the Electoral Matters Committee held on 11th June 2026 were submitted.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Electoral Matters Committee held on 11th June 2026 be approved as a true and correct record.

12/26 **FINDINGS OF THE FUTURE LOCAL GOVERNANCE IN BROMSGROVE WORKING GROUP & FINSTALL COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEW DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Senior Electoral Services Officer presented a report on the findings of the Future Local Governance in Bromsgrove Working Group, including next steps, and the Finstall Community Governance review draft recommendations.

The working group had held a number of meetings and explored the subject of future local governance in Bromsgrove in detail. This had included a public engagement exercise.

The working group had also considered neighbourhood area committees as a possible model for future local governance. Members were asked to note that these arrangements might still form part of the future governance landscape under a new unitary authority. However, given the resources available, the working group concluded that its immediate focus should be on progressing preparatory work for a Community Governance Review, rather than carrying out further work on neighbourhood area committees at this stage.

The timing of any review had been an important part of the working group's discussion. Local government reorganisation had recently been paused and, pending confirmation from Government, the working assumption on the date of the Committee meeting was that elections in May 2027 would be to Bromsgrove District Council, with shadow elections for any new unitary authority taking place in May 2028.

Members were asked to note that this position could change. However, if this working assumption proved to be correct, this might mean that there would be sufficient time for Bromsgrove District Council to conduct a Community Governance Review in full, including making any resulting Reorganisation of Community Governance Order, before a future transitional period began. Consequently, this had created an opportunity for the Council to reconsider the timing of the review, although Members were advised to remain mindful of the continued uncertainty surrounding reorganisation.

The Committee was being invited to note the working group's findings. It was further proposed that the group, with officer support, should continue the preparatory work required for a Community Governance Review. This would include developing three key elements: detailed terms of reference, a proposed timetable and a full budget.

The terms of reference would provide the formal framework for the review. They needed to set out clearly why the review was being undertaken, the geographical area it would cover and the matters it would consider. This work needed to be undertaken carefully because, once the review formally began, the Council would be expected to conduct it in accordance with the published terms of reference.

A proposed timetable had been included in the report. To preserve the opportunity for Bromsgrove District Council to complete the process itself, Officers were suggesting that the terms of reference would need to be ready for consideration by Council in late 2026 or early 2027. That would provide an anticipated 12-month period in which to undertake the review: consult residents and other interested parties, produce draft recommendations, consult on these, then agree the final recommendations and make any resulting order before a future transitional period.

That timetable would need to be considered alongside the scheduled elections in Bromsgrove and Redditch in May 2027. As a consequence

of these, Electoral Services would have significant statutory responsibilities to address during the same period. Officers therefore considered that specialist consultancy support and additional Electoral Services resources would be needed to ensure that both the elections and the Community Governance Review could be delivered properly.

The financial work was expected to have three elements, which would be considered by Council at two separate stages.

Recommendation 5 in the report related to the financial costs of the first stage of the work. Following publication of the agenda for the meeting, Officers had reviewed the wording and were suggesting that this be amended. This amendment was as follows:

> "*An estimated cost of £30,000 be proposed to Council* to fund specialist consultancy support and additional resources for Electoral Services to develop the detailed terms of reference, timetable and budget for the Community Governance Review. *When the funding request is presented to Council it will identify the budget from which it is proposed to be met, and the resulting financial consequences to enable proper consideration*."

The amendment was being proposed as officers had had time to consider the likely consultancy costs in more detail since the agenda for the meeting was published. The revised recommendation proposed an initial estimated cost of £30,000, which would be presented to Council in October 2026. This funding would support specialist consultancy input from the beginning of the process, together with any additional Electoral Services resources required for the preparatory work. It would also include establishing the project arrangements and developing the detailed terms of reference, timetable and budgets.

Members were informed that there was currently no provision within the Electoral Services budget for this work. The report to Council would therefore need to identify the proposed source of the £30,000 and clearly set out the financial consequences of using that funding. This could include using funding from reserves or any other appropriate funding that might be available, including community or ward-based funds.

As part of the preparatory work, officers would establish the two further financial requirements. This comprised:

- the full cost of conducting the Community Governance Review, including consultation, specialist support and any additional resources required; and
- an indicative estimate of the cost of establishing a new Parish or Town Council, should that ultimately be recommended following the review.

The funding for these two elements would not be sought from Council in October. Instead, they would be addressed in a later report to Council alongside the completed terms of reference and proposed timetable. This would allow Council to consider the scope, timing and full financial implications together before deciding whether to formally commence a Community Governance Review.

In respect of the existing Finstall Community Governance Review, Members were reminded that this review had already formally commenced and its terms of reference had been published. It therefore needed to be concluded separately from any wider review of community governance in Bromsgrove.

The wider engagement exercise had not identified any material evidence that would alter the position previously considered by the Electoral Matters Committee in respect of the Finstall Community Governance Review. The proposed draft recommendation was therefore that the area to the west of the railway line containing Field View House should be removed from Finstall parish.

Subject to the Committee's agreement, the residents of Field View House would be consulted on the draft recommendation before final recommendations were prepared. The report also proposed that approval of the consultation material should be delegated to the Electoral Services Manager, following consultation with the Chairman of the Electoral Matters Committee.

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

- The potential for the preparatory work referenced in recommendation 5 to be undertaken inhouse. Clarification was provided that officers had the skills and experience to undertake this work. However, at a time of local elections in Bromsgrove, Parish Council elections and elections (by thirds) in Redditch, there was insufficient capacity within the team to undertake the work required.
- The extent to which the work required in the initial stages could be undertaken by the Electoral Services team prior to the local elections in May 2027. Members were informed that a lot of tasks needed to be undertaken in the months leading up to the local elections.
- The statutory duties that the Electoral Services team needed to address when organising local elections.
- The potential for this work to be undertaken by other staff working for the Council. Members were informed that work on Community Governance Reviews was very specialist which required support from appropriately qualified and experienced staff.
- The Association of Electoral Administrators (AEA) and the reasons why the Council would need to approach this association for support with the work. Members were informed that the AEA was

the professional body for staff working in Electoral Services across the country. Members of this body would have the necessary expertise to enable them to undertake the required consultancy work.

- The activities that would be covered by the £30,000 budget. Clarification was provided that it was likely that this would contribute to the background work, but Members were asked to note that Officers would still be involved in co-ordinating the project.
- The independent perspective that an external consultant could provide if they were involved in a Community Governance Review for the District.
- The additional financial costs that would arise should a full Community Governance Review for the District be progressed at a later stage.
- The extent to which the financial costs associated with the later stage of a Community Governance Review for the District represented value for money.
- The limited financial costs arising from the introduction of neighbourhood area committees when compared to a District-wide Community Governance Review.
- The frequency with which Community Governance Reviews should be undertaken at a Council. Members noted that it was considered good practice for these to be completed every 15 years and no such review had been completed in Bromsgrove District in the preceding 15-year period.
- The requirement for Bromsgrove District Council, as a principal authority, to be satisfied that it had appropriate governance arrangements in place.
- The number of residents and other local stakeholders who had participated in the engagement exercise undertaken by the working group.
- The extent to which the residents who had participated in this engagement exercise were familiar with the contribution that could be made by a Parish Council to a local community.
- The fact that there was no guarantee that the Council would progress to the second stage of the process and that there would be a further report to Council on this subject prior to a decision being taken on this matter.
- The financial support that would be required by a new Parish Council, should any be introduced at the end of a Community Governance Review, and the need for the Council to provide this support in the absence of a Parish precept in the first year of a new Parish Council's operation.
- The extent to which any such costs could be shared between Bromsgrove District and Worcestershire County Councils. Members were advised that all of the costs would need to be covered by Bromsgrove District Council.

- The potential for residents to present a petition to the Council calling for a Community Governance Review to be undertaken in a particular location in the District.
- The opportunity for Community Governance Reviews to be undertaken in sections of the District, rather than across the whole of the District, and the different financial costs arising. Confirmation was provided that Community Governance Reviews across a smaller geographic area than the whole District would cost less than a review for the whole District, although the exact costs would vary depending on the area concerned.
- The need for Members to clarify their vision for the geographic area(s) that they wanted to cover in a Community Governance Review should a decision be taken to progress with this.
- The potential for further Community Governance Reviews to be undertaken in the future and for additional Parish Councils to be introduced at a later date.
- The extent to which efficiency savings could be achieved where Parish Councils shared resources, including their Parish Clerk.
- The opportunities available to achieve economies of scale in the operation of Parish Councils.

Specific reference was made to the resolutions in respect of Finstall Community Governance Review. There was general consensus amongst Members that these proposals would be appropriate to take forward.

On being put to the vote, resolutions 3 and 4 in respect of this matter were therefore carried.

During discussion of this item, Members also considered the proposed amendment to the wording of recommendation 5 in accordance with the changes that had been presented by Officers at the start of the meeting.

On being put to the vote, the amendment to the wording of recommendation 5 was carried.

(*Councillor E. Gray requested that it be noted in the minutes that she had voted against this amendment*.)

RESOLVED that

1) The findings to date of the Local Governance Working Group, as set out in this report, be noted.

2) The Electoral Matters Committee continue the preparatory work through the established working group - to develop detailed terms of reference, a proposed timetable and a full budget for a Community Governance Review for Council's consideration in due course.

3) The draft recommendation for the Finstall Community Governance Review be that the area west of the railway line be removed from Finstall Parish and become unparished.

4) In respect of resolution 3, delegated authority be granted to the Electoral Services Manager, following consultation with the Chairman of the Electoral Matters Committee, to finalise the consultation material and make any minor presentational or factual amendments required before publication.

RECOMMENDED that

An estimated cost of £30,000 be proposed to Council to fund specialist consultancy support and additional resources for Electoral Services to develop the detailed terms of reference, timetable and budget for the Community Governance Review. When the funding request was presented to Council it would identify the budget from which it was proposed to be met, and the resulting financial consequences to enable proper consideration.

(*Members voted on resolutions 1 and 2 and recommendation 5 separately to the other resolutions. Councillor E. Gray asked for it to be noted in the minutes that she voted against these proposals*.)

13/26 **TO CONSIDER ANY URGENT BUSINESS, DETAILS OF WHICH HAVE BEEN NOTIFIED TO THE ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF LEGAL, DEMOCRATIC AND PROCUREMENT SERVICES PRIOR TO THE COMMENCEMENT OF THE MEETING AND WHICH THE CHAIRMAN CONSIDERS TO BE OF SO URGENT A NATURE THAT IT CANNOT WAIT UNTIL THE NEXT MEETING**

There was no urgent business for consideration on this occasion.

The meeting closed at 6.39 p.m.

Chairman