

Public Document Pack



BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MEETING OF THE CABINET

WEDNESDAY 25TH MARCH 2026

AT 6.00 P.M.

PARKSIDE SUITE, PARKSIDE, MARKET STREET, BROMSGROVE,
WORCESTERSHIRE, B61 8DA

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

AGENDA

1. To receive apologies for absence

2. Declarations of Interest

To invite Councillors to declare any Disclosable Pecuniary Interests or Other Disclosable Interests they may have in items on the agenda, and to confirm the nature of those interests.

3. To confirm the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 6th March 2026 (Pages 5 - 10)

4. Minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board held on 10th February 2026 (Pages 11 - 24)

There are no outstanding recommendations contained in the minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Board included in this agenda pack.

5. Shared Homelessness Strategy and Action Plan 2026-2031 (Pages 25 - 72)
6. Planning Advisory Service Review (Pages 73 - 140)
7. 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.

J. Leach
Chief Executive

Parkside
Market Street
BROMSGROVE
Worcestershire
B61 8DA

17th March 2026

**If you have any queries on this Agenda please contact
Joanne Gresham
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BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MEETING OF THE CABINET

FRIDAY 6TH MARCH 2026, AT 5.00 P.M.

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

Officers: Mr J. Leach, Ms. J. Lorraine, Mrs. C. Felton, Mrs. D. Goodall and Mrs J. Gresham

82/25 **TO RECEIVE APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor S. Baxter.

83/25 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no Declarations of Interest.

84/25 **TO CONFIRM THE ACCURACY OF THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE CABINET HELD ON 18TH FEBRUARY 2026**

The minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 18th February 2026 were submitted for Members' consideration.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 18th February 2026 be approved as a true and accurate record.

85/25 **COUNCIL TAX RESOLUTIONS 2026/27**

The Assistant Director of Finance & Customer Services presented the Council Tax Resolutions 2026/27 for Members' consideration.

The report provided an overview of the requirements, context, and key figures relating to the Council Tax Resolution for the 2026/27 financial year, including the council tax base, precept impacts, and known external factors influencing the overall bill.

Also included was the formal calculation of the Council Tax Base for 2026/27, which must be approved annually in accordance with statutory regulations.

Members were informed that the calculated tax base for the whole District for 2026/27 was 38,409.8 Band D equivalent properties. This figure was based on data as of 30th November 2025, and adjusted for dwelling changes, discounts, exemptions, and a 1 per cent non-collection allowance. This tax base formed the foundation for setting the District Council's own Council Tax requirement.

For 2025/26, the District Council's Band D charge was £257.48, with a budget strategy focused on service resilience and maintaining increases below inflation. The District Council element for 2026/27 would increase by 2.99 per cent, taking Band D to £265.18.

It was noted that the Council continued to operate within significant national financial pressures and was maintaining a focus on protecting frontline services and financial stability.

The overall Council Tax bill included several external precepts as follows:

- The Worcestershire County Council (WCC) 2026/27 budget included an 8.98 per cent increase, taking the charge to £1,760.80 for a Band D bill.
- West Mercia Police & Crime Commissioner precept for 2026/27 was set to rise by 5.15 per cent, increasing the Band D charge to £306.50.
- Hereford & Worcester Fire & Rescue Service precept for 2026/27 figure was set to rise by 4.89 per cent; increasing the Band D charge to £107.22.
- Parish Councils were setting their 2026/27 precepts separately, with an average rise of 8.77 per cent.

The Council remained committed to financial stability, recognising the tax base calculation as a core part of the Medium-Term Financial Plan.

There were several national factors which impacted on the Council Tax setting process this year including WCC financial pressures, wider public sector pay decisions, and inflationary service costs. These continued to shape the environment in which the District must set its own Council Tax requirement.

It was noted that if the Council Tax Resolutions were agreed at the Council meeting directly after this meeting, the Council Tax bills would be issued to residents accordingly.

Following the presentation, it was reported that a support mechanism would be put in place in order to help residents who might be impacted with the Council Tax increase. It was hoped that support would be provided at an early stage. The Benefits Team were aware that this approach would be taken. In addition to this, the Council operated a Council Tax Support Fund which also provided support to residents who qualified for this scheme.

Members welcomed this approach in order to provide appropriate support to those vulnerable residents within the District who required additional assistance.

RESOLVED to **NOTE** that at its meeting on 7th January 2026 Cabinet approved the calculated Council Tax Base 2026/27 as:

- (a) for the whole council area as 38,409.8 [item T in the formula in section 31B of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, as amended (the "Act")]; and
- (b) for dwellings in those parts of its area to which a parish precept relate the amount as shown in column 5 of **schedule 1**.

RECOMMENDED that

- 1) The calculation for the council tax requirement for the council's own purposes for 2026/27 (excluding parish precepts) as **£10,185,510.76**
- 2) That the following amounts be calculated for the year 2026/27 in accordance with sections 31 to 36 of the Act:
 - a) £43,803,037.52 being the aggregate of the amounts which the council estimates for the items set out in section 31A(2) of the Act (taking into account all precepts issued to it by Parish Councils) (i.e., gross expenditure)
 - b) £32,121,303.24 being the aggregate of the amounts which the council estimates for the items set out in section 31A(3) of the Act. (i.e gross income).
 - c) £11,681,734.28 being the amount by which the aggregate of 1.2.2(a) above exceeds the aggregate of 1.2.2(b) above, calculated by the council, in accordance with section 31A(4) of the Act, as its council tax requirement for the year. (Item R in the formula in section 31B of the Act).
 - d) £304.13 being the amount at 1.2.2(c) above (Item R), all divided by Item T (1.1(a) above), calculated by the council, in

Agenda Item 3

Cabinet
6th March 2026

- accordance with section 31B of the Act, as the basic amount of its council tax for the year (including parish precepts).
- e) £1,496,223.52 being the aggregate amount of all special items (parish precepts) referred to in section 34(1) of the Act (as per the attached **schedule 3**)
 - f) £265.18 being the amount at 1.2.2(d) above less the result given by dividing the amount at 1.2.2(e) above by Item T (1.1 (a) above), calculated by the council, in accordance with section 34(2) of the Act, as the basic amount of its council tax for the year for dwellings in those parts of its area to which no parish precept relates.
 - g) The amounts shown in column 4 of **schedule 1**. These are the basic amount of council tax for the year for dwellings in those parts of the council's area shown in column 1 of the schedule respectively to which special items relate, calculated by the council in accordance with section 34(3) of the Act. (District and parish combined at band D).
 - h) The amounts shown in columns 7 to 14 of **schedule 1** being the amount given by multiplying the amount at 1.2.2(g) above by the number which, in the proportion set out in section 5(1) of the Act, is applicable to dwellings listed in a particular valuation band divided by the number of dwellings listed in valuation band D, calculated by the council, in accordance with section 36(1) of the Act, as the amounts to be taken into account for the year in respect of categories of dwellings listed in different valuation bands.
- 3) It is to be noted that for the year 2026/27, Worcestershire County Council, Police and Crime Commissioner for West Mercia, and Hereford and Worcester Fire Authority have issued precepts to the council in accordance with section 40 of the Act for each category of dwelling in the council's area as indicated below:

	Valuation Bands							
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£
Worcestershire County Council	1,173.87	1,369.51	1,565.16	1,760.80	2,152.09	2,543.38	2,943.67	3,521.60
Police and Crime Commissioner for West Mercia	204.33	238.39	272.44	306.50	374.61	442.72	510.83	613.00
Hereford and Worcester Fire Authority	71.48	83.39	95.31	107.22	131.05	154.87	178.70	214.44

Agenda Item 3

Cabinet
6th March 2026

- 4) That having calculated the aggregate in each case of the amounts at 1.2.2(h) and 1.2.3 above, that Bromsgrove District Council in accordance with sections 30 and 36 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 hereby sets the amounts shown in **schedule 2** as the amounts of council tax for 2026/27 for each part of its area and for each of the categories of dwellings.
- 5) The Interim Director of Finance be authorised to make payments under section 90(2) of the Local Government Finance Act 1988 from the collection fund by ten equal instalments between April 2026 to March 2027 as detailed below

	Precept (£)	Surplus/Deficit on Collection Fund (£)	Total to Pay (£)
Worcestershire County Council	67,631,975.84	76,853.64	67,708,829.48
Police and Crime Commissioner for West Mercia	11,772,603.70	13,865.63	11,786,469.33
Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Authority	4,118,298.75	13,950.93	4,132,249.68

- 6) The Interim Director of Finance by authorised to make transfers under section 97 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988 from the collection fund to the general fund the sum of £11,695,685.21 being the council's own demand on the collection fund (£10,185,510.76) and parish precepts (£1,496,223.52) and the distribution of the surplus/deficit on the collection fund (£13,950.93).
- 7) That the Interim Director of Finance be authorised to make payments from the general fund to parish councils the sums listed on **Schedule 3** by two equal instalments on 1st April 2026 and 1st October 2026 in respect of the precept levied on the council.
- 8) That the above resolutions to be signed by the Chief Executive for use in legal proceedings in the Magistrates' Court for the recovery of unpaid council taxes.
- 9) Notices of the making of the said council taxes signed by the Chief Executive are given by advertisement in the local press under section 38(2) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992.

Agenda Item 3

Cabinet
6th March 2026

86/25

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 5.20 p.m.

Chairman

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

10TH FEBRUARY 2026, AT 6.00 P.M.

PRESENT: Councillors P. M. McDonald (Chairman), A. M. Dale (Vice-Chairman), S. Ammar, A. Bailes, R. Bailes, J. Clarke, D. J. A. Forsythe, B. Kumar, J. Robinson, J. D. Stanley and H. D. N. Warren-Clarke

Observers:

Councillor K. J. May – Leader and Cabinet Member for Strategic Partnerships, Economic Development and Enabling
Councillor S. J. Baxter – Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Reorganisation and Climate Change
Councillor S.T. Nock – Cabinet Member for Finance
Councillor K. Taylor - Cabinet Member for Planning, WRS and Strategic Housing
Councillor S. R. Colella,
Councillor E. M. S. Gray
Councillor. D. Hopkins
Councillor C. A. Hotham
Councillor M. Marshall
Councillor B. M. McEldowney

Officers: Mr. G. Revans, Ms H. Corredor, Ms R. Egan, Mrs D. Goodall, Mr S. Parry, Ms R. McElliott and Mrs S. Woodfield

Other parties: Mr T. Burton (Representative of Tim Burton Planning), Mr J. Campion (Representative of Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC), Mr D. Coleman (Representative of DAC Planning) and Ms L. Hornberger (Representative of West Mercia Police (joined remotely)

87/25

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES

Apology for absence was received from Councillor R.E. Lambert, with confirmation provided that Councillor D.J.A. Forsythe was attending as the named substitute and apology for absence was also received from Councillor S.A. Robinson, with confirmation provided that Councillor J.W. was attending as her named substitute. Apology for absence was also received on behalf of Councillor P.J. Whittaker as portfolio holder.

88/25

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND WHIPPING ARRANGEMENTS

There were no declarations of interest nor of whipping arrangements.

89/25

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

The minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting held on 6th January 2026 were considered by the Board.

A Member requested an updated list of the Board's named substitutes which Officers agreed would be provided accordingly.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting held on 6th January 2026 be approved as a correct record.

90/25

POLICE AND CRIME COMMISSIONER (UPDATE)

The representative for the Police and Crime Commissioner, accompanied remotely by a local inspector, provided a strategic update to the Board.

The key points included:

- Policing remained predominantly people based; 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.

Following the presentation, Members raised the following concerns within the District:

- Increased criminal cross border activity in the West Midlands. - The PCC responded that regular cross-border meetings were underway with the West Midlands Police, including data sharing and planned joint operations. It was suggested that crime within the West Midlands would be greater than in local areas. Vehicle crime and domestic burglaries was being tackled long term.
- Various reports of vigilante-style individuals wearing high-vis jackets, patrolling in school areas. What strategies were in place? - In response Members were advised that specific "vigilante" reports were being investigated in partnership with affected schools.

Agenda Item 4

Overview and Scrutiny Board
10th February 2026

- Persistent speeding with some fatalities in the Lickey Hills area. – In response it was advised that speed surveys could be commissioned in hotspot areas. It was also advised that the West Mercia Police could get access to additional funds to provide practical solutions i.e. additional signage.
- There was limited availability of TruCam enforcement with only one tool among several enforcement methods. – It was advised that in addition to TruCam there were under resourced Safer Neighbourhood Teams (SNTs) and laser devices. West Mercia Police would continue expanding road policing methods, including motorcycles and specialist teams to assist.
- A perceived rise in shoplifting on Bromsgrove High Street. Members requested that a joint visit with the West Mercia Police and shop owners would be helpful to discuss the issues further. - In response the Board noted that shoplifting had risen slightly year on year but remained relatively stable. The town centre sergeant was leading robust enforcement activity. The Inspector and Sergeant offered to attend site visits with Members.
- Members requested access to location specific data. - In response there were current recording systems which made location extraction difficult; however, work was underway to mirror the West Midlands Police's public reporting model for this financial year.
- Members had received increased reports of cannabis use. – Reported drug offences had increased slightly but West Mercia Police were trying to combat the problem with carrying out more proactive stop-searches.
- Reports of neighbourhood harassment cases. – Members were advised that in these cases the West Mercia Police could use harassment legislation such as Community Protection Notices (CPNs) and Public Order powers.
- Racially aggravated incidents had also been reported to Members. - In response the Board were informed that these cases should receive prompt contact and that individual cases raised would be reviewed.
- Reports of Cross City Line crimes. - It was agreed that knife crime was a problem in these areas. The British Transport Police and West Mercia Police were working collaboratively to combat the issues and active operations were in place to tackle the issues.
- Members received little or no updates from the Council's representative on the West Mercia Police and Crime Panel and requested regular localised policing updates to the Board.
- Rural crime concerns were raised by Members in the Dodford and Grafton surrounding parishes which included vehicle thefts and burglaries. Members requested a reassurance of more police presence in the areas as confidence had been lost. – The rural security concerns were acknowledged; however, it was advised that patrolling was unlikely to deter the issues.
- Some Members expressed a poor perception of the 101 Service. – In response it was advised that operatives worked extremely

Agenda Item 4

Overview and Scrutiny Board
10th February 2026

hard, often dealing with lifesaving critical incidents and an average of 10,000 calls were received a week. Members noted that training had been introduced for control room staff on rural crime indicators and further training was being explored from National Farmers Union (NFU) backed up with specialist teams for areas such as wildlife. However, it was agreed that there was room for some improvement. Further resources were required, however, with funding being minimal it was difficult to deliver the level of service required.

- Members had received regular complaints of burglaries in the Barnt Green area and advised that Ward Members were ill informed of what steps were being taken to tackle the reported issues. To tackle the problem, residents were setting up their own Neighbourhood Watch Groups and employing security to patrol the areas. – In response Members were advised to sign up to “Neighbourhood Matters”, a website dedicated to the local Safer Neighbourhood Team (SNT) for the public to report critical neighbourhood matters. However, some Members had signed up to this webpage but found the information was inadequate for the issues which had been raised.
- A Member took the opportunity to thank the local sergeant for the area of Alvechurch. Issues of harassment had been reported and dealt with effectively, speaking to each party involved to solve the matter.
- The Leader of the Council thanked the PCC and West Mercia Police for their attendance to the meeting. She also reported regular issues in the District with road traffic accidents caused by diversion routes. – It was advised to report the relevant incidents to the local Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) in the areas concerned.
- The Leader also wished to thank the West Mercia Police for the work carried out to tackle the closure of illegal vape shops in the High Street. – Members were advised that Op Machinize was a major, ongoing UK-wide initiative led by the National Crime Agency (NCA), in partnership with the National Police Chiefs Council (NPCC), Trading Standards and other agencies, targeting the criminal exploitation of high street businesses which were helping to tackle the issues.
- The Chairman concluded discussions by requesting that regular updates were provided to the Board by the Council’s representative on the Police and Crime Panel, which was agreed by the Board.

A motion was moved and seconded requesting that the Council’s representative on the Police and Crime Panel provided a report to the Board following each Panel meeting.

RESOLVED that

- 1) The Police and Crime Commissioner update be noted; and

- 2) The Council's representative on the Police and Crime Panel provide regular updates to the Board.

91/25

PLANNING ADVISORY SERVICE (PAS)

The Executive Director commenced discussions by stating 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
- Readiness for forthcoming planning reforms

Tim Burton, PAS Planning Consultant carried out a presentation to discuss the Development Management workstream.

The key points were discussed 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.
- Need for a “reset” of working practices.

Recommendations included:

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

David Coleman, PAS Planning Consultant also carried out a presentation to Members and discussed the Local Plan workstream.

The main points discussed were:

- 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 the Worcestershire County Council (WCC) on transport and education.

Agenda Item 4

Overview and Scrutiny Board
10th February 2026

- Need 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.

After the presentations, Members discussed the following:

- The need for joint Officer-Member behavioural, culture, trust and relationship building external training. – In response the Executive Director agreed that building relations for Officers and Members was a good suggestion and highlighted the portfolio's comments about training being designed to be more engaging. The PAS Consultant suggested that some training requirements would be tailored differently for Members and Officers and considerations of roles were advised. It was also suggested that workshops for Local Plan discussions could be a good option to encourage open discussions and also to have better clarity of Officer and Member roles.
- Possible Officer training required for complex subjects i.e. grey belt areas.
- A suggestion that the recommendation to continue active Senior Leadership support should include all Officers and Members who could provide influence.
- Was it expected that all the recommendations would be implemented? – In response the PAS Consultants advised that the recommendations should be implemented, were necessary and valid and the priority was to have an action plan for implementing the recommendations. It was felt that building relations was the overriding issue. The Executive Director advised the Board that the suggested recommendations would go to Cabinet in March along with an action plan.
- Suggestions that cross party working groups should include a chair but not include the portfolio holder, to encourage neutrality.
- Why it had taken so long for a PAS report when individual issues had been raised by Members for some time?
- Urgency of progressing the Local Plan due to speculative applications. – In response the Leader explained that the formula for housing and infrastructure provision had changed since the National Planning Policy Framework rules in 2022. However, this had been challenged with the Minister and therefore the rules would be revisited. There was also a statutory requirement to educate children.
- How would the recommendations be progressed and when would the action plan be published to ensure accountability, transparency and mitigation of risks? – The Executive Director explained that the recommendations and action plan would go to Cabinet in March. In response Members expressed the view that

Agenda Item 4

Overview and Scrutiny Board
10th February 2026

considerations to Cabinet would delay progress and earlier actions were necessary to meet the statutory deadline. The Leader advised that she was happy to review timelines, however, external advice may also be sought and the first Planning Subgroup was meeting the next day to discuss the recommendations. The Executive Director added that some recommendations could be expedited.

- Clearer communication on enforcement performance was also raised. – Members were informed that this would form part of the action plan, along with timescales.
- Resource and staffing capacity issues, with Members sometimes having difficulties contacting Planning Officers. What plans were being put in place? – In response the Executive Director informed that the medium-term strategies were being explored.
- To review the necessity for Members to contact Planning Officers, prior to planning meetings taking place. – It was agreed that specific training would be put in place to assist with this.
- Why there was a breakdown in relations with WCC and when would a Memo of Understanding (MOU) be in place for transport planning support? – The Leader explained that Officers were working to rectify the issues and would be forming a different approach for this issue.
- Concerns about historic delays and political management of the plan was also raised by Members.
- A requirement for consistent updates and improved engagement mechanisms was also requested. – In response the Portfolio Holder suggested that Members provided details, who would liaise with Planning Officers.
- What was a realistic timescale for the Council to consider the adoption of Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)? – In response the PAS Consultant suggested that it would take 12 months to draft a plan, requiring viability evidence to underpin the plan.
- Some Members had frustrations with past working groups not working collaboratively and lacked inconsistencies in Member attendance. Other Members were frustrated that numerous recommendations had been suggested in group meetings but had not been carried through. It was also suggested that future working group meetings needed to be open and honest and learn from the past to move forwards.
- Stream retention and transparency for public confidence was agreed as recommendation.

Following the above discussions two motions were moved, seconded and agreed.

RESOLVED that

- 1) Joint Officer-Member relationship building training be included as a formal action within the PAS Action Plan; and

- 2) The PAS Action Plan be brought to Cabinet at the earliest possible opportunity (earlier than the provisional date of 26th March 2026, if feasible).

[Between the hours of 8:49pm and 9:00pm the meeting was adjourned for a short comfort break].

92/25

LOCAL GOVERNMENT RE-ORGANISATION (UPDATE)

The Assistant Director of Corporate Services and Transformation presented her report with the following main points raised:

- Worcestershire remained at Stage 3 of the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) process.
- Two proposals had been submitted and the statutory consultation 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 Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) "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 (12), largely due to uncertainties in costings and capacity.
- Corporate risks had been redeveloped and would be reported to the Audit, Standards and Governance meeting held on 17th February 2026.

Members discussed the following:

- How much interest was expected from the public for the Statutory Consultation? – In response it was explained that the consultation was focused on reaching public bodies primarily but was open to all residents and businesses. Parish Councils would be contacted separately also. The Portfolio Holder also urged Members to ensure that the public was aware of the consultation.
- The Portfolio Holder also commented that although it was difficult for the Council to navigate the unknowns, housekeeping would be essential for future implementation, regardless of the decision made.

The Chairman concluded the Board had previously decided on receiving updates at every meeting and options for deeper scrutiny could be revisited once workloads allowed.

RESOLVED that the Local Government Re-Organisation Update be noted.

93/25 **WORCESTERSHIRE HEALTH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE (UPDATE)**

There was no update provided for the reporting of the Worcestershire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC) as the meeting scheduled for 9th February 2026 had been cancelled and re-scheduled for 11th February 2026.

94/25 **FINANCE AND BUDGET WORKING GROUP (UPDATE)**

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.

RESOLVED that the Finance and Budget Working Group update be noted.

95/25 **CABINET WORK PROGRAMME**

The Cabinet Work Programme was presented for Members' consideration.

It was requested and agreed by the Board that the cabinet item for the Introduction of Enforcement of Littering from Vehicles be added to the Board's Work Programme.

RESOLVED that the content of the Cabinet Work Programme be noted as per the preamble above.

96/25 **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD WORK PROGRAMME**

The Overview and Scrutiny Board Work Programme was considered by Members.

RESOLVED that the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme be noted as per the preamble above.

97/25 **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY ACTION SHEET**

The Overview and Scrutiny Action Sheet were considered by the Board.

RESOLVED that the Overview and Scrutiny Action Sheet be noted.

98/25 **TO CONSIDER ANY URGENT BUSINESS, DETAILS OF WHICH HAVE BEEN NOTIFIED TO THE ASSISTANT DIRECTOR 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 for consideration.

99/25

TO CONSIDER, AND IF CONSIDERED APPROPRIATE, TO PASS THE FOLLOWING RESOLUTION TO EXCLUDE THE PUBLIC FROM THE MEETING DURING THE CONSIDERATION OF ITEM(S) OF BUSINESS CONTAINING EXEMPT INFORMATION:-

RESOLVED: that under Section 100 I of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended, the public be excluded from the meeting during the consideration of the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Part I of scheme 12A to the Act, as amended, the relevant paragraph of that part, in each case, being as set out below and that it is in the public interest to do so:-

Minute Item No. 100 – Town Centre Parking and ANPR Update
Minute Item No. 101 – EV Charger Profit Sharing Arrangements Update

100/25

TOWN CENTRE PARKING AND ANPR (UPDATE)

The Assistant Director Regeneration and Property Services updated the Board on the Town Centre Parking and Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) update.

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. Options were presented to introduce time limits, 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.

After the presentation the Board made the following comments:

Churchfields Car Park

- Some Members expressed the view that ASB issues would remain if the car park reopened and felt that the brownfield site would be better used for build extra housing for the District. – In response the Leader advised that the primary position would be to carry out remediation works to the car park and address the ASB concerns.
- School Drive Car Park could provide relief but was located quite far away from the Town Centre, however, Churchfields Car Park was more suitably located for people using the Town Centre.
- With the upcoming LGR considerations and to leave a legacy, carrying out remediation works and re-opening the car park would assist with the key issue of parking within the Town Centre.

Sanders Park

- Some Members regularly visited the park and hadn't experienced problems with parking availability.
- Members were concerned that the potential consideration to introduce charges to the car park could potentially deter some to visit the park. – In response the Leader reassured Members that there were no immediate proposals to introduce parking charges.

School Drive Car Park

- Concerns that parking charges in North Bromsgrove Car Park could be a deterrent for the use of the local gym near the area. A Member suggested season ticket charges to reduce costs for gym membership holders and a consideration for potential revenue for the Council. – In response the Leader reminded Members that the Council did support the Leisure Centre through the Covid pandemic. Although the Leisure Centre had not contacted the Council to discuss season ticket ideas, the suggestion would be explored further if contact was made.
- LGR – Concerns that there would be inadequate car spaces available for North Bromsgrove High School. – In response the Leader informed the Board that the issue had been raised by with the Board of Education.
- Reports of numerous bins in the area which needed to be addressed.

Stourbridge Road Car Park

- Members expressed the view that the Stourbridge Road Car Park was a prime spot for the Town Centre and convenient for Council Staff. – In response Officers explained that there was a development agreement in place and a planning application on the site; therefore the ongoing use of the car park was unlikely and should be excluded when considering future capacity needs.

General Discussions

- Manual checks were encouraged by Members to check the validity for the current car parking usage in the Bromsgrove Town Centre. – In response the Assistant Director Regeneration and Property Services explained that the findings were carried out during the strategic planning review but shared concerns that the use of the car parks within the report were out of date and agreed that a more comprehensive usage strategy were required. Contact would be made with Wychavon Parking Services to discuss costings and it was agreed that further findings would be reported to the Board in due course. During discussions Members also queried how the data analysis checks had been carried out for the car park usage. – In response Officers explained that certain times of the day were analysed.
- Members expressed the view that future demands for parking had not been highlighted in the Local Plan.
- What was the current plans for the agreed extra out of town Civil Enforcement Officers (CEOs)? – The Assistant Director responded that the details would be discussed with Wychavon Parking Services and would be reported back to the Board. The Leader also added that 25% of resources were used for CEOs in the rural areas.

- Exploration of outsourcing to introduce ANPR at Council owned car parks was sought. – However, in response the Executive Director informed the Board that the contract agreement was in place for 5 years (which would run after LGR).

In conclusion the Chairman suggested the following be reported back to a future meeting for remediation costs for the Churchfields Car Park; and an exploration of a business case for parking permits at School Drive Car Park.

RESOLVED that

- a) The update on Town Centre Parking and ANPR be noted;
- b) Remediation costs for the Churchfields Car Park be provided for future reporting; and
- c) Explore a business case for parking permits at School Drive Car Park.

(During consideration of this item, Members discussed matters that necessitated the disclosure of exempt information. It was therefore agreed to move to exclude the press and public prior to any debate on the grounds that information would be revealed that included information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information)). However, there is no exempt information contained within this minute).

101/25

EV CHARGER PROFIT SHARING ARRANGEMENTS (UPDATE)

The Assistant Director Environmental Housing and Property Services presented the Electrical Vehicle (EV) Charger profit sharing arrangements update to the Board.

The main points were discussed:

- 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.

Agenda Item 4

Overview and Scrutiny Board
10th February 2026

- 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 could be another option, however, compensation may be payable, given the expenditure incurred to date for installations.

After the presentation, Members made the following comments:

- How was the contract procured? – In response the Board were informed that it had been through an open tender process with only one bid received.
- Who dealt with the repair and maintenance on site? – It was advised that this was covered by the common contract clause.
- What happened with the contract when the unitary authority took over? – In response it was advised that the contract would be carried over to the unitary authority and maintained.
- How the Council obtained the current usage of the units? – In response the Board noted that the Council were in the process of seeking to gain access to the contractor's portal to gain this data.

RESOLVED that the EV Charger Profit Sharing Arrangements update be noted.

(During consideration of this item, Members discussed matters that necessitated the disclosure of exempt information. It was therefore agreed to move to exclude the press and public prior to any debate on the grounds that information would be revealed that included information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information)). However, there is no exempt information contained within this minute).

The meeting closed at 10.35 p.m.

Chairman

Cabinet
2026

25th March

Shared Homelessness Strategy 2026-2031

Relevant Portfolio Holder	Councillor Kit Taylor
Portfolio Holder Consulted	Yes
Relevant Head of Service	Judith Willis Assistant Director of Community and Housing Services
Report Author	Job Title: Amanda Delahunty Housing Development and Enabling Manager Contact email: a.delahunty@bromsgroveandredditch.gov.uk Contact Tel: 01527 881269
Wards Affected	No specific ward relevance
Ward Councillor(s) consulted	Not Applicable
Relevant Strategic Priority	Housing
Non-Key Decision	
If you have any questions about this report, please contact the report author in advance of the meeting.	

1. **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Cabinet is requested to RESOLVE that: -

1) the draft Shared Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2026-2031 and action plan be approved for public consultation for six weeks starting 13th April 2026.

2. **BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 The Homelessness Act 2002 requires all housing authorities to have a homelessness strategy in place which is based on a review of all forms of homelessness in their local authority area.
- 2.2 It is intended that this Strategy will sit under the existing Worcestershire Strategic Housing Board Plan.
- 2.3 In developing this strategy a comprehensive assessment of the nature and extent of homelessness across the local authority areas was carried out by analysing homelessness data and taking account of the views of customers and partner organisations. A consultation event was held on the 30th September 2025 with partners and stakeholders, to consider housing from both a strategic and client-based perspective.

This event included partners from a variety of statutory and voluntary organisations.

- 2.4 Service users were also consulted and supported to complete a questionnaire. This provided them with an opportunity to feedback on their experiences including those in temporary accommodation, young people, rough sleepers and victims/survivors of domestic abuse.
- 2.5 The National Plan to End Homelessness, published by the Government October 2025, is a long-term strategy with the overarching vision that: Homelessness should be rare, brief and non-recurring and that people who do become homeless should receive support quickly and effectively. Local authorities are expected to move from crisis to prevention. A key requirement will involve greater collaboration across government departments. There are five pillars of the strategy –
1. Universal Prevention
 2. Targeted Prevention
 3. Preventing Crisis
 4. Emergency Response
 5. Recovery and Stability
- 2.6 This new Shared Homelessness Strategy, in partnership with Bromsgrove, Malvern Hills, Wychavon and Wyre Forest, builds on the success of our Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2022-25, which emphasised prevention, intervention, recovery and joined-up systems, which are core themes echoed in the new National Plan.
- 2.7 The strategy sets out how the Council will invest in early intervention and support systems to stop homelessness before it happens. The Council will strengthen cross-service collaboration (health, jobcentres, criminal justice, social care) to identify risks early. A ‘duty to collaborate’ for key public services (planned through future legislation) will support this approach.
- 2.8 The local authorities will aim to eliminate unlawful use of B&Bs for families (beyond statutory short stays) and improve the quality of temporary accommodation and aim to halve long-term rough sleeping.
- 2.9 Local authorities are also expected to tackle the structural causes of homelessness by building more affordable and social homes and support the reform of the private rented sector working with landlords and tenants to help them to sustain their accommodation where at all possible. The new Crisis and Resilience Fund will be key to providing welfare support to those who have experienced an income shock or unexpected bill, such as boiler replacement.

- 2.10 The Government is providing nearly £3.5bn funding for homelessness prevention and rough sleeping services from 2026/27–2028/29.
- 2.11 Funding streams have been amalgamated into a new Homelessness, Rough Sleeping and Domestic Abuse Grant.
- 2.12 Worcestershire has aligned its strategic approach to homelessness with these national priorities with a plan to shift from Crisis to Prevention. The strategy focuses resources upstream, supporting people earlier (before accommodation loss). The shared action plan has measurable targets based on the national outcomes framework.
- 2.13 Progress reporting is tied to funding conditions. This means expanding preventative services such as advice services, financial resilience support and co-ordinated multi-agency pathways that intervene before homelessness occurs.
- 2.14 The national plan emphasises coordination across services. At the local level, this reinforces: Multi-agency structures like housing partnerships, health and wellbeing boards, prison and probation and specialist support teams which already exist in Worcestershire.
- 2.15 The National Plan highlights that the Government expects closer collaboration between housing, health, social care, children's services, prison and probation and voluntary sector partners. Better case-sharing, data exchanges and joint pathways, particularly for people with complex needs.
- 2.16 The shared strategy aspires towards this more integrated model to prevent gaps and reduce repeat homelessness.
- 2.17 The consolidation of funding into a single grant over a three-year period gives the local authority's partners greater stability and flexibility to prioritise local needs (e.g., rough sleeping services, domestic abuse related housing support). There is a requirement to spend a minimum proportion on prevention and staffing. This allows improved local commissioning of support services, such as tailored housing support and landlord engagement schemes.
- 2.18 The outcomes framework metrics (e.g., rough sleeping rates, B&B usage, prevention success) will provide a basis for performance review. The local authorities will collect and monitor relevant homelessness data, publish regular progress reporting, and adjust strategies based on outcomes. Creating a more outcome-focused, transparent approach to homelessness planning at the local level.

2.19 The local authorities will work closely together and with regional NHS and public health partners.

2.20 Each of the local authorities will develop their own action plan which will sit under the overarching, shared action plan, by October 2026.

3. OPERATIONAL ISSUES

3.1 The delivery of the Shared Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy actions will be overseen by the Housing Strategy Team.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

4.1 The new Homelessness, Rough Sleeping and Domestic Abuse Grant will provide funding to develop services to support the strategy and a report has already been taken to members to provide the detail on spending priorities for the next three years.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 The Council has a duty under the Homelessness Act 2002 to conduct a review of the nature and extent of homelessness in its District every 5 years and to develop a strategy setting out how services will be delivered in the future to tackle homelessness and the available resources to prevent and relieve homelessness.

5.2 The Homelessness Reduction Act came into force in April 2018, and places new legal duties on local housing authorities so that everyone who is homelessness or at risk of homelessness will have access to early meaningful help, irrespective of their priority need status, so long as they are eligible for assistance.

5.3 The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 requires local authorities to collaborate with Tier One authorities to provide safe and supported accommodation for victims/survivors of domestic abuse.

5.4. The Renters Rights Act 2025 shifts the local authority role from discretionary enforcement to a mandatory duty to enforce landlord legislation. The abolition of Section 21 no fault evictions is likely to result in more tenancies being ending by Section 8 Notices for rent

arrears and provides an opportunity for local authorities to work with landlords to, wherever possible, sustain tenancies. The Council has utilised Homelessness, Rough Sleeping and Domestic Abuse grant to provide a new service with Citizens Advice to support this work.

6. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

Local Government Re-organisation

- 6.1 LGR does not alter the statutory homelessness duties set out under the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 and Housing Act 1996, including prevention (s.195), relief (s.189B), interim accommodation (s.188) and the duty to provide free advice and information (s.179).
- 6.2 The Government's National Plan to End Homelessness sets out a cross-government expectation that homelessness cannot be reduced without multi-agency integration
- 6.3 Both the National Plan to End Homelessness and the Homelessness Code of Guidance stress the need for coordinated arrangements across the below areas,
- health
 - social care
 - children's services
 - criminal justice
 - and domestic abuse services

and it is considered that the most appropriate method is to have a shared strategy approach across as much of Worcestershire to ensure there is a coherent approach to our homelessness duties until the results of LGR are provided.

- 6.4 A single Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy must be produced for any new authority, and this strategy and action plan has been produced so that it is able to be incorporated into either one or two unitary authorities until a new single strategy for the new area, based on a fresh homelessness review is completed as required by the Homelessness Code of Guidance

Relevant Council Priority

- 6.2 Housing – The strategy provides a framework for a range of services which support this Council priority.

Climate Change Implications

- 6.3 There are no direct climate change implications from the strategy itself but individual actions/services may have an impact.

Equalities and Diversity Implications

- 6.4 The strategy seeks to deliver a range of services for homeless households and draws on ways to improve the work of the Council in developing services and preparing links, pathways and referrals between services to prevent homelessness in the first place or minimise its impact when it happens.
- 6.5 The design of services which tackle the root causes of homelessness such as poverty, health inequalities and adversity in childhood will include ensuring that providers have appropriate policies and training in place to make sure that there is no adverse impact on equalities groups

7. RISK MANAGEMENT

- 7.1 If the strategy is not approved the Council will not be legally compliant. Furthermore, it is likely that more households who are threatened with homelessness, or who are in housing need, will have limited options for support to sustain their accommodation or find alternative suitable accommodation that meets their needs. If they have to make a homeless approach this could lead to the following negative outcomes:

- Increased B&B costs
- Increased rough sleeping in the District
- Impacts on physical and mental health, educational achievement, ability to work and similar through increased homelessness

8. APPENDICES and BACKGROUND PAPERS

Appendix 1 – Shared Homelessness Strategy and Action Plan

9. REPORT SIGN OFF

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Cabinet
2026

25th March

Department	Name and Job Title	Date
Portfolio Holder	Kit Taylor Cabinet Member for Planning, WRS and Strategic Housing	20.2.26
Lead Director / Head of Service	Judith Willis Assistant Director Community and Housing Services	24.2.26
Financial Services	Julie Lorraine, Director of Finance	24.2.26
Legal and Democratic Services	Nicola Cummings – Principal Solicitor – Governance and Jess Bayley-Hill, Principal Democratic Services Officer	25.02.26
Policy Team (if equalities implications apply)	Rebecca Green Policy Manager	24.2.26
Climate Change (if climate change implications apply)	Matthew Bough Strategic Housing & Business Support Manager	N/A

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Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy

Page 33
2026 - 2031

Our Vision - to end homelessness and rough sleeping and where it has not been possible to prevent it from occurring, ensure that it is rare, brief and non-recurring

Contents

Foreword	3
Chair of Worcestershire Housing Board	3
1. Introduction	4
2. Pillar 1: Universal prevention - tackling the root causes of homelessness	6
3. Pillar 2: Targeted prevention - targeted support for people at risk of homelessness	9
4. Pillar 3: Preventing crisis - helping people stay in their homes	16
5. Pillar 4: Improving emergency responses - improving temporary accommodation and making people’s experiences better if they do become homeless	18
6. Pillar 5: Recovery and preventing repeat homelessness - ensuring people don’t experience homelessness more than once and halving long term rough sleeping.....	20
7. Governance arrangements.....	22
8. Partnerships	23
Appendix 1 - Action Plan	26
Appendix 2 - Funding the strategy.....	36
Appendix 3 - Glossary of terms.....	40

Foreword

Chair of Worcestershire Housing Board

I am proud to introduce this shared Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2026-31 for Bromsgrove District Council, Malvern Hills District Council, Redditch Borough Council, Wychavon District Council and Wyre Forest District Council.

Homelessness and rough sleeping remain among the most visible and urgent challenges facing our communities today. They are stark reminders of inequality, vulnerability, and the need for collective action. It is not simply the absence of a home, but the absence of security, dignity, and opportunity. Every child should grow up with the security of a home, and every adult deserves a safe place to live that provides stability and where they have a chance to thrive.

Tackling homelessness and rough sleeping continues to be of utmost importance for each of the councils involved in developing and delivering on this strategy.

Our vision, aligned with the Government's national strategy, will focus on 5 pillars to end homelessness:

Universal prevention: tackling the root causes of homelessness across the whole population.

Targeted prevention: providing tailored support to people who are more likely to face homelessness.

Preventing crisis: early identification of people who need help and putting in place personalised interventions that meet their needs.

Improving emergency responses: to ensure that if people do become homeless, they receive high quality support and that homelessness is brief.

Recovery and preventing repeat homelessness: helping people rebuild their lives with the right support.

This strategy will also take a renewed approach to the support and intervention for families with children in temporary accommodation to minimise the associated risk and long-term impact this has on them.

We recognise that homelessness is not simply a housing issue, but a complex social challenge shaped by health, employment, family breakdown, and wider economic pressures. Tackling homelessness requires collaboration across government, local authorities, health and social care, the voluntary sector, and communities themselves. That is why we have developed this strategy in collaboration with a range of stakeholders, which is essential to the successful implementation of our vision, as well as with the voice of those with lived experience of homelessness.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the organisations and individuals who have contributed towards the development of this strategy.

Governance will sit with the Worcestershire Housing Board- recognising that tackling homelessness not only benefits the individual but also benefits the economy, the health of our population, reduces crime and disorder and reduces costs for the taxpayer.

This strategy will govern our approach for five years and will see us beyond Local Government Reorganisation (LGR). However, given our experiences over recent years in tackling homelessness and the ever-changing landscape, it is vital that it remains responsive and will be kept under constant review.



Vic Allison, Chief Executive of Malvern Hills and Wychavon District Councils and Chair of the Worcestershire Housing Board

1. Introduction

Our vision is to **end homelessness and rough sleeping and where it isn't possible to prevent it from occurring, ensure it is rare, brief and non-recurring.**

We will tackle homelessness and rough sleeping through our work on the 5 pillars to end homelessness in line with the Government's National Plan to End Homelessness: universal prevention, targeted prevention, preventing crisis, improving emergency responses and recovery.

The district councils collaborating on the development and implementation of this strategy have a proven track record of working closely together to prevent and tackle homelessness across our districts. This is the third shared homelessness strategy to be developed, and the achievements of our last strategy are highlighted below.

1.1 Achievements of the last strategy

The previous Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2022 - 2025 was developed by all six Local Housing Authorities (LHAs) in Worcestershire and focused on the then three main tenets of the national strategy: *prevention, intervention and recovery* as well as increasing the supply of temporary and permanent accommodation.

- Established a **countywide Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy Group**.
- Developed a **Prison Leavers Protocol** and the pre-release homeless panel.
- Developed **stakeholder involvement and People With Lived Experience (PWLE) in reviewing services** through regular countywide meetings, bespoke focus groups, and questionnaires.
- Quarterly **reviews of data collection and deep dives into client groups** to inform decision making and share learning.

- **Joint training** in homelessness, Mental Capacity Act, psychologically informed environments, Care Act 2014, Complex Adults Risk Management framework, self-neglect etc.
- Support for those with mental health illnesses through development of **Mental Health Link Worker posts** and non-medical interventions
- **Delivery of the Rough Sleeper initiative** (target 563 p.a):
 - 2024/25 - **637 people supported**
 - 2023/24 - **837 people supported**
 - 2022/23 - **713 people supported**
- **Housing and support plans developed for the Target Priority Group (TPG)** (the most complex rough sleepers)
- **Cost of living plans, welfare assistance and bespoke support** to reduce homelessness developed across the county
- **Safe accommodation units set up for survivors of domestic abuse**
- **Supported provision of domestic abuse support services** including through the Domestic Abuse Support Service (West Mercia Women's Aid), Sanctuary Scheme and Domestic Abuse Coordinator and specialist Housing Officers (all councils)

There are also some actions from the previous strategy that are still underway at the time of writing this strategy including:

- Undertaking a **review of peer support models** in place in some areas of the county to share learning and best practice and explore whether the models could be expanded.
- **Explore opportunities for a greater range of supported and step-down accommodation** available following the supported housing needs assessment and strategy. The Supported Housing (Regulatory Oversight) Act 2023 has yet to be implemented so this action was deferred.

1.2 The current situation: homelessness review

To inform and provide the evidence base for the strategic objectives and actions within this strategy, a homelessness review was undertaken.

The review includes a compilation of homelessness data and trends, mapping of services and analysis of gaps in provision, service provider feedback and the feedback of People With Lived Experience (PWLE). We also held a stakeholder engagement event in September 2025 to gather the views of statutory and voluntary sector organisations and co design the strategy.



1.3 The plan to prevent and tackle homelessness in our districts: long-term vision and short-term priorities

In line with the Government’s national strategy, our long-term vision is to end homelessness and rough sleeping and where it isn’t possible to prevent it from occurring, that it is rare, brief and non-recurring.

Our strategy and action plan are centred around the 5 pillars to end homelessness as set out in the national strategy:

1. Universal prevention: tackling the root causes of homelessness across the whole population.
2. Targeted prevention: providing tailored support to people who are more likely to face homelessness.
3. Preventing crisis: early identification of people who need help and putting in place personalised interventions that meet their needs.

4. Improving emergency responses: to ensure that if people do become homeless, they receive high quality support and that homelessness is brief.
5. Recovery and preventing repeat homelessness: helping people rebuild their lives with the right support.

The action plan defines our priorities over the next 5 years to achieve our vision, and contains short-, medium- and long-term priorities.

1.4 Strategy structure

The strategy firstly explores the local issues that need to be addressed against each of the five pillars in the national strategy, based on the Homelessness Review undertaken in 2025.

Secondly it defines how we will take action to address local issues through the Strategy Action Plan, the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy Group and local homelessness partnerships, and comprehensive governance arrangements under the Worcestershire Housing Board.

Finally, it outlines the funding and resource available to implement the strategy and deliver services.

1.5 Partnership working to codesign the strategy

The LHAs recognise the role our statutory and voluntary sector partners play in supporting the work we do, and how they go beyond the delivery of our statutory services through providing complimentary statutory and non-statutory services. However, this strategy is focused primarily on the role of LHAs and in meeting their legal responsibilities. It is a legal obligation of the LHAs to have a strategy in place and for it to be compliant with the Homelessness Act 2002. In developing the strategy, we have followed the legislative and good practice guidance and reviewed homelessness strategies from across the country.

2. Pillar 1: Universal prevention – tackling the root causes of homelessness

2.1 Increasing the supply of social and affordable housing

The Worcestershire Housing Strategy 2023-40, developed by the six Worcestershire LHAs and partners provides a long-term housing strategy for Worcestershire centred around four priority areas:

- Economic growth and jobs
- Quality and standards
- Health and wellbeing
- Net zero carbon and climate change

Specifically in relation to housing growth, the focus is on developing a 5+ year public sector pipeline of development sites, and the development of housing delivery capacity e.g. the exploration of direct delivery housing models for those LHAs who do not currently have this capacity.

There are two established delivery groups working to implement Housing Strategy actions and these are overseen by the Worcestershire Housing Board, which also oversees the implementation of this Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy. This arrangement will ensure synergy between the two strategies.

In terms of permanent housing all the councils collaborate with developers and registered providers to deliver market and affordable housing across the county. This work is underpinned by the councils Local Plans which identify a wide range of tenures and types of housing including low-cost home ownership and social/ affordable rent properties.

There is a shortage in the supply of housing, particularly in the provision of affordable housing with an annual requirement of all housing tenures of approximately 1,911 per annum across the districts that share this strategy.

Local Plan numbers are informed by a combination of the standard methodology requirement, Housing Market Assessments and Housing Needs Surveys to determine the required mix of housing.

2.2 Making the best use of existing housing and that it is allocated to those who need it most

All LHAs sharing this strategy have their own allocations policies to ensure that much needed affordable housing is allocated to those who need it most. In each LHA area, the demand for affordable housing far outstrips supply. At the time of writing, Local Government Reorganisation could see the abolition of all six district councils in Worcestershire and the introduction of one or two unitary authorities and with it the requirement to develop new allocations policies for the new organisation(s).

Feedback from the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy Stakeholder Event indicated that partners felt that the “managed move” process whereby Registered Providers (RPs) move households within their own stock and therefore negating the need for a homelessness approach could be an area to try to seek consistency on. This would mean less upheaval for households and reduced service demand on local authority housing teams.

The councils also collaborate with registered providers to ensure best use is made of existing stock including tackling under occupation and low demand schemes.

Whilst evictions from social housing are relatively low locally as they are nationally, there are more opportunities to prevent homelessness from social housing tenancies at an earlier stage through the establishment of pre-eviction panels and improved collaborative working. The government references a new toolkit in the National Plan to End Homelessness to provide advice for providers and councils on strengthening tenant engagement to reduce homelessness risks.

2.3 Supported housing

As with general needs affordable housing, the demand for supported housing is far higher than the supply locally and nationally. People need supported accommodation for a range of reasons e.g. young people needing support with life skills, people with mental health needs, people with substance misuse needs, survivors of domestic abuse. Some cohorts of homeless households will need more than just a housing solution to lift them out of homelessness and will require a sustainable, supported, and appropriate environment.

The Government's new Social and Affordable Homes Programme includes new flexibility for accommodation where the level of design and adaptation results in higher costs and calls on providers to produce ambitious bids for new supported housing.

The Worcestershire Housing Strategy delivery groups are exploring opportunities with RPs to deliver supported housing.

To improve standards across existing supported accommodation and tackle rogue landlords the government is introducing a new licensing regime following the consultation on the Supported Housing (Regulatory Oversight) Act 2023. As part of the implementation of this Act, the councils will be required to develop a Supported Housing Strategy by 31st March 2027.

2.4 Private rented sector accommodation

The Renters Rights Act seeks to give more security to tenants by abolishing section 21 'no fault' evictions which has been a significant cause of homelessness across the districts. The Act also brings with it a range of other measures to strengthen tenants' rights e.g. empowering tenants to challenge unreasonable rent increases, bringing an end to rental bidding and reducing barriers to accessing private rented accommodation such as outlawing discrimination against prospective tenants with children or who receive benefits, and preventing landlords from charging high rent in advance payments.

Making sure both tenants and landlords understand their rights under the Act will play an important part in reducing the risk of homelessness.

For the first time, the Act also includes the provision for councils to issue civil penalties against landlords who evict their tenants illegally.

Whilst the local authorities sharing this strategy welcome the intention of this legislation, there remains concern that the Act will lead to private landlords exiting the market prior the major implementation milestones e.g. no-fault evictions being removed in May 2026, which may lead to a spike in homelessness. Measures to mitigate this situation are considered within the strategy action plan.

As there is not enough social housing to meet demand, helping people to access private rented accommodation remains a priority across the districts - through rent deposits, bonds and private sector leasing schemes.

The councils will also be considering as part of this strategy how they can build relationships with private landlords to both improve access to private rented accommodation and prevent homelessness from private rented accommodation e.g. by encouraging landlords to work with the councils if they have a tenant who is at risk of homelessness.

Work with private sector landlords and letting agents also enables councils to meet some housing needs in parts of the county, although local housing allowance rates do make this challenging. The councils have been innovative in attracting landlords to provide accommodation through landlord forums, the use of rent bonds and deposits, social letting agencies and private sector leasing schemes, and this will continue during the lifetime of the strategy.

It should be noted that in some areas of the county, there are particular pressures on private sector accommodation with both Home Office and criminal justice providers looking to purchase/lease private rented sector accommodation for asylum seekers and prison leavers. In some cases, this has led to homelessness situations as existing tenants are served with notice and has led to reducing private sector accommodation available to homeless households.

2.5 Maximising income, financial inclusion and welfare assistance

Supporting low-income households to be able to pay their rent and other essential living costs to sustain their accommodation is critical to preventing homelessness. Recent years funding from the Household Support Fund, and Discretionary Housing Payments have led to some positive outcomes locally in the face of the cost-of-living crisis. It is expected that the new Crisis Resilience Fund will build on this bespoke approach.

Some councils involved in this strategy also have specialist Financial Inclusion Officers who work directly with people making homeless approaches due to rent arrears who are struggling with the cost of living. Their role is to ensure that their income is maximised

through ensuring they are receiving correct benefit entitlements, assistance to apply for benefit back payments and working with local services to increase their income through quality employment. Help is also provided by tenancy sustainment or support workers on issues like budgeting and maximising benefit entitlement,

Continuing to provide discretionary welfare support to ensure low-income households do not become homeless is a key priority for this strategy and action plan.

3. Pillar 2: Targeted prevention – targeted support for people at risk of homelessness

3.1 Collaboration to prevent homelessness

The LHAs and partner agencies have a proven record of working collaboratively to prevent homelessness. The Worcestershire Housing Board comprises of senior officers from across sectors who oversee the implementation of housing and homelessness strategies. A countywide Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy Group has been in existence for many years comprising of LHAs, MHCLG, statutory and voluntary sector partners.

Feeding into the countywide group, each LHA has a local homelessness partnership. This arrangement will continue to provide assurance that the strategy action plan is implemented, outcomes are achieved against the strategy targets - and that people that are at risk of homelessness are identified early and linked into the right housing and support services.

The government intends to introduce a new ‘duty to collaborate’ requiring public services to work together to prevent homelessness and support those at crisis point. Locally we developed a ‘commitment to refer’ which goes beyond the existing ‘duty to refer’ which requires certain public bodies to notify the LHA should they identify a household who may become homeless within 56 days. This is in recognition that there are many partners who will identify a potential homelessness situation and not just those included in the legislation.

It is the intention of this strategy to scrutinise adherence to the duty to refer locally and prepare for the new ‘duty to collaborate’.

3.2 Addressing barriers to accessing services

Some groups of people face barriers to accessing services because they may not be delivered in a way that meets their needs. For example, an action in the previous homelessness strategy was to understand the barriers for women rough sleepers in accessing services that are often communal provisions for both male and female rough sleepers. This work is ongoing at the time of writing this strategy. We also know that young people, care leavers, people from ethnic minority backgrounds, disabled people and LGBT+ people also face barriers.

For young people and care leavers the LHAs and Children’s Services work closely together and have developed a longstanding Care Leavers Protocol and a 16/17-year-old Protocol to clarify joint working arrangements. Each district has supported accommodation for young people, which in recent years has been at risk due to a change in funding structures and has meant LHAs have needed to meet the shortfall in County Council funding. It is a priority for supported accommodation to be in place for homeless young people in order for them to have a safe and supported environment for them to develop the necessary life skills needed to live a successful future life. In 2021 Wychavon District Council bought and refurbished a 10-room property to provide supported accommodation for young people and have also committed to purchasing a further property in its latest council plan.

Locally we also know that people with a physical disability can find it hard to access adapted temporary accommodation due to the lack of availability. This can then lead to extended stays in hospital and a delay in discharge. Wyre Forest District Council opened a new temporary accommodation facility in 2025 which includes a small number of fully adapted rooms. Our intention is to explore opportunities to work with colleagues across the health system to increase the availability of adapted temporary accommodation.

We also know locally that people with multiple and complex needs face barriers to accessing accommodation, for example those that are using drugs and alcohol and with mental health support needs. Worcestershire Public Health have developed a Memorandum of Understanding between services to address this issue.

Working with People With Lived Experience (PWLE) of homelessness and accessing services is also a priority for this strategy as it is critical that we design accessible, inclusive and culturally sensitive, trauma informed services.

We already regularly undertake lived experience engagement with certain groups, for example survivors of domestic abuse and rough sleepers. However, we are seeking to go further with this strategy and ensure PWLE are contributing to, and overseeing, the strategy actions and performance via the Countywide Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Group.

3.3 Interventions to prevent homelessness for higher risk groups

There are many challenges that affect the higher risk groups and these include a severe housing shortage, silting up or undersupply of supported accommodation especially for those with complex needs and some poor-quality supported accommodation.

3.3.1 Single people

Single homeless households make up 57% of all housing register applicants across the districts, with the largest group being single adults aged 35-65 (26%).

Between 2022-2025, 54% of applicants owed a homeless duty were single adults:

65% were already homeless (relief duty)
37% were threatened with homelessness (prevention duty)

Single homeless people often face multiple needs: mental ill health, substance misuse, social isolation, and barriers to employment. Many do not qualify as having a priority need under legislation, limiting access to settled housing and statutory support. They are overrepresented among rough sleepers and those in insecure arrangements (e.g. sofa surfing), leading to poor health, social exclusion, and instability. Even those without vulnerabilities struggle due to unaffordable rents and precarious finances.

This homelessness strategy aims for early intervention, clear routes to housing, and multi-agency collaboration (local authorities, housing providers, health, probation, voluntary sector).

The LHAs use national homelessness funding to provide both accommodation-based and floating support, rent deposits and rent in advance to help access accommodation and No First Night Out/No Second Night Out provision and access to furniture.

3.3.2 Prison leavers

A small but significant number of homeless applications are from those leaving prison. We hold fortnightly prison meetings to ensure that where a Duty to Refer has been made, individuals are provided with a homelessness assessment prior to release wherever possible.

However, housing options are often limited due to the individual not meeting the priority need threshold under homelessness legislation. With limited supported accommodation available, Community Accommodation Service (CAS3) accommodation has provided a much-needed lifeline for those who otherwise might be released without an accommodation offer which may result in rough sleeping.

Recalls from this accommodation remain a concern (circa 50%) and a

positive housing pathway from CAS 3 accommodation needs to be explored.

3.3.3 Rough sleepers/those at risk of rough sleeping

Rough sleeping can be a dangerous and isolating experience. People who sleep rough are more likely to be victims of crime and violence. The longer a person remains on the streets, or actively engages in street life culture, the more likely it will have significant implications on their physical and mental health. Female rough sleepers are particularly at risk and may require specialist or women only services to address their needs. Safeguarding is therefore particularly relevant to these groups.

The Worcestershire official street count held each year shows fluctuating levels of rough sleeping across the county, with numbers in recent years remaining fairly static.



Rough sleeper data is collated each week improving our local intelligence of the flow, return, and stock of individuals and the reason behind their homelessness. Regular rough sleeper/prevention meetings and multi-agency meetings are held at a local level enables

the co-ordination of services and information sharing to develop partnerships with all organisations and individuals committed to ending rough sleeping and homelessness. This includes a consideration of any safeguarding issues that need to be flagged with partners or referred to the Adult Safeguarding Team. All five councils have rough sleeper outreach teams providing intensive support and routes into accommodation such as No First / No Second Night Out, Housing First/Led and other services.

Progress has been made in tackling health inequalities with increased access to health services and countywide drug and alcohol support, including harm reduction teams. Outreach teams have strengthened their practice by signing up to Homeless Link's outreach principles and undertaking learning and development.

Although Supported Housing providers in Worcestershire work within a trauma informed, person centred approach, those clients with substance misuse, serious mental health conditions and/or a history of arson may find themselves waiting for a suitable placement due to stringent accessibility criteria. There is also limited availability of rapid access supported accommodation resulting in an individual's only accommodation option being outside of the county.

We will also expand the multi-agency work on Target Priority Group rough sleepers and expand the Mental health and Homelessness Group so that multi-agency working is consistent across all districts and there is effective cross boundary working.

Therefore, the strategy will continue to promote collaborative working with health partners, housing providers and other organisations to improve access to services for rough sleepers including early intervention for those at risk and accommodation for those with complex needs.

3.3.4 Young people and care leavers

Homelessness for young people remains significant issue. This includes from people aged 16-17, Care Leavers and young parents. Many young people will have support as well as accommodation needs as they leave home for the first time.

Changes to the benefits system together with the impact of the cost-of-living crisis, and the number of young people in low paid work, has seen a rise in the number of those at risk of homelessness.

For young people the data indicates that the most common causes of homelessness in Worcestershire are family or friends being no longer willing to accommodate, the loss of private rented accommodation and relationship breakdown with partner (non- violent breakdown).

Whilst services do work closely together, there is still more to be done to prevent young people from becoming homeless. It is a focus of this strategy to enable more upstream homelessness prevention through family mediation and identifying potential homelessness situations at the earliest stage e.g. via schools and other relevant sectors/organisations.

3.3.5 Families with children

Worcestershire continues to be an attractive place to live and work, inevitably leading to high rents and house prices. This means some families are unable to afford to own or privately rent a home. Changes to the benefits system together with the impact of the cost-of-living crisis and the number of people in low paid work has seen a rise in the number of families at risk of homelessness.

We want to prevent homelessness by identifying the key risk factors/triggers in families lives that can lead to a family being at risk of homelessness at the earliest possible stage.

Families in Worcestershire access social housing registers for a variety of reasons, often reflecting both long-term housing challenges and immediate triggers that place them at risk of homelessness. The key reasons include:

- **Relationship Breakdown**
Non-violent relationship breakdowns, particularly involving partners, remain a significant factor. Families in this situation often require alternative accommodation to prevent homelessness or unsafe living conditions.
- **Domestic Abuse**
Domestic abuse is a major reason families seek housing support. Increased awareness of available services and support pathways has led to earlier reporting and engagement with housing services.
- **Loss of Private Rented Accommodation**
The end of an assured shorthold tenancy in the private rented sector, whether due to eviction, rent increases, or landlord decisions, continues to trigger housing register applications.
- **Financial Hardship and Housing Affordability**
Rising rents, high house prices, low wages, and changes to the benefits system contribute to families' inability to secure or sustain accommodation.
- **Other Factors**
Other, less frequent reasons include overcrowding, unsuitability of current accommodation (e.g., health/accessibility needs), and the need to move closer to education, employment or support networks.

As of June 2025, there were 4,955 families on the housing registers across the councils' areas which equates to 43% of all applications.

Analysis of trends shows that relationship breakdown, domestic abuse and the loss of private rented tenancies remain the leading immediate triggers for applications, emphasising the importance of early intervention and targeted prevention support.

3.3.6 Survivors of domestic abuse

Domestic Abuse continues to be one of the primary drivers of homelessness across Worcestershire, with a profound and lasting impact on victim/survivors, families, and communities. Since the introduction of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, LHAs and Worcestershire County Council have worked collaboratively to strengthen housing pathways, deliver on new statutory duties, and create a coordinated, trauma-informed response using a whole family approach for those fleeing abuse.

The establishment of the Worcestershire Domestic Abuse Partnership Board, a domestic abuse and housing coordinator, specialised domestic abuse housing officers and the provision of safe accommodation has led to more consistent standards of support across the county. Housing teams, alongside commissioned domestic abuse providers, now play a critical role in early identification, prevention, and sustaining safe accommodation for survivors.

Data and Trends

Data highlights that domestic abuse remains a significant cause of homelessness presentations across Worcestershire over the last three years. Of those owed a homelessness duty in 2024/25, 30.8% of households presented due to domestic abuse.

	Prevention (%)	Relief (%)	Total (%)
2022/23	8.3%	18.4%	26.7%
2023/24	9.7%	18.8%	28.5%
2024/25	7.1%	23.7%	30.8%

In 2024/25 over 10,000 domestic abuse-related incidents and crimes were recorded by police in Worcestershire. This total includes both crimes and non-crime incidents. According to Worcestershire County Council's Operation Encompass page, which summarises West Mercia Police's Q4 2024/25 Performance Monitoring Report, around 25% of all recorded crimes in the county were classified as domestic abuse related.

While West Mercia Police data for the same period indicates a statistical decrease in domestic abuse incidents across the force area, the figures for Worcestershire demonstrate that domestic abuse remains a significant issue locally.

Despite improved reporting, local insight suggests that many survivors still do not disclose abuse, indicating ongoing unmet need. Across the county, domestic abuse-related approaches accounted for a significant proportion of homelessness applications. The majority were women with dependent children, though a growing number of single survivors, male victims, and individuals with complex needs have been identified.

Sanctuary Schemes and Safe Accommodation

LHAs across Worcestershire, work in partnership to deliver safe accommodation, including, refuge spaces, dispersed units, and sanctuary schemes to enable survivors to remain safely in their homes where appropriate.

Sanctuary Scheme Referrals (September 2024 - August 2025):

District	2024/25
Bromsgrove	3
Malvern Hills	15
Redditch	8
Wychavon	32
Wyre Forest	47

Between 2024-2025 a total of 105 referrals were made to sanctuary schemes across all 5 local authorities. Overall referrals have decreased

across most districts, with some localised increases, highlighting variation in demand and referral pathways.

There has been much progress across the LHAs since the implementation of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 statutory duty across LHAs including the expansion of the Domestic Abuse Community Champions network through Worcester Community Trust and West Mercia Women's Aid, delivery of trauma-informed housing training to frontline staff, specialist Domestic Abuse Housing in each council (who have received positive feedback from service users) and strengthened partnership working between housing, police, and support providers through regular MARAC coordination and attendance at DRIVE meetings.

All the housing teams work in partnership with Sanctuary Schemes to help victim-survivors of domestic abuse stay safely in their homes by providing tailored security measures, reducing the need to move.

The introduction of the Domestic Abuse Housing Coordinator role to work closely with Domestic Abuse Housing Officers has ensured training and knowledge remain up to date.

3.3.7 Veterans

Instances of homelessness amongst veterans are low locally, however there is action to be taken to further tackle this. LHAs are currently working with the Worcestershire Armed Forces Covenant team to ensure that there is a good understanding of the Armed Forces Covenant in housing services and ensure that organisational policies reflect the needs of the Covenant e.g. that local connection rights (for the purposes of social housing allocation) are embedded in policy.

3.3.8 Refugees and migrant homelessness

Worcestershire has provided a sanctuary to refugees from Ukraine, Syria and Afghanistan through the government's resettlement schemes, including Homes for Ukraine, the [Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme](#) (ACRS) and [Afghan Relocations and Assistance](#)

[Policy](#) (ARAP), as well as a small number of arrivals through the Community Sponsorship Scheme. Accommodation has been provided by a combination of private hosts, the private rented sector and, where appropriate, social housing.

The Home Office is responsible for providing accommodation for asylum seekers, whilst their asylum claims are being processed. Home Office accommodation is provided in Worcestershire in both contingency hotels and dispersal accommodation (usually self-contained family accommodation or houses of multiple occupation). However, asylum seeker numbers in Worcestershire are currently relatively low in comparison to other areas of the UK.

Once asylum has been granted, a refugee is required to leave their Home Office accommodation, with notice to quit currently at 56 days. A process is in place for information to be shared with the local housing authority of notice to quit local Home Office accommodation, to ensure housing advice can be provided.

Homelessness amongst this cohort is relatively low locally due to fewer asylum seeker numbers than other areas of the country and the fact that those placed in Worcestershire often look to relocate to areas where cultural or religious needs are better met or nearer to family members once asylum has been granted. However, it still remains a challenge to be able to respond to the needs of refugees and migrants. In particular, we are seeing an increase in approaches for those with No Recourse To Public Funds, where options for support are extremely limited, and LHAs need to work closely with our partner VCSE organisations to respond to this.

3.3.9 Hospital discharge, substance use and Adult Social Care support

“Discharge from hospital into poor quality, insecure housing or, in the worst cases, onto the streets is a deeply harmful outcome. When combined with unmet mental health needs and substance use needs, it can severely undermine people's recovery and increase the risk that

their health deteriorates further and makes them even more vulnerable.” [A National Plan to End Homelessness, MHCLG, 2025.](#)

The government is committed to a target that no one eligible for assistance is discharged to the street after a hospital stay and will be working with the NHS and councils to implement the [Discharging people at risk of or experiencing homelessness guidance published in 2024.](#)

In preparation for this, our strategy will commit to exploring local opportunities with colleagues across the health system to promote early identification of housing issues and planning from admission both for accommodation needs but also any ongoing health and care needs.

The LHAs do not provide any supported temporary accommodation and therefore it is essential that if people do need to access temporary accommodation that the necessary support and care package is provided to reduce the risk of a harmful outcome.

Sadly, district councils have seen a rise in the number of homeless people harming themselves, and others, in temporary accommodation and an increase in the number of deaths in temporary accommodation through people dying by suicide or overdose. Although the numbers are small, they are increasing and this desperately needs to be addressed to safeguard people and prevent this from happening.

At the time of writing this strategy a roundtable event was being organised to bring together senior officers from housing, health, social care, registered housing providers, and safeguarding to focus on the issue of supporting people with complex needs in unsupported accommodation. It is expected that the recommendations from that event will feed into this strategy and the action plan.

3.3.10 Neurodivergence and homelessness

People with a range of neurodivergent needs, including autism, ADHD, dyslexia, dyspraxia, learning disabilities and other cognitive differences, may face additional barriers and challenges when navigating housing services or experiencing homelessness. These barriers often relate to communication differences, difficulties with unfamiliar and changing environments, sensory needs, and the cumulative impact of unmet support needs.

To better support local residents with neurodiverse needs, Local Housing Authorities have introduced training for housing officers to improve understanding of neurodivergence and to help staff recognise when individuals may require tailored approaches, including those who do not have a formal diagnosis. This training aims to ensure that interactions are accessible, supportive, and responsive to individual needs rather than relying on assumptions or labels.

LHAs are also reporting increasing numbers of households requesting additional bedrooms where, for example, children with neurodivergent needs are unable to share bedrooms with siblings. This often reflects genuine challenges relating to sleep, safety, behaviour regulation, or sensory differences. These pressures contribute to growing demand for larger family homes within an already limited social housing stock.

4 Pillar 3: Preventing crisis – helping people stay in their homes

Identifying and preventing homelessness at the earliest possible stage is the best outcome for households, LHAs and the public purse. However, where it has not been possible to prevent homelessness, services need to work together quickly and effectively to ensure that it is as brief as possible.

4.1 Preventing homelessness at the earliest stage

‘Too often, households are known to one service, such as a voluntary or community organisation, without that information being shared with the council or other relevant partners. To deliver truly coordinated and preventative support, everyone must work together, with clear referral pathways and shared responsibility for identifying and responding to risk early.’

[A National Plan to End Homelessness, MHCLG, 2025](#)

Locally as well as nationally, we want to increase the proportion of households who are supported to stay in their own homes or helped to find alternative accommodation - to prevent homelessness and the need for temporary accommodation.

Details of the Government’s new Homelessness, Rough Sleeping and Domestic Abuse Grant were announced in December 2025 as part of a provisional multi-year settlement. The intent of this grant is to simplify homelessness funding and allow for greater flexibility in spend according to local need.

The provisional 3-year allocations will allow for longer term strategic planning to commission or directly provide homelessness services/initiatives on a longer-term basis, rather than annual allocations in recent years.

To inform this strategy, a mapping exercise was carried out as part of the homelessness review which identified what services are available across Worcestershire and what gaps in provision there might be. A summary of this is contained within the homelessness review and an action within the plan is to explore what services are required to be commissioned or directly provided by LHAs based on the findings of the review.

The LHAs already provide a number of services to help prevent homelessness or to ensure suitable alternative accommodation is available at the prevention stage. This includes access to funding for rent deposits/bonds and rent in advance, welfare assistance, working with landlords and families to resolve issues and mediation for young people and their families.

4.2 Accessing the right support at the right time

It is vital that people get the support that they need, when they need it, to prevent homelessness. Housing and homelessness systems can be complex by the very nature of legislation, geographical location, differences in funding and associated criteria, whether they are provided by statutory or voluntary services and as such it can be challenging for people to navigate them or understand what support is available.

The need to raise awareness of what services are already available was a key theme arising from partners who attended the strategy stakeholder event held in September 2025. The mapping exercise outlined in the previous section will be useful in raising awareness but the LHAs are keen to work with partners to build further on this through improved communication and joint training across organisations and sectors. Joint work with the Adult Front Door and the Community Directory are actions within the strategy action plan.

To proactively identify and predict where households may be at risk of homelessness, we want to improve our use of data to enable us to target high-risk households 3-6 months before they potentially reach crisis point. To address this, we want to explore using a predictive analytics model utilising a range of different data to target our homelessness prevention work.

4.3 Person-centred support to prevent rough sleeping

The councils have worked closely together for many years to tackle rough sleeping and have developed a range of initiatives such as No First Night Out (emergency bed spaces for those that are new to the street), Housing First/Led models (intensive support linked to accommodation), outreach support, bespoke funding and person-centred packages of support. A Rough Sleeper Coordinator has also been in post for several years to oversee the councils' strategic approach to tackling rough sleeping and unblock barriers to accommodation for those with a poor tenancy or offending history.

We will aim continue providing bespoke funding for outreach teams and the Rough Sleeper Coordinator to find a housing solution for those at risk of rough sleeping and rough sleepers.

5. Pillar 4: Improving emergency responses – improving temporary accommodation and making people’s experiences better if they do become homeless

Whilst the aim is to prevent homelessness at the earliest possible stage and negate the need for temporary accommodation, it will always be needed as a safety net for households at crisis point.

LHAs have a duty to provide temporary accommodation in certain circumstances to homeless households. They can also utilise a discretionary duty to accommodate others, where no duty is owed but they are accommodated under wider policy initiatives such as No First Night Out/No Second Night Out to prevent rough sleeping or to support rough sleepers coming off the streets.

If temporary accommodation is required then it must be safe, affordable, of a decent standard and stable. B&B accommodation is not suitable for families with children, but we recognise that it may be the only option at crisis point.

Over the previous three years the number of placements ending has steadily declined from 1121 to 734 and the same for placements with children 339 to 235. Which means that households are spending longer in temporary accommodation. This is due to increasing pressure on housing availability impacting on the ability to house people into permanent accommodation. Correspondingly in the five districts the length of stay in temporary accommodation over 12 weeks has risen from 18% in 2022/23 to 26% in 2024/25 and a corresponding increase of length of placements for the longer timescales (or static numbers over the last three years).

For all the councils the most used type of temporary accommodation is Bed and Breakfast but the amount this is used varies from 46% of all

placements in Redditch to 59% in Wyre Forest in 2024/25. There has been a decrease in use of Bed and Breakfast between 2023/24 and 2024/25 in all of the councils except Bromsgrove where the percentage of placements in B&B have increased from 42% to 48%.

This shows positive work undertaken by many councils to bring other forms of temporary accommodation into use including from Registered Providers and councils’ own stock. When considering the use of temporary accommodation for households with dependent children, WFDC and MHDC still mainly use Bed and Breakfast (53% and 72% respectively). However, both WDC and BDC use more temporary accommodation provided by Registered Providers than B&B (39% and 56% respectively) and RBC mainly use their own housing stock (61%).

The availability of different types and numbers of temporary accommodation differs across the county and can range from ad hoc used of emergency accommodation such as Bed and Breakfast to accommodation owned and managed by the Councils directly. See the table below for more information on temporary accommodation across the districts.

Placements into:	22/23	23/24	24/25
TA within RP Stock	89	89	72
TA within your own stock	113	115	98
Any other type of TA	27	28	76
Made own arrangements for TA	36	13	3
Other nightly paid, privately managed accommodation	165	92	69
Private sector TA leased council / Registered Provider	29	43	12
Bed & Breakfast	633	578	395
Temporarily remains in property	5	3	3
Other: e.g refuge	24	13	6

The new government strategy has a strong focus on households in temporary accommodation and particularly those with dependent children. There is now a body of research around the health impacts of temporary accommodation on people’s health including infant mortality and councils are expected to reduce the use of Bed and Breakfast style accommodation for families over the lifetime of this parliament.

All the LHAs have support workers who can provide additional support to households in need, but the resource is limited and it is critical that the councils utilise other support and care providers where relevant.

LHAs want to increase the amount of good quality self-contained accommodation, which will provide a better experience for homeless households but is also better value for money and less expensive than nightly paid accommodation.

We will work with education providers and GPs to ensure they are aware and can support those households in Temporary Accommodation where appropriate.

6. Pillar 5: Recovery and preventing repeat homelessness – ensuring people don't experience homelessness more than once and halving long term rough sleeping

With the right support people can rebuild their lives after experiencing the trauma of homelessness and break the cycle of repeat homelessness.

6.1 Ensuring people don't experience homelessness more than once

Preventing repeat homelessness is achieved through a variety of ways depending in part on the client group. Ensuring households are supported through the transition from temporary into permanent accommodation and working with households to make them tenancy ready whilst in temporary and supported accommodation has proved beneficial.

Some repeat homeless can arise through households not being able to access health interventions when needed. Locally some LHAs have funded Mental Health Link workers to work with housing teams and households approaching for homelessness assistance. This has proved a valuable resource to enable homeless households to access mental health support and assisting them to access existing mental health services at the right time.

Through regular meetings, agencies collaborate on policy development, share data and good practice, and coordinate funding opportunities. This joined-up approach strengthens the county's ability to deliver sustainable solutions and improve outcomes for those at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness.

Further work needs to be done to better understand why repeat homelessness for survivors of domestic abuse and larger families with complex needs is high and we will work with those with lived experience to see if we can develop workstreams to tackle this.

6.2 Tackling long term rough sleeping

The Government's funding programmes have enabled LHAs to implement a number of service offers for rough sleepers including Housing First/Led, No First/Second Night Out, outreach workers and access to personalised budgets. This approach has supported the most entrenched rough sleepers, some of whom had previously been on the streets for many years, to maintain social housing/private rented tenancies. Through the use of personalised budgets for meaningful activities and engagement opportunities councils have been able to help rough sleepers and former rough sleepers to sustain their accommodation, make their property a home, build positive routines and strengthen community connections.

By offering bespoke interventions, the personalisation budget helps to break the cycle of homelessness and reduce the likelihood of individuals returning to the streets. It empowers frontline staff to respond quickly and creatively to barriers faced by rough sleepers, ensuring that support is not only practical but also person-centred.

This strategy is committed to maintaining this robust approach to tackling and reducing rough sleeping.

6.3 Access to specialist health services: mental health, physical health & substance use

“What needs to be considered is the traumatic experience of being homeless. And that doesn't stop the moment you come out of homelessness... Even if you didn't have mental health issues going into homelessness, you are guaranteed 100 million percent [to have mental health issues after experiencing homelessness]. I have no doubt in my mind at all that everybody goes through a homelessness journey will experience trauma if being homeless and that needs to be considered because even if you've got no recovery to deal with, no official mental health diagnosis or

any compound need, you are going to have an adjustment and, you know, adjustment from that trauma”

MHCLG (2025) Lived Experience Forum Report, recommendations from people with lived experience for the cross-Government homelessness strategy, Revolving Doors, Groundswell, Justlife Foundation

Project Bright Path supports people who are rough sleeping or at risk of rough sleeping and experiencing mental health challenges, both diagnosed and undiagnosed. The programme provides rapid, relational and trauma-informed support through short-term, focused interventions and better connection into mainstream services. Its purpose is to help people stabilise at times of crisis and access the right mental health and housing support at the right time. A key development during the year was the appointment of two Band 7 mental health practitioners, one based in Herefordshire and one in Worcestershire. Their specialist clinical input has already made a difference, supporting people with complex needs, helping unlock access to formal mental health assessments and diagnosis, and strengthening the ability of frontline workers to navigate mental health systems.

The project also delivers a training programme which is delivered in partnership with a wide range of organisations, including LHAs, housing providers, rehabilitation centres and voluntary sector partners. Content has continued to evolve, with additions including trauma-informed approaches, neurodiversity awareness and clearer pathways for mental health and homelessness support.

In developing this strategy, housing and health colleagues have been engaging in more detailed discussions around the links between mental health, physical health and homelessness and what could be done locally to address poor health and inequalities via the countywide Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy group, the Worcestershire Housing Board, the Housing and Health Group, the district health collaboratives, and the Health Inequalities Prevention Personalisation Care Board. This strategy is committed to ensuring access to specialist services for homeless

households and specific actions will be defined in conjunction with housing and health.

6.4 Community support and services

The LHAs recognise that peer support can be invaluable in tackling and preventing homelessness. Those that have lived experience will often be able to engage complex homeless households more effectively as they know first hand what it is like to experience homelessness and disadvantage.

Homelessness peer support models are in place in some areas of the county and there remains a commitment from the previous strategy to review peer support models and identify good practice with a view to potentially increasing or upscaling peer support.

The Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy Group continues to learn from those with lived experience of homelessness through ongoing feedback, workshops and questionnaires.

The service mapping exercise carried out as part of the Homelessness Review and the [Community Services Directory](#) are also useful to highlight the community support services available. Ongoing discussions on how to harness community support continue to take place at local homelessness forums.

We will continue to engage with other services that can support households into education, employment and training and those that assist people with managing finances such as the Citizens Advice Bureau.

7. Governance arrangements

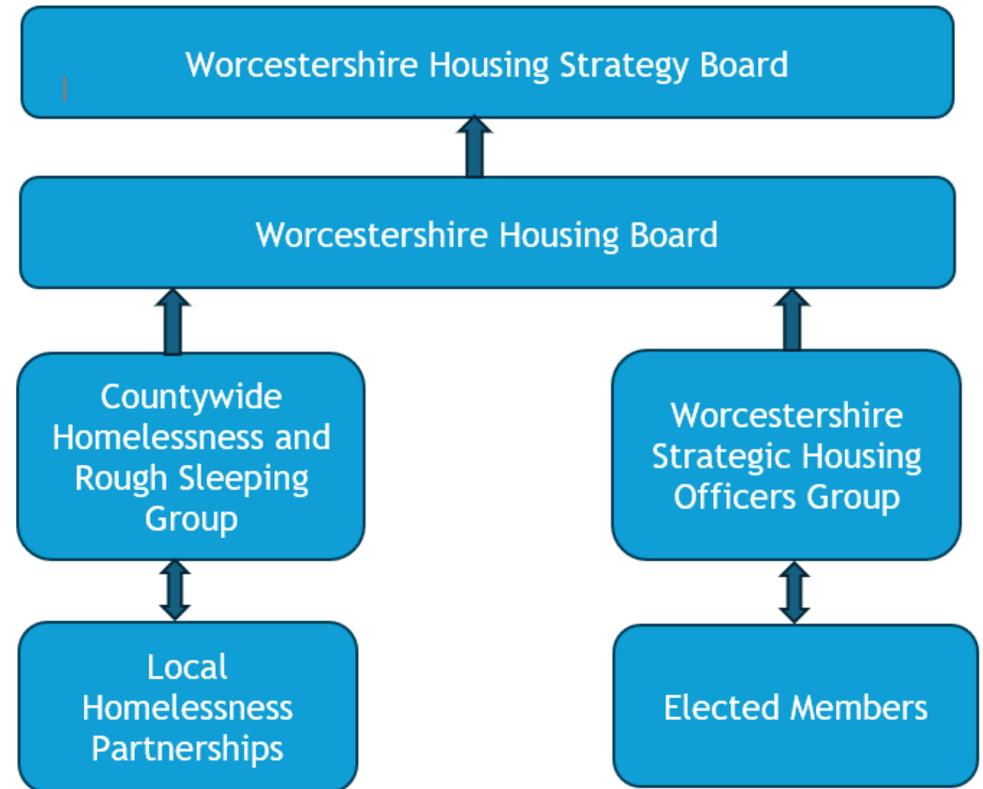
7.1 Oversight, delivery and monitoring

Worcestershire Housing Board is responsible for ensuring that the commitments within the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy are realised. The partnership is a multi-agency and cross-sector partnership, ensuring delivery of the strategy is supported across relevant organisations. The Housing Board reports to the Housing Strategy Board comprised of Chief Executive or senior officers from LHAs, Registered Providers, NHS and Public Health.

The Strategy will be overseen by the Countywide Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Group, a public and voluntary sector partnership that brings together statutory agencies, housing teams, health services, and community partners to ensure a coordinated response to homelessness across the county. The chair of that group will attend the Housing Board regularly to report on outcomes achieved and progress against actions.

Each LHA has its own local homelessness partnership, consisting of local statutory and voluntary partners which will oversee and deliver on homelessness services and the strategy at a local level and feed into the Countywide Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Group.

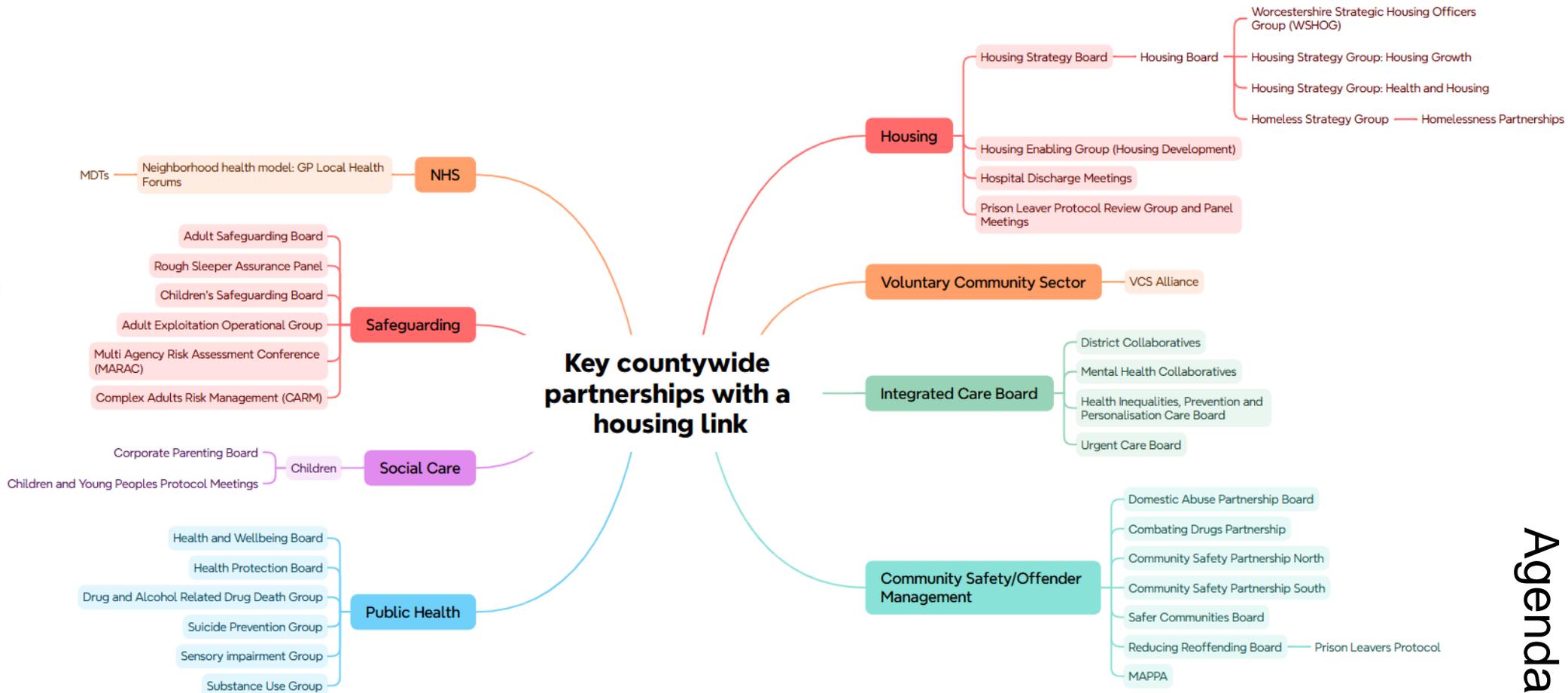
The LHAs are responsible for meeting their own statutory duties in relation to preventing homelessness. The Worcestershire Strategic Housing Officers Group (WSHOG) will be responsible for the operational delivery of the LHA elements of the strategy. Each LHA will have their own separate mechanism for reporting back to elected members on outcomes and progress including committees and member briefings to ensure there is political oversight on the delivery of the strategy and services.



8. Partnerships

Partnerships are essential to the delivery of the strategy as many organisations have a role to play in tackling homelessness and rough sleeping in the wider context.

Page 55



Agenda Item 5

This is not a definitive or exhaustive list of all partnerships but highlights some key groups and inter-relationships. There are also localised partnership and strategic groups within each LHA that are not included in this section.

The advent of the Integrated Care Boards and review of the role of the Health and Wellbeing Board has led to a new way of working within the health, social care and wider partnerships including greater district level working with Primary Care Networks.

Integrated Care System - Taking collective action to tackle health inequalities.



Reducing Re-offending Group & MAPPA Strategic Management Board

The Reducing Re-offending Board oversees the development and delivery of the criminal justice pathway and protocol across the county, following on from work commissioned by Public Health and the LHAs. Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) were introduced in 2001 under the Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000 and subsequently strengthened by the Criminal Justice Act 2003 as the statutory arrangement for managing sexual and violent offenders. It provides a mechanism whereby the agencies involved can better discharge their responsibilities and protect the public in a coordinated way. The responsible authority for MAPPA in each criminal justice area consists of the police, probation, and prisons. LHAs have a duty to cooperate with MAPPA arrangements in assessing and managing the risks posed by MAPPA-eligible offenders and the Board oversees the process.

Adult Safeguarding Board and the Assurance Panel

The main purpose of Worcestershire Safeguarding Adults Board (WSAB) is to promote wellbeing and reduce the risk of harm for people with care and support needs. Rough sleepers specifically are overseen by an Assurance Panel. The LHAs are represented on the Board and Panel at Senior Officer level.

Corporate Parenting Board (CPB)

The CPB provides leadership and a governance structure for corporate parenting to drive forward the outcomes for looked after children and care leavers. It oversees the Board's strategy and promotes the voice of

children and young people. It also provides challenge and scrutiny to ensure the best outcomes are achieved for children in care and care leavers. LHAs are represented at CPB by officers from WSHOG.

Domestic Abuse Partnership Board (DAPB)

The DAPB consists of key partners with an interest in tackling domestic abuse and supporting victims, including their children. The DAPB has been created to support Worcestershire County Council in meeting its duty under Part IV of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 and to expand upon the wider community-focused work of the Worcestershire Forum against Domestic Abuse.

Appendix 1 – Action Plan

Pillar 1: Universal Prevention - tackling the root causes of homelessness

Action	Measure	Lead	Timescale
1.1 Prevent homelessness from private rented sector tenancies by building relations with landlords to identify those at risk of homelessness at an earlier stage, utilising funding where appropriate and available and take action to sustain tenancies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Countywide landlord forum established. - “Help to Stay” scheme established. - Tenancy Sustainment Officers in place (funding dependent). - Decrease in households becoming homeless due to end of a private sector tenancy for a negative reason. - Prevention panel established with landlords - Utilise funding such as the Crisis Resilience Fund and homeless funding to sustain tenancies 	Housing Advice Team Leaders/Housing Strategy Officers/Private Sector Housing Teams	March 2027
1.2 Ensure more legal support is available for tenants facing eviction by expanding partnerships with organisations who already undertake this work so that services have sufficient resource, knowledge, expertise and capacity to robustly defend evictions based on grounds under Renters Rights Act.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Training on Renters’ Rights Act undertaken for LHA staff. - Established referral mechanisms are in place with the Housing Loss Prevention Advice Service - Decrease in households becoming homeless due to end of a private sector tenancy for a negative reason. - Increase in tenancies sustained in the private rented sector following intervention. 	Housing Advice Team Leaders/Housing Strategy Officers/Private Sector Housing Teams Registered Housing Providers	December 2026
1.3 Develop an integrated tenancy sustainment approach, bringing together housing, community organisations/hubs, employment and financial inclusion partners and develop stronger links to online support, to identify tenancies at risk and deliver coordinated support.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “Tenancy at Risk” protocol with Registered Providers is explored. - Coordinated support packages in place including income maximisation, debt advice, financial literacy training, and flexible crisis prevention/ discretionary welfare funding. - Decrease in households becoming homeless due to end of a tenancy for a negative reason. 	Housing Advice Team Leaders/Housing Strategy Officers and Community Services	March 2028
1.4 Review the Duty to Refer data and prepare for the new Duty to Collaborate to ensure that any potential homeless cases are referred to the local housing teams by partner agencies at the earliest opportunity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Duty to refer data is reviewed. - Increase in the number of Duty to Refer referrals 	Housing Strategy Officers/All statutory agencies	March 2027

Agenda Item 5

	- Increase in the proportion of cases approaching for homelessness assistance at prevention stage, or earlier.	required to refer	
1.5 Use data and lived experience to track and evaluate progress against the strategy (and inform service delivery) using key performance indicators and regular reviews. Consider how we can implement “big picture” reporting to demonstrate and understand homelessness prevention activity across all sectors/organisations.	- Data dashboard and baseline statistics developed and monitored at countywide homelessness strategy meetings. - Summary reporting mechanism developed to show homelessness prevention work across all sectors/organisations. - PWLE attending/providing feedback to the Homelessness Strategy Group.	Research and Intelligence Officer/Housing Strategy Officers	September 2028
1.6 Improve shared understanding of the work of all partner agencies in preventing homelessness through promoting the Community Services Directory, and joint training and awareness sessions.	- Joint training undertaken and increased awareness of roles and responsibilities. - All homelessness prevention services are signed up to the community services directory.	County Council, Housing Advice Team Leaders/Housing Strategy Officers, Homelessness Partnerships	September 2027
1.7 Develop and implement clear referral guidance and processes between agencies (housing, health, education, social care) for early identification of at-risk individuals.	- Referral guidance and process defined and promoted. - Individuals are not released from institutions into homelessness.	Housing Strategy Officers, Health, Education and Social Care Leads	March 2029
1.8 Explore opportunities to develop and deliver homelessness education programmes in schools	- Review service offered by Nightstop in WF and roll out across other district (funding dependent)	Housing Strategy Teams	March 2029
1.9 Make better use of existing social housing by exploring opportunities to better match disabled households with adapted housing and by tackling under occupation of larger properties	-Current demand for adapted housing and best practice in maximising use of existing stock reviewed	Housing Strategy Teams	March 2028

Pillar 2: Targeted Prevention - targeted support for people at risk of homelessness

Action	Measure	Lead	Timescale
2.1 Explore the feasibility of a predictive homelessness risk model that pulls data from a range of sources to identify and target support to people at greatest risk of becoming homeless before they reach crisis point.	- Predictive analytics system developed and implemented. - Data driven services/provision are developed. - Increase in homelessness prevention. - Decrease in TA placements.	Research and Intelligence Officer	March 2029

Rough sleepers and single homeless households:			
<p>2.2 Review and strengthen the rough sleeper support/accommodation options (All services and interventions that tackle rough sleeping) and commission or directly deliver services required utilising the new multi-year homelessness funding arrangements.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Carry out a needs assessment and develop a Supported Housing Strategy - Number of services newly commissioned or expanded (if required) - Map unmet needs identified through outreach 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - WSHOG - Housing Advice/strategy Teams, - Outreach Services, - Rough Sleeper Co-Ordinator 	July 2027
<p>2.3 Investigate the ability to provide bespoke funding Outreach teams and the Rough Sleeper Coordinator to develop tailored solutions for individuals who have previously been unable to secure or maintain accommodation, subject to funding.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reduction in rough sleeping. - Number of individuals housed through the funding - Tenancy sustainment 6 months + - Number of individuals supported through the funding to address unmet needs - Reduction in repeat presentations to outreach services - Building relationships with Registered Providers to overcome barriers into accommodation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Rough Sleeper Co-ordinator - Outreach Services - Housing Advice/Strategy Teams 	rch 2029 (pending funds)
<p>2.4 Expand the online multi-agency work on Target Priority Group rough sleepers Implement outreach and support services TPG online group across all districts to improve cross-boundary coordination and case management. Learning from good practice and promoting joined up working.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Online multi-agency TPG group working effectively across boundaries+. - Reduction in the number of TPG rough sleepers. - Increase in TPG rough sleepers accessing services and accommodation - Number of districts consistently using the TPG platform - Number of cross-boundary cases successfully resolved 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Rough Sleeper Co-Ordinator/Housing Advice Teams 	September 2026
<p>2.5 Extend the Mental Health & Homelessness Group to all districts to enable discussion/referrals into mental health services for those at risk of or experiencing rough sleeping</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mental Health and Homelessness group expanded across all districts to ensure consistent access to mental health services. - Increased number of districts participating - Number of rough sleeping cases discussed - Increased access to mental health support for rough sleepers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Housing Advice/Strategy Team Leaders - Rough Sleeper Co-Ordinator 	rch 2027
<p>2.6 Understand factors leading to returns to rough sleeping Using data to identify repeat patterns, implement targeted interventions, and redesign support offers, subject to funding.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Enhanced support offer in place for those who return to rough sleeping. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Rough Sleeper Co-Ordinator - Outreach Services 	April 2027

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Work undertaken with Registered Providers to reduce the no. of people refused housing due to poor tenancy history - Reduction in recurring rough sleeping - Number of individuals enrolled in enhanced support - Tenancy sustainment following re-engagement 	- Housing Advice/Housing Strategy Teams	
<p>2.7 Set up a Lived Experience involvement process to ensure people who have experienced rough sleeping or homelessness are able to put forward ideas or feedback. Use this feedback to make changes to services and improve everyday practice, subject to funding.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - People with lived experience involved in service development and improvement - Number of people with lived experience taking part in a way that meets their needs - Feedback collected and recorded - Number of service changes or improvements made because of the group's feedback 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Rough Sleeper Co-Ordinator - Outreach Services 	October 2026
Children, young people and care leavers:			
<p>2.8 Pilot the “Upstream” model in partnership with schools, specialist youth and family support services e.g. Centrepoin model (should funding be available). This would include a review of family intervention and mediation services.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Prevention initiatives developed across the Councils leading to a reduction in youth homelessness. - The causes of youth homelessness and what interventions can be made to sustain accommodation and positive relationships with family/friends are better understood. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Housing Advice/Strategy Team Leaders - Children's Services - Youth Services - Schools 	December 2027
<p>2.9 Review the Care Leavers Protocol in light of new legislative requirements that state that care leavers will no longer be deemed intentionally homeless in the case of accommodation breakdown.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Care leavers protocol updated to be compliant with the legislation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Housing Advice/Strategy Team Leaders - Children's Services 	December 2026
<p>2.10 Agree a Memorandum of Understanding with providers of young persons supported accommodation to facilitate movements to alternative supported accommodation where relationships between residents have broken down</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Memorandum of Understanding in place across providers to respond to potential homelessness situations where the relationship between residents has broken down. - Fewer crisis situations in which a suitable move cannot be found 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Housing Advice/Strategy Team Leaders - Supported Housing Providers 	December 2027
<p>2.11 Work with partner organisations (e.g. DWP) to explore services provided to address youth unemployment and ensure they can be connected with prevention/mediation/budgeting/debt advice services.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reduction in youth homelessness - More young people managing their money and able to live independently 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Housing Advice Team Leaders - DWP 	March 2027

<p>2.12 Work with partners to understand the links between homelessness and neurodiversity in young people and how homelessness prevention services can meet their needs.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reduction in youth homelessness. - Officers trained to ensure that neurodivergence is recognised and services are adapted to meet needs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Housing Advice Team Leaders -County Council 	<p>March 2027</p>
<p>Families with children:</p>			
<p>2.13 Identify the key risk factors in families that lead to homelessness to ensure targeted intervention at the earliest stage</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Review best practise around early intervention and prevention for families including risk factor identification. - Increase in homeless prevention for families with children 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Housing Advice Team Leaders and Housing Strategy Officers - Research and Intelligence Officer 	<p>Ongoing</p>
<p>Homelessness and health:</p>			
<p>2.14 Commission a homelessness and health audit to understand the health needs of homeless households, reduce health inequalities for rough sleepers and improve life expectancy.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The health needs of homeless households are understood and services commissioned or adapted to meet need and prevent homelessness. - Health inequalities experienced by rough sleepers are reduce and life expectancy is increased. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - WSHOG 	<p>September 2026</p>
<p>2.15 Improve joint working across housing, health and social care to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) Prevent unnecessary hospital admissions for those who are homeless/at risk of homelessness (ii) remove barriers to hospital discharge for those who cannot return to their home or who are homeless (iii) Develop and implement the Duty to Collaborate for hospital admission, discharge, and step-down care that ensure a housing plan is in place before discharge. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Improved pathway into accommodation to ensure that discharges are planned in partnership with housing options services and that appropriate support is in place. - Reduced unnecessary hospital admissions for homeless households - Reduced delays in hospital discharge for homeless households 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -WSHOG -Integrated Care Board -NHS 	<p>September 2027</p>
<p>2.16 Explore opportunities to provide a flexible approach to medical appointments to meet the needs of those with complex needs/chaotic lives and ensure follow up care is provided- example of health care worker in local day centres.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Health Bus service locations are near rough sleeper locations wherever possible. - All rough sleepers have access to a GP and substance use services where appropriate. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -WSHOG -Integrated Care Board -NHS 	<p>December 2026</p>
<p>2.17 Enhance the collaborative approach with partners to effectively manage the risk to those with complex and multiple needs in temporary accommodation.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Existing support and ongoing care and support processes are reviewed. - Reduction in serious incidents in unsupported TA/housing. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Worcestershire Housing Board - WSHOG 	<p>April 2027</p>
<p>2.18 Integrate mental health services more deeply into homelessness prevention and intervention strategies. E.g. outreach teams should have improved access to mental health professionals to provide immediate support to those in crisis, and ongoing</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Current mental health services (and their capacity) are mapped, gaps are identified. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Outreach Teams - Mental Health Services 	<p>June 2027</p>

support is provided for those in unsupported temporary accommodation.	- Those in TA can access appropriate mental health support		
2.19 Develop more fully accessible permanent and temporary housing through Disabled Facilities Grant and Homes England Funding (dependent on funding)	- Increase in the number of accessible/healthy homes delivered by Developers and RPs - Increase in the number of accessible temporary accommodation units.	-WSHOG -Worcestershire Housing Adaptations Service	June 2030
2.20 Investigate the ability to provide flexible budgets to prevent homelessness especially for non-priority/intentional cases or individuals facing severe mental health issues. This could be used to help cover emergency needs.	- Funding identified - Data captured on “what works” to prevent homelessness for this cohort to inform future service delivery	-Housing Advice Team Leaders/Housing Strategy Teams	December 2026
Domestic abuse			
2.21 Sustain and expand safe accommodation options (funding dependent) to minimise the use of B&B for DA survivors.	- Increase in the number of safe accommodation options	-DA Coordinator -Public Health -Housing Providers	September 2027
2.22 Review best practice in preventing homelessness due to domestic abuse at an earlier stage through early interventions with households at risk of homelessness due to DA.	- Those are risk of homelessness and experiencing domestic abuse approach for homelessness assistance at an earlier stage e.g. prevention stage, not relief/crisis stage - Decrease in homelessness approaches due to DA - Greater awareness and take up of Sanctuary Scheme options	- DA Coordinator - DA Housing Officers - Research and Intelligence Officer	March 2027
2.23 Develop a protocol for Registered Providers to access relevant survivor information (with consent) to deliver trauma-informed housing offers and minimise re-traumatisation.	- Improved accommodation offers due to greater understanding of needs and risk - Reduced repeat homelessness for DA survivors	- DA Coordinator - Registered Housing Providers - DA Housing Officers	June 2027
2.24 Develop dedicated housing pathways for survivors with multiple needs and those with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF)	- Reduced homelessness levels due to DA - Improved partnership working with schools and health and holistic support available to whole family.	- DA Coordinator - DA Housing Officers	June 2027
2.25 Strengthen communication and engagement with schools and health professionals to support early identification and safeguarding and ensure children affected by domestic abuse are linked to appropriate support services to prevent future victimisation or perpetration.	-Processes are defined and embedded	- DA Coordinator - DA Housing Officers	July 2027

Prison leavers:			
2.26 Review supported and transitional accommodation capacity and barriers to accommodation to ensure that there are pathways into accommodation prior to release.	- Reduced homelessness due to leaving prison	- Housing Advice/Strategy Team Leaders - Prison and Probation Service	September 2027
2.27 Improve data capture: referrals to Prison Release meetings, homeless assessments before release, and accommodation pathways including CAS3 accommodation.	- Improved understanding of housing needs - Increased accommodation options and improved process for prison leavers	- Housing Advice/Strategy Team Leaders - Prison and Probation Service	December 2026
2.28 Increase the number of housing assessments undertaken within prisons to identify a housing solution before release.	- Increased accommodation options and improved process for prison leavers	- Housing Advice/Strategy Team Leaders - Prison and Probation Service	June 2027
2.29 Work with partner housing providers to develop a positive pathway from CAS3 accommodation	- More individuals moving on from CAS3 into settled or supported accommodation	- Strategic Housing Senior Officers	March 2027
2.30 Review Worcestershire Criminal Justice Housing and Support Protocol	- Protocol is updated to reflect current legislation and service provision	- Strategic Housing Lead	March 2028
Asylum seekers and refugees:			
2.31 Collaborate with community, voluntary, and faith organisations to develop tailored, culturally appropriate information and guidance for asylum seekers, refugees and those with No Recourse to Public Funds, enabling them to access necessary support.	- Comprehensive and culturally appropriate guidance developed.	-Homelessness Partnerships	September 2027
Veterans:			
2.32 Continue to work with the Worcestershire Armed Forces Covenant Partnership to ensure that there is a good understanding of the Armed Forces Covenant in housing and that organisational policies reflect the needs of the Covenant	- Armed Forces Covenant embedded in housing services (where relevant) - Housing staff received training on the Armed Forces Covenant.	-WSHOG	Ongoing

Pillar 3: Preventing crisis - helping people stay in their homes

Action	Measure	Lead	Timescale
3.1 Use the findings of the Homelessness Review Service Mapping to explore funding services required to be commissioned or directly provided by LHAs to sustain accommodation.	- Gaps are defined, business case developed. - More homelessness cases are prevented	Housing Advice Team Leaders and Housing Strategy Officers	December 2026

<p>3.2 Ensure that homelessness services are well connected to services offering support through the new Crisis and Resilience Fund.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - CRF fund outcomes analysed to inform “what works” - Report on outcomes that have prevented homelessness without the need for a homeless approach to housing services. - Homelessness Services are aligned with the local delivery of the Crisis and Resilience Fund and support is available to those in crisis and facing homelessness. 	<p>WSHOG</p>	<p>March 2027</p>
<p>3.3 Utilise funding to ensure services such as accommodation and floating support, and help with housing costs are targeted to reduce homelessness through prevention</p>	<p>-Number of households prevented from becoming homeless increases</p>	<p>Housing Advice Team Leaders and Housing Strategy Officers</p>	<p>December 2026</p>
<p>3.4 Make use of the government toolkits to aid prevention of homelessness (when available)</p>	<p>-Number of households prevented from becoming homeless increases</p>	<p>Housing Advice Team Leaders and Housing Strategy Officers</p>	<p>March 2028</p>

Pillar 4: Improving Emergency Responses - improving temporary accommodation and making people’s experiences better

Action	Measure	Lead	Timescale
<p>4.1 Increase the number of high-quality, self-contained, TA units for families with children through working with Registered Housing Providers and considering options such as leasing or purchasing accommodation (funding dependent). Minimise the use of B&B, and other forms of shared accommodation and out of area placements for families with children.</p> <p>4.2 Improve the transition of households moving out of TA and into settled accommodation by providing an assessment of support needs and referring families into the appropriate support. This would include sharing the needs assessment with housing providers (with consent) so they can provide a trauma informed housing offer.</p> <p>4.3 Create family-centred TA solutions: reevaluate the model for families in TA, ensuring that placements consider the impact on children’s schooling, health, and support networks and help children, families and young people in TA to maintain connections to services and support networks.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increase in the number of suitable TA units - Reduction in the average length of stay in temporary accommodation - Reduction of the number of households with children in temporary accommodation - Reduction in the number of families with children in B&B over 6 weeks - Reduction in temporary accommodation costs - Increase in successful move-ons per quarter - PWLE feedback from families who have experienced TA is gathered and analysis on a regular basis 	<p>Housing Advice Team Leaders and Housing Strategy Officers</p>	<p>March 2028</p>

<p>4.4 Jointly review social housing allocations policies once government’s new guidance is available to try to prevent the need for TA or move people on into settled accommodation more quickly if they do need to access TA.</p> <p>4.5 Develop a resilience plan to address the impacts of rising temporary accommodation use, accommodation costs, and the anticipated loss of grant funding. This will include a review of block booking contracts, introduce dynamic purchasing and reduce the use of spot purchasing</p> <p>4.6 Work with PWLE to analyse the barriers to accessing temporary accommodation and implement solutions e.g. increased security measures, provisions for pets.</p> <p>4.7 Explore opportunities to work with colleagues across the health economy to increase the availability of adapted temporary accommodation.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Barriers to TA are understood and action taken to overcome barriers 		
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Pillar 5: Recovery and Preventing Repeat Homelessness - ensuring people don’t experience homelessness more than once and having long term rough sleeping

Action	Measure	Lead	Timescale
<p>5.1 Take action to tackling long term rough sleeping through reviewing: Accommodation-based and floating support/Rough sleeper outreach and intensive support/Rent deposits and rent in advance/No First Night Out Accommodation/Furniture projects</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - All activities to prevent and tackle rough sleeping locally are reviewed and defined, gaps identified and services commissioned. - Reduction in rough sleeping 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Housing Advice/Strategy Team Leaders - Rough Sleeper Co-Ordinator 	<p>March 2027</p>
<p>5.2 Review opportunities to develop and implement community and peer support models</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increase in tenancy sustainment - increase in engagement of service users 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Housing Advice/Strategy Team Leaders - Rough Sleeper Co-Ordinator 	<p>March 2028</p>
<p>5.3 Review opportunities to strengthen advocacy services: increase the availability of independent advocates, particularly for vulnerable groups like young people, those with mental health issues, and DA survivors.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Advocacy services are defined and strengthened 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Housing Advice/Strategy Team Leaders - Outreach Services - Housing Advice 	<p>December 2027</p>
<p>5.4 Investigate with PWLE why there is a high level of repeat homelessness in certain homeless cohorts e.g. DA survivors, rough sleepers, families with complex support needs.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Repeat homelessness is minimised - Drivers of repeat homelessness are understood and minimised 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Research and Intelligence Officer 	<p>March 2028</p>
<p>5.5 Develop mechanisms for referring temporarily accommodated households (with consent) to medical professionals, schools etc (subject to Government guidance)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Repeat homelessness is minimised and households are safeguarded 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - WSHOG 	<p>December 2028</p>

Stakeholders identified a number of suggestions that are business as usual and as such do not feature in the action plan but will still be delivered. The strategy action plan will be reviewed on an annual basis, and this will include a review of current actions and identification of any new actions required for future years.

Appendix 2 - Funding the strategy

Homelessness Prevention Grant

Homelessness services across the districts have previously been funded through a combination of district council general fund budgets and targeted grant funding from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), most notably the Homelessness Prevention Grant (HPG).

The HPG was a ringfenced funding stream required to be deployed in line with national policy objectives. Its strategic purpose was to strengthen early intervention and prevention activity, ensuring full and consistent implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act, while contributing to the ambition of ending rough sleeping through increased prevention of single homelessness.

The HPG also intended to reduce reliance on temporary accommodation, particularly for families. This included maximising opportunities for family homelessness prevention, reducing the overall number of families placed in temporary accommodation, and eliminating the use of bed and breakfast accommodation for families beyond the statutory six-week limit.

Strategic deployment of HPG focussed on targeted prevention, effective use of temporary accommodation alternatives, and system-wide approaches that delivered sustainable housing outcomes while reducing financial and operational pressures on local authorities.

The allocations in 2025/26 were as follows;

Housing Authority	Grant (£)
Bromsgrove District Council	383,917
Malvern Hills District Council	402,595
Redditch Borough Council	776,429
Wychavon District Council	811,670
Wyre Forest District Council	664,560

This funding supported the delivery of a range of coordinated interventions across the county aimed at preventing and reducing rough sleeping. These included No First Night Out and No Second Night Out emergency accommodation, designed to minimise the number of nights individuals spend sleeping rough; housing pathways, intervention and transition worker roles that provided targeted support to secure and sustain accommodation; a countywide Rough Sleeping Coordinator role operating across the districts to ensure strategic oversight of rough sleeping interventions, partnership working and system alignment; and the delivery of Housing-Led and Housing First accommodation to

provide settled housing with appropriate wraparound support for individuals with complex needs.

At the time of writing this strategy the Government had recently announced the new homelessness and rough sleeping funding arrangements for 2026/7-2029/30. This section will be updated in due course.

Domestic Abuse Act Funding for Domestic Abuse Housing Officers 2025/6

Housing Authority	Grant (£)
Bromsgrove District Council	33,666
Malvern Hills District Council	33,666
Redditch Borough Council	33,666
Wychavon District Council	33,666
Wyre Forest District Council	33,666

Funding for domestic abuse services is essential to ensure the provision of dedicated, specialist officers who can effectively respond to victims and survivors. These officers play a critical role in early intervention, risk assessment, safeguarding, and multi-agency coordination. Sustained investment will allow for improved response times, consistent victim support, enhanced offender management, and better outcomes for families affected by domestic abuse. Funding will support recruitment, specialist training, and retention of officers, ensuring victims receive trauma-informed, timely, and effective protection while reducing repeat incidents and long-term harm within communities.

Domestic Abuse Act Funding 2025/6(to implement the requirements of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021)

Housing Authority	Grant (£)
Bromsgrove District Council	35,774
Malvern Hills District Council	34,742
Redditch Borough Council	35,697
Wychavon District Council	34,855
Wyre Forest District Council	33,835

Household Support Fund (2025/26)

HSF 7 Allocation April 25 - March 26

District Council 12 month allocation	General allocation	Food/warm space allocation	Total
Bromsgrove	£171,321.39	£18,000.00	£189,321.39
Malvern Hills	£235,312.23	£18,000.00	£253,312.23
Redditch	£329,900.14	£18,000.00	£347,900.14
Wychavon	£230,918.03	£18,000.00	£248,918.03
Wyre Forest	£328,625.52	£18,000.00	£346,625.52
Total	£1,595,072	£108,000.00	£1,703,072

The Household Support Fund (HSF) is intended to provide targeted financial assistance to vulnerable households who are struggling to meet the cost of essential living expenses. The fund aims to prevent crisis, reduce hardship, and support households to maintain stability.

Discretionary Housing Payments (2025/6)

Housing Authority	Grant (£)
Bromsgrove District Council	62,332
Malvern Hills District Council	75,651
Redditch Borough Council	79,296
Wychavon District Council	112,099
Wyre Forest District Council	110,242

Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs) provide short-term financial assistance to households who require additional help with housing costs and are in receipt of Housing Benefit or the housing element of Universal Credit. The fund aims to prevent homelessness, sustain tenancies, and support households during periods of financial difficulty.

Appendix 3 - Glossary of terms

CAS3 : Community Accommodation Service	11
DAPB: Domestic Abuse Partnership Board	24
DRIVE: A domestic abuse partnership that protects victims by disrupting, challenging and changing the behaviour of those who are causing harm.....	14
LGR: Local Government Reorganisation	2
LHAs: Local Housing Authorities	4
MHCLG: Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government.....	9
MARAC: Multi agency risk assessment conference.....	14
PWLE: People with Lived Experiencee	4
RPs: Registered Housing Providers	6
TPG: Target Priority Group (most complex rough sleepers).....	4

Planning Advisory Service (PAS) Report

Relevant Portfolio Holder	Councillor Kit Taylor
Portfolio Holder Consulted	Yes
Relevant Assistant Director	Guy Revans, Executive Director – Environment and Communities
Report Author	Job Title: Executive Director – Environment and Communities Contact email: guy.revans@bromsgroveandredditch.gov.uk
Wards Affected	All
Ward Councillor(s) consulted	N/A
Relevant Council Priority	All four Council Corporate Priorities.
Non-Key Decision	
If you have any questions about this report, please contact the report author in advance of the meeting.	
If you have any questions about this report, please contact the report author in advance of the meeting.	

1. **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Cabinet RESOLVE that: -

- 1.1 The findings of the Planning Advisory Service (“PAS”) Report dated January 2026 attached at Appendix 1 be noted.
- 1.2 The comments of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee regarding consideration of the PAS Report as summarised in this report and set out at Appendix 3 be noted.
- 1.3 The recommendations made by the PAS as set out at 3.1.2 of this report be accepted and implemented.
- 1.4 The progress made to date as set out in section 3.3 of this report be noted and the Planning Advisory Service Recommendations Action Plan as set out at Appendix 2 of this report be adopted.

2. **BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 In light of the significant reforms introduced through the Levelling-Up and Regeneration Act 2023, the Planning & Infrastructure Act 2025, and updates to the national planning policy framework (NPPF), the Bromsgrove Chief Executive, in agreement with the Council Leader,

commissioned an independent review of the council's planning service to ensure it is well placed to meet the challenges ahead.

2.2 The review was carried out by the Planning Advisory Service ("PAS") and the final report is attached at Appendix 1. In requesting the review, it was recognised that there are multiple challenges facing the delivery the Council's planning service currently, including the need to support councillors and officers in responding to legislative changes, historical issues with progressing plan-making and the requirement to deliver a new local plan. The PAS note that the planning service is operating in a complex environment with 89% of land in the District designated as green belt. Housing land supply is only 2.24 years belt which can lead to additional development pressures.

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

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

3. OPERATIONAL ISSUES

3.1 Key points from the PAS report January 2026.

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

1) Assess the effectiveness of governance arrangements.

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

2) Evaluate the working relationships between officers, members, and external partners (particularly Worcestershire County Council).

- There is work to do to rebuild levels of trust between councillors and officers. These dynamics relate to both the Local Plan processes and Develop Management and the Planning Committee processes.
- Pre-application discussions and site visits are underutilised, and interaction between councillors and officers outside of planning committee is limited. This results in issues which could be resolved earlier often surfacing at committee leading to lengthy debates and reinforcing a sense of tension rather than collaboration.
- Above all the PAS note that the Council must create an environment where behaviours reflect shared goals rather than individual or political agendas.
- The PAS note that Bromsgrove's planning service is at a critical juncture, and that the leadership and senior management must have a clear opportunity to address the current risks but also set a new tone for how councillors, officers and senior leadership work together—collectively taking responsibility for how planning shapes the future of the district.

3) Identify barriers to successful decision-making.

- It is noted by the PAS that planning is increasingly being viewed through a party-political lens rather than a shared corporate priority.
- They also note that the Council being in no overall control has led to a greater need for cross party collaboration.
- Further, that there are significant obstacles to meeting the current Local Development Scheme (LDS) timetable, not least the absence of the national plan making regulations and Local Government Reorganisation (LGR).
- The report is clear that planning is a key corporate risk. The political leadership and senior managers will need to support and enable officers and councillors to make difficult but necessary decisions.
- Progressing the emerging local plan is vitally important if the council is to provide for a plan-led approach to future development and infrastructure provision. Without an up-to-date local plan, the district will remain subject to the risk of widespread speculative development and 'planning by appeal' for a prolonged period which would be undesirable and detrimental to local communities. There is also a risk of government intervention in plan-making which

would see decisions on the future direction of growth being taken away from the council.

- Despite the uncertainty, the council is making progress — including the recent consultation on the draft development strategy, however the plan making timetable needs to accelerate substantially, and we urgently complete an up-to-date green belt assessment and establish an agreed spatial vision and approach to guide development of a preferred spatial strategy.

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

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

3.2 Recommendations of the report

3.2.1 The Key recommendations from the PAS review are set out in the table below. In accordance with recommendation 1.3, Members are being asked to resolve that the recommendations set out below are accepted and implemented.

Decision making	
RDM1	<p>There is an urgent need for a reset in the relationships and interaction between councillors and officers. This is essential to improve collaborative working between officers and members that will improve the quality of decision-making. All the mechanisms and processes are in place to enable this but are not being used as widely and effectively as they could be. This should be led and given the highest priority by senior managers and political leaders with buy-in from all political groups as well as the planning team.</p>
RDM2	<p>Recommendation: Strengthen and formalise councillor planning training The council should establish a comprehensive and structured programme of planning training for both planning committee members and ward councillors, designed to strengthen defensible decision-making, clarify roles and responsibilities, and ensure decisions are made within a clear legal and governance framework. The training should be mandatory for committee members. This programme should include the following components:</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Defensible decision-making training for planning committee members, based on the PAS <i>Defensible Decision-Making</i> resource and, where appropriate, the use of relevant case studies. The purpose of this training is to ensure committee members are fully aware of their statutory role and responsibilities, to reinforce the principles of sound, evidence-based decision-making, and to reduce the risk of challenge. It is recommended that this element of the training is delivered by a suitably experienced external consultant to provide independence and specialist expertise. • An ongoing programme of training for planning committee members focused on emerging national and local planning issues, developed alongside the council's existing annual training offer. This should include briefings on new and evolving forms of development (for example, grey belt development and battery storage) and reinforce understanding of how key policy concepts, including the application of the '<i>tilted balance</i>'¹, should be applied in decision-making. • A dedicated programme of planning training for ward councillors, aimed at improving understanding of how councillors can appropriately influence planning decision-making, the limits and parameters of that influence, and the wider council context within which planning decisions are taken. This training should cover the legal framework governing planning decisions, the importance of decisions being robustly evidenced, and ensure councillors are fully cognisant of the council's code of conduct and constitution as they apply to planning matters. The programme should also include an overview of the role of planning enforcement and how it interacts with planning decision-making.
RDM3	<p>To continue exploring ways of working more effectively with Worcestershire County Council (especially highways).</p> <p>The need to cultivate better joint working and engender a more effective role within the decision-making process is recognised by the council. The Bromsgrove chief executive is encouraged to continue to engage with their counterpart at Worcestershire County Council and establish clear expectations and deliverables. This may be achieved via and memorandum of understanding (MOU) regarding highway matters, developed by the planning service with the support of the executive director and chief executive.</p>
RDM4	<p>To undertake a review of the processes and performance monitoring associated with planning enforcement. This should be undertaken with a specific emphasis on improving the interaction between the investigating officers and the planning officers responsible for undertaking planning assessments, as well as on how this work is prioritised. In terms of performance, a key objective of planning enforcement is to resolve as many breaches as possible without serving a notice, and that should be seen as a</p>

	positive outcome and not a negative one. Performance data and ‘numbers of notices served’ is not the best indicator of performance – reporting on cases opened and resolved would be a better indicator.
RDM5	To undertake a review of officer presentations to the planning committee. This is to ensure that officer presentations are proportionate and provide a greater focus on identifying what are the key issues to assist committee member’s consideration.
RDM6	Review the quality of streaming of planning committee meetings and the timescale for retention of recordings. This needs to be aimed at identifying ways of improving the viewing experience, taking note of best practice elsewhere. Previous legal advice around the retention of recordings should be revisited to ensure that the recordings are retained until they cease to perform any useful purpose.
RDM7	To provide greater encouragement for councillors to contribute to pre-application work and to explore how interaction between councillors and officers outside of the planning committee more generally can be improved. This should involve reviewing the operation of existing procedures to understand why they are not leading to greater interaction, and how further opportunities can be encouraged. This should be supplemented by reinforcement by senior officers and political party leaders of the importance and benefits arising from greater officer-councillor engagement in planning matters more generally.
RDM8	To undertake a review of the planning committee site visit process to encourage better attendance. This should explore and seek to resolve the issue of poor attendance, including reviewing the timing and number of accompanied site visits undertaken.
Local Plan Review	
RLP1	Build political consensus. Reflect upon the challenges arising from the draft development strategy consultation approach and identify lessons learned. Facilitate an impartially chaired cross-party workshop of all councillors/and or the strategic planning steering group (SPSG) to address concerns about process, rebuild consensus, and develop understanding of risks relating to the ‘tilted balance’ (see recommendation RDM2 above). This will empower elected members to communicate a strong positive vision for the district’s future and consider ‘macro’ district-wide benefits rather than just ‘micro’ ward impacts.
RLP2	Review the operation and terms of reference for the strategic planning reference group (SPSG) to improve governance arrangements and support a genuine cross-party local plan member working group. A review should include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Defined membership proportionate to group sizes (not open attendance). • Requirement for continuity of attendance (named councillors with named deputies). • Clear terms of reference including collective responsibility for recommendations and efficient administrative arrangements.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Authority to make recommendations to cabinet/full council. • Regular meetings with effective and efficient administrative arrangements. which minimise demands on planning policy officers. • Impartial chairing by the council leader or assistant director rather than portfolio holder to emphasise the corporate priority. • End/avoid separate political group briefings and ensure all members receive the same information simultaneously.
RLP3	<p>Develop the strategic spatial vision and complete evidence base. Urgently complete an up-to-date green belt assessment and establish an agreed spatial vision and approach to guide development of a preferred spatial strategy. Commission spatial master planning work and utilise design coding to illustrate what development could look like, moving beyond allocation boundaries to show placemaking, design quality, and community integration. Ensure employment, retail, community facilities, and green infrastructure receive equal prominence to housing .in future iterations of the draft plan. Organise councillor site visits to exemplar developments.</p>
RLP4	<p>Secure infrastructure delivery commitments as a priority. Build on chief executive-to-chief executive engagement with Worcestershire County Council with clear expectations and deliverables. Create a formal memorandum of understanding for transport planning support with agreed timescales and escalation procedures. Work closely with the county council to jointly identify solutions and agree future plans to fund and deliver new and enhanced education provision to serve planned growth. Produce a robust infrastructure delivery plan (IDP) endorsed by all providers. Consider adoption of community infrastructure levy (CIL) and explore front-loading of developer contributions.</p>
RLP5	<p>Strengthen Programme Management and Resources. Develop a comprehensive project plan aligned to the new planning system Gateway requirements, showing all tasks, critical path dependencies, resource allocation, and realistic contingency. Undertake capacity assessment of the planning policy team and secure additional resources (e.g. Assistant Directors have been proactively asked and reminded to submit budget bids, including bids for additional capacity) where needed. Implement regular progress monitoring and actively maintain risk register. If May 2028 target proves to be unachievable through detailed planning, revise and republish the local development scheme (LDS) with realistic timescales.</p>
RLP6	<p>Continue active senior leadership support. Use the corporate risk register to reinforce and recommunicate that the local plan is a key corporate risk. There should be regular progress reporting to the senior leadership team from the assistant director and the strategic planning manager. Chief executive and executive director should keep a dialogue going with planning policy officers and attend key meetings where appropriate to provide their support where required. Reinforce clear protocols for engagement and councillor-officer interaction and ensure group leaders take responsibility for councillor’s following them and continue to provide wellbeing support for planning officers.</p>

RLP7	Introduce a training and support programme for councillors. Establish training for all councillors on the role and importance of the local plan to reduce future risk and enable more effective and collaborative approaches to plan progression in the future. Councillors require sufficient training and strong political group leadership to support them to fulfil their roles appropriately for the long-term benefit of the electorate and the district as a whole. In short, members need to be supported to make politically very difficult decisions.
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3.3 Actions taken to date:

3.3.1 There has been cross party consideration and discussion of the report at the Group Leaders meeting on 28th January and at the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 10th February. There has also been consultation and discussion with the Chair and Vice Chair of the Planning Committee.

3.3.2 The Group Leaders meeting agreed a number of actions including: -

- That the PAS Report be considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 10th February 2026
- That to build political consensus, a Local Plan Cross-party Working Group (LPCPWG) should be established with a defined membership proportionate to group sizes with immediate effect (3 Conservative, 2 Liberal Democrat, 2 Labour and 2 Independent).
- That Terms of Reference (ToR) should be drawn up for the LPCPWG.
- That a meeting should be held with the chair and vice chair of the planning committee to discuss the LGA planning training for committee chairs held at Warwick University. The aim of the meeting was to review what additional steps to support the running of planning committee could be agreed and implemented or alternatively be referred to the constitution working group for further consideration

3.3.3 The meeting of Overview and Scrutiny on 10th February considered a report summarising the findings of the PAS report and Members had the opportunity to be addressed by and put questions to two of the planning consultants from PAS who had been involved in the review. A list of the main issues discussed is set out at Appendix 3 to this report.

- 3.3.4 In addition to the full list at Appendix 3, Members may wish to note the following specific points raised by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee:
- That the Committee believes that there is a need for joint Officer-Member relationship building training. This links to PAS recommendation RDM1 regarding the need for a re-set in the relationships and interactions between councillors and officers. Members of the Committee resolved that **“Joint Officer-Member relationship building training be included as a formal action within the PAS action plan”**.
 - That urgency in moving forward was highlighted as a concern with particular regard to the Local Plan and the number of speculative planning applications.
 - Members also discussed the need to progress implementation of the PAS action plan.
- 3.3.5 The meeting of the Chairman and Vice Chairman of Planning Committee outlined in paragraph 3.3.2 has now taken place. This has resulted in some suggestions regarding the operation of Planning Committee being agreed to be implemented as soon as practicable. A number of other matters that need more in-depth consideration have been referred to the Constitution Working Group.
- 3.3.6 Officers can report that to date there have been two meetings of the LPCPWG. An update on the local plan issues was given to the first meeting of the LPCPWG and a further update given at the second meeting to keep group members fully apprised of current position and timescales across the work streams.
- 3.3.7 Counsel’s Opinion was sought from a specialist planning barrister around the local planning process. The barrister attended the first meeting of the LPCPWG and will be attending relevant future meetings to give clarity on the Local Plan process.
- 3.3.8 Resourcing requirements have been worked up for both the Local Plan and Development Management. These have identified that additional staff are required in both areas and due to the increase in applications budgets will be increased to allow recruitment in the new financial year.
- 3.3.9 Initial meetings have been held to discuss the required training, workshops and support that is required for both Councillors and Officers for both the Local Plan and Development Management areas and this

has included joint training and workshops as requested at the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board on 10th Feb 2026.

3.3.10 A draft Memorandum of Understanding has been produced for discussion with the County Council once agreed by the LPCPWG.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

4.1 The Development Management element of the review and report was paid for by the Planning Advisory Service and was therefore carried out at no cost to the Council. The Local plan element cost a total of £17,744

4.2 Recruitment to existing positions is ongoing, in order to progress plan making at speed funding for additional posts has been included in the budget. The Cost for these posts is £123k per annum, although 40% of this would be apportioned to RBC under the shared service arrangement, leaving £74k for BDC to fund.

4.3 In addition, £525k has been apportioned from reserves to fund the evidence base and legal fees associated with preparing the Local Plan.

4.4 Within DM recruitment is ongoing for 1 x (within establishment costs) Principal Planner role. However additional resource is also being requested to enable 2 further postholders to be appointed. Considering existing savings, the costs of these 2 x additional posts would be £113,919, split under the shared services arrangement 66% to BDC (£75,946) and 33% to RBC (£37,973).

4.5 These proposals will be funded via additional Planning income or if that does not happen then it will be funded from Financial resilience reserve fund.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Planning decisions must be decided in accordance with the Formalising training and clarifying roles will strengthen compliance with the statutory framework for planning and enforcement decisions. It will also reinforce the legal framework governing councillor behaviour, including the Code of Conduct and rules on predetermination. Other actions will clarify expectations between parties and strengthen compliance with administrative law.

5.2 The plan-making process is governed by the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012, although

changes are being made via the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023 (LURA). Preparing a development plan is a statutory requirement for Local Planning Authorities

6. OTHER - IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Local Government Reorganisation

Failure to adopt a new Local Plan before local government reorganisation (April 2028) creates uncertainty over plan ownership, as the new Authority will have the final say on adoption, and implementation.

We wrote to Wyre Forest District Council re the potential for a North Worcestershire Local Plan and they have rejected this in favour of a single district plan for their area.

6.2 Relevant Council Priority

Economic Development, Housing, Environment and Infrastructure.

6.3 Climate Change Implications

6.3.1 Planning plays a central role in delivering the Council's Net Zero and climate resilience objectives. Both the Local Plan and day-to-day development management decisions shape future carbon emissions, transport patterns, energy use and the District's ability to adapt to climate impacts.

6.3.2 Implementing the PAS recommendations will help ensure climate considerations are embedded more consistently and defensibly in planning decisions by strengthening governance, evidence, and Member training.

6.3.3 To support sustainable growth and align with national policy requirements, future planning work should:

- **Promote low-carbon, energy-efficient development**, using design codes and updated policy to require higher energy standards and low-carbon heating.
- **Enable renewable and low-carbon energy infrastructure**, including solar, wind, and heat networks, where appropriate.
- **Prioritise sustainable transport**, integrating active travel, public transport and EV infrastructure to reduce car dependency.
- **Strengthen climate adaptation**, particularly regarding flood risk, surface water management, overheating and water efficiency.

- **Protect and enhance green and blue infrastructure**, supporting biodiversity, carbon sequestration and climate resilience.
- **Ensure development delivers Biodiversity Net Gain** and other statutory environmental outcomes.

6.3.4 The emerging Local Plan will be the primary mechanism through which these climate objectives are delivered. Early decisions on spatial strategy, infrastructure, and green belt considerations will have long-term implications for carbon reduction and environmental resilience. Embedding robust climate evidence and maintaining strong Member–Officer collaboration will be essential in achieving a sustainable and future-proofed development strategy for the District.

6.4 Equalities and Diversity Implications

Adopting these recommendations supports equality and diversity by strengthening fairness, transparency and consistency in decision making. It also improves the accessibility of the planning process and help councillors better understand their duties under the Equality Act 2010. To implement them lawfully the council must ensure that all training and processes are accessible to every councillor and that no new procedures inadvertently disadvantage people with protected characteristics. It is also important that equality considerations are embedded in revised approaches, MOUs or enforcement frameworks.

7. RISK MANAGEMENT

- 7.1 The Bromsgrove District Plan (adopted 2017) is nearing the end of its plan period and is no longer providing an effective planned framework for decision-making.
- 7.2 From a DM perspective, risk centres around the Speed and Quality of decision making and government sanctions are in place if either fall below relevant thresholds. Implementing an action plan to address the issues identified by the PAS report, would reduce risks especially around the quality assessment and would ensure that good decisions are being made. Departmental risk monitoring and mitigation would remain in place and is regularly discussed with the Service AD.
- 7.3 The progress of the Local plan is being monitored via the corporate risk register under COR0017. The immediate action is to update the timetable for the Local Plan and formally publish the notice of intention to start plan making, this is being considered by the Local Plan Working group. Once the regulations allowing the Council to formally progress into the new plan making system are published, the notice

can be prepared. In the background work is still progressing on the plan as identified in this report.

- 7.4 Lack of five-year housing land supply is an issue, with only 2.24 years' supply, the council is exposed to the *tilted balance*, increasing the likelihood of additional development pressure.
- 7.5 There is a risk of government intervention in plan-making if progress is not made.
- 7.6 Fragmented political control increases the risk of inconsistent decision-making and difficulty achieving cross-party consensus on strategic planning matters.
- 7.7 Tension between national policy and local priorities, Councillors face ongoing tension between green belt protections and government housing delivery expectations, increasing decision risk.
- 7.8 Delays and unresolved issues can lead to appeals for non-determination, removing control from the council.
- 7.9 Excessive focus on minor details at planning committee risks missing strategic planning considerations and weakens the planning balance.
- 7.10 Limited early engagement by councillor involvement at pre-application and pre-committee stages leads to unresolved concerns surfacing late in the process.
- 7.11 With approximately 89% of the district designated green belt, options for growth are severely constrained. This is added to by the complexity of "grey belt" policy:
- 7.12 The perceived ineffectiveness of enforcement, leads to Councillor frustration and limited understanding of enforcement constraints, competing workloads can delay enforcement investigations and undermine confidence in the system. An overreliance on notice numbers rather than resolution outcomes risks a misleading performance assessment.
- 7.13 Continued strain between officers and councillors risks further decline in working relationships and organisational culture and staff departures and recruitment difficulties, reduces capacity and institutional knowledge adding to pressures on staff.

8. APPENDICES and BACKGROUND PAPERS

Cabinet 2026

25th March

- 8.1 Appendix 1 - Planning Advisory Service Report
- 8.2 Appendix 2 - Planning Advisory Service Recommendations Action Plan
- 8.3 Appendix 3 - Summary of comments of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee regarding consideration of the PAS Report (meeting date 10th February 2026)

9. REPORT SIGN OFF

Department	Name and Job Title	Date
Portfolio Holder	Kit Taylor	03.03.2026
Lead Director / Assistant Director	N/A	N/A
Financial Services	Debra Goodall	03.03.2026
Legal Services	Sarah Sellers	26.02.2026
Policy Team (if equalities implications apply)	Rebecca Green	03.03.2026
Climate Change Team (if climate change implications apply)	Matthew Eccles	03.03.2026

APPENDIX 1



Planning Service Review

Bromsgrove District Council

January 2026

Final report

APPENDIX 1

Contents

1. Executive Summary	3
2. Key Recommendations	5
3. Scope of the service review	9
4. Planning Advisory Service (PAS)	10
5. The peer team.	10
6. Decision Making Review	11
7. Plan-Making	20
8. Implementation, next steps and further support	36
Appendix 1 – Approach to the Review	37

APPENDIX 1

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1. In light of the significant reforms introduced through the Levelling-Up and Regeneration Act 2023, the Planning & Infrastructure Act 2025, and updates to the national planning policy framework (NPPF), the Bromsgrove chief executive, in agreement with the council Leader, has commissioned this independent review of the council's planning service to ensure it is well placed to meet the challenges ahead. The review, carried out by Planning Advisory Service (PAS) is also in recognition of the need to support councillors and officers in responding to the forthcoming legislative changes, the requirement to deliver a new local plan, and the historical challenges experienced in progressing plan-making.
- 1.2. This review examines Bromsgrove District Council's local plan production process and the development management (DM) decision-making framework. There are areas of good practice but also significant challenges arising from changes in political control, a local plan last adopted in 2017, development pressures, and the evolving national planning policy reforms. The challenges are shared across different parts of the planning service and are of a systemic nature requiring councillors, officers, and the senior leadership of the council to take collective responsibility for resetting relationships and rebuilding trust, so that the corporate focus can be on delivering better planning outcomes.
- 1.3. The service operates in a complex environment. Development needs to be delivered against a backdrop of significant infrastructure challenges and 90% of land designated as green belt. Local plan policies are open to challenge for being out of date, housing need has recently doubled, and housing land supply is just 2.24 years. This increases the risk of speculative development and planning decisions by appeal. National planning reform adds further complexity, with a [new gateway-based plan-making system](#) requiring a disciplined, collaborative and well-managed approach.
- 1.4. These pressures sit alongside considerable political and structural change. The council moved to no overall control (NOC) in May 2023, introducing new political dynamics and making the need for cross-party collaboration more important than ever. Local government reorganisation (LGR) is having a tangible impact on the council's day-to-day operations, mainly through increased demands on leadership and officer capacity. The differing positions on the preferred model for reorganisation (Bromsgrove/most districts supporting a two-unitary option while the county council favours a single authority) will add a tension to the working relationship between the districts and the county council. The PAS review team are encouraged therefore by the Bromsgrove chief executive's commitment and efforts to engage with their county council counterpart.
- 1.5. Development management processes are broadly very sound, but opportunities for early engagement between councillors and officers are being missed. Pre-application discussions and site visits are underutilised, and interaction between councillors and officers outside of planning committee is limited. This results in issues which could be resolved earlier often surfacing at committee leading to lengthy debates and reinforcing a sense of tension rather than collaboration.
- 1.6. Governance arrangements have been updated seeking to keep pace with the demands of the changed political environment. This is an important step and part of process of addressing evidence of siloed and fragmented engagement. These updated arrangements are still bedding in, so it important that processes are followed consistently to support collaboration and collective ownership of issues. Planning is increasingly perceived through a party-political lens rather than as a shared corporate priority and there is still work to do to rebuild levels of trust and mutual respect between councillors and officers. These

APPENDIX 1

dynamics are in now in sharp focus as the council develops its updated local plan - despite the Full Council agreement to publish a draft development strategy consultation in summer 2025, the consultation strategy and draft local plan do not enjoy the support of many councillors.

- 1.7. There are significant obstacles to meeting the current LDS timetable, not least the absence of national plan-making regulations and the ongoing impact of preparations for local government reorganisation (LGR). Despite the uncertainty, the council is making progress — including the recent consultation on the draft development strategy, however the plan-making timetable needs to accelerate substantially while managing several key issues.
- 1.8. These include embedding governance arrangements that should foster cross-party consensus. For the local plan, it means developing a compelling spatial vision, completing the evidence base, and continuing with and formalising relationships with key partners— particularly Worcestershire County Council—are essential steps. Above all, the council must create an environment where behaviours reflect shared goals rather than individual or political agendas.
- 1.9. Planning is a key corporate risk, and the political leadership and senior management understand that getting the local plan in place will require supporting and enabling officers and councillors to make the difficult but necessary decisions. This is against the backdrop of many wider and significant corporate and strategic challenges beyond planning like LGR and balancing the books in a difficult fiscal environment.
- 1.10. The challenges identified represent clear opportunities for improvement, but being broadly systemic in nature, they need more than technical fixes alone. They require a reset that prioritises collaboration, shared responsibility, and a united response across the council. Both councillors and officers need to work together and use the strategic planning steering group (SPSG) and senior leadership team (SLT) meetings to establish a constructive dialogue supported by transparent processes and timely information sharing. By embracing these principles, the council can restore confidence in the planning service decision-making processes, and work towards ensuring that development is plan-led, infrastructure-supported, and aligned with community needs.
- 1.11. Bromsgrove’s planning service stands at a critical juncture. The leadership and senior management of the council have a clear opportunity not only to address current risks, but also to set a new tone for how councillors, officers, and senior leadership work together—collectively taking responsibility for how planning shapes the future of the district.

APPENDIX 1

2. Key Recommendations

- 2.1 These recommendations are interdependent and mutually reinforcing. Several recommendations are cross-cutting and arising from both the decision-making and plan making review. The service review is encouraged to address these recommendations in a suitably joined up manner. Success will require sustained political leadership, cross-party commitment, adequate resources, improved risk management, and a fundamentally different approach to the challenges ahead.
- 2.2 It is important that these recommendations form part of a service / improvement plan that is clear about 'what success looks like'. This will help to ensure that the recommendations in this report are in context and aligned to a clear set of outcomes and measures.

Decision making	
RDM1	<p>There is an urgent need for a reset in the relationships and interaction between councillors and officers. This is essential to improve collaborative working between officers and members that will improve the quality of decision-making. All the mechanisms and processes are in place to enable this but are not being used as widely and effectively as they could be. This should be led and given the highest priority by senior managers and political leaders with buy-in from all political groups as well as the planning team.</p>
RDM2	<p>Recommendation: Strengthen and formalise councillor planning training</p> <p>The council should establish a comprehensive and structured programme of planning training for both planning committee members and ward councillors, designed to strengthen defensible decision-making, clarify roles and responsibilities, and ensure decisions are made within a clear legal and governance framework. The training should be mandatory for committee members.</p> <p>This programme should include the following components:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Defensible decision-making training for planning committee members, based on the PAS <i>Defensible Decision-Making</i> resource and, where appropriate, the use of relevant case studies. The purpose of this training is to ensure committee members are fully aware of their statutory role and responsibilities, to reinforce the principles of sound, evidence-based decision-making, and to reduce the risk of challenge. It is recommended that this element of the training is delivered by a suitably experienced external consultant to provide independence and specialist expertise. • An ongoing programme of training for planning committee members focused on emerging national and local planning issues, developed alongside the council's existing annual training offer. This should include briefings on new and evolving forms of development (for example, grey belt development and battery storage) and reinforce understanding of how key policy concepts, including the application of the '<i>tilted balance</i>'¹, should be applied in decision-making.

¹ Planning Legislation requires planning decisions to be made in accordance with the Development Plan as a starting point, and balance this with all other material considerations. Paragraph 11 of the NPPF, under the 'presumption in favour of sustainable development',

APPENDIX 1

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A dedicated programme of planning training for ward councillors, aimed at improving understanding of how councillors can appropriately influence planning decision-making, the limits and parameters of that influence, and the wider council context within which planning decisions are taken. This training should cover the legal framework governing planning decisions, the importance of decisions being robustly evidenced, and ensure councillors are fully cognisant of the council's code of conduct and constitution as they apply to planning matters. The programme should also include an overview of the role of planning enforcement and how it interacts with planning decision-making.
RDM3	<p>To continue exploring ways of working more effectively with Worcestershire County Council (especially highways).</p> <p>The need to cultivate better joint working and engender a more effective role within the decision-making process is recognised by the council. The Bromsgrove chief executive is encouraged to continue to engage with their counterpart at Worcestershire County Council and establish clear expectations and deliverables. This may be achieved via and memorandum of understanding (MOU) regarding highway matters, developed by the planning service with the support of the executive director and chief executive.</p>
RDM4	<p>To undertake a review of the processes and performance monitoring associated with planning enforcement. This should be undertaken with a specific emphasis on improving the interaction between the investigating officers and the planning officers responsible for undertaking planning assessments, as well as on how this work is prioritised. In terms of performance, a key objective of planning enforcement is to resolve as many breaches as possible without serving a notice, and that should be seen as a positive outcome and not a negative one. Performance data and 'numbers of notices served' is not the best indicator of performance – reporting on cases opened and resolved would be a better indicator.</p>
RDM5	<p>To undertake a review of officer presentations to the planning committee. This is to ensure that officer presentations are proportionate and provide a greater focus on identifying what are the key issues to assist committee member's consideration.</p>
RDM6	<p>Review the quality of streaming of planning committee meetings and the timescale for retention of recordings. This needs to be aimed at identifying ways of improving the viewing experience, taking note of best practice elsewhere. Previous legal advice around the retention of recordings should be revisited to ensure that the recordings are retained until they cease to perform any useful purpose.</p>
RDM7	<p>To provide greater encouragement for councillors to contribute to pre-application work and to explore how interaction between councillors and officers outside of the planning committee more generally can be improved. This should involve reviewing the operation of existing procedures to understand why they are not leading to greater interaction, and how further opportunities can be encouraged. This should be supplemented by reinforcement by senior officers and political party leaders of the importance and benefits arising from greater officer-councillor engagement in planning matters more generally.</p>

sets out circumstances where this balancing exercise should be weighted towards granting permission. This is the case where there are no relevant policies in the Development Plan, or the relevant policies are 'out of date' including where the council cannot demonstrate a five-year supply of deliverable housing sites. These circumstances become a material consideration, which 'tilts' the balancing exercise from a neutral balance to one where there must be compelling reasons for permission to be withheld.

APPENDIX 1

RDM8	To undertake a review of the planning committee site visit process to encourage better attendance. This should explore and seek to resolve the issue of poor attendance, including reviewing the timing and number of accompanied site visits undertaken.
Local Plan Review	
RLP1	Build political consensus. Reflect upon the challenges arising from the draft development strategy consultation approach and identify lessons learned. Facilitate an impartially chaired cross-party workshop of all councillors/and or the strategic planning steering group (SPSG) to address concerns about process, rebuild consensus, and develop understanding of risks relating to the 'tilted balance' (see recommendation RDM2 above). This will empower elected members to communicate a strong positive vision for the district's future and consider 'macro' district-wide benefits rather than just 'micro' ward impacts.
RLP2	Review the operation and terms of reference for the strategic planning reference group (SPSG) to improve governance arrangements and support a genuine cross-party local plan member working group. A review should include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Defined membership proportionate to group sizes (not open attendance). • Requirement for continuity of attendance (named councillors with named deputies). • Clear terms of reference including collective responsibility for recommendations and efficient administrative arrangements. • Authority to make recommendations to cabinet/full council. • Regular meetings with effective and efficient administrative arrangements, which minimise demands on planning policy officers. • Impartial chairing by the council leader or assistant director rather than portfolio holder to emphasise the corporate priority. • End/avoid separate political group briefings and ensure all members receive the same information simultaneously.
RLP3	Develop the strategic spatial vision and complete evidence base. Urgently complete an up-to-date green belt assessment and establish an agreed spatial vision and approach to guide development of a preferred spatial strategy. Commission spatial master planning work and utilise design coding to illustrate what development could look like, moving beyond allocation boundaries to show placemaking, design quality, and community integration. Ensure employment, retail, community facilities, and green infrastructure receive equal prominence to housing .in future iterations of the draft plan. Organise councillor site visits to exemplar developments.
RLP4	Secure infrastructure delivery commitments as a priority. Build on chief executive-to-chief executive engagement with Worcestershire County Council with clear expectations and deliverables. Create a formal memorandum of understanding for transport planning support with agreed timescales and escalation procedures. Work closely with the county council to jointly identify solutions and agree future plans to fund and deliver new and enhanced education provision to serve planned growth. Produce a robust infrastructure delivery plan (IDP) endorsed by all providers. Consider

APPENDIX 1

	adoption of community infrastructure levy (CIL) and explore front-loading of developer contributions.
RLP5	Strengthen Programme Management and Resources. Develop a comprehensive project plan aligned to the new planning system Gateway requirements, showing all tasks, critical path dependencies, resource allocation, and realistic contingency. Undertake capacity assessment of the planning policy team and secure additional resources (e.g. Assistant Directors have been proactively asked and reminded to submit budget bids, including bids for additional capacity) where needed. Implement regular progress monitoring and actively maintain risk register. If May 2028 target proves to be unachievable through detailed planning, revise and republish the local development scheme (LDS) with realistic timescales.
RLP6	Continue active senior leadership support. Use the corporate risk register to reinforce and recommunicate that the local plan is a key corporate risk. There should be regular progress reporting to the senior leadership team from the assistant director and the strategic planning manager. Chief executive and executive director should keep a dialogue going with planning policy officers and attend key meetings where appropriate to provide their support where required. Reinforce clear protocols for engagement and councillor-officer interaction and ensure group leaders take responsibility for councillor's following them and continue to provide wellbeing support for planning officers.
RLP7	Introduce a training and support programme for councillors. Establish training for all councillors on the role and importance of the local plan to reduce future risk and enable more effective and collaborative approaches to plan progression in the future. Councillors require sufficient training and strong political group leadership to support them to fulfil their roles appropriately for the long-term benefit of the electorate and the district as a whole. In short, members need to be supported to make politically very difficult decisions.

APPENDIX 1

3. Scope of the service review

- 3.1 Considering the significant changes being introduced through the Planning & Infrastructure Act 2025, the Levelling-Up and Regeneration Act (LURA) 2023, and updates to the national planning policy framework (NPPF), the Bromsgrove chief executive has taken the opportunity to reflect on how well its planning service is positioned to respond, especially in light of the council's need to produce a local plan, and the historical challenges experienced in progressing plan making. This is a timely chance to consider the council's overall approach to planning—examining decision-making, the effectiveness of councillor–officer working relationships, and the adequacy of support and training arrangements—benchmarking these against current best practice.
- 3.2 To support this, the council has commissioned the Planning Advisory Service (PAS) to undertake an independent review of its decision-making and plan-making functions. Rather than focusing on detailed processes or management structures, the review explores how effectively governance, people, and systems currently work together to enable sound planning decisions and to progress the production of an up-to-date local plan. The aim is to identify strengths to build on and areas where improvement is needed, ensuring the council is well prepared for the demands of the district and the reformed planning system.
- 3.3 It is important to recognise that this service review is not an inspection or an investigation; it is a 'critical friend' review, forward-looking, improvement-focused and designed to complement and add value to the council's own performance and improvement plans. The review is not designed to provide an in-depth or technical assessment but for the members of the peer team to draw on their experience and knowledge and reflect on the information presented to them and what they observed and heard during a series of on-site interviews.
- 3.4 This report is a summary of the review team's findings. Naturally, the review process represents a snapshot in time and will inevitably touch on things that the council is already addressing and progressing. The intention is to offer constructive challenge and practical recommendations that prioritise actions and focus future improvement work more effectively.
- 3.5 The PAS team thanks the councillors and officers for their open, honest and constructive responses during the service review process. All information collected is on a non-attributable basis. The team was made very welcome and would especially like to mention the invaluable organisational assistance and excellent onsite support provided by Susan Tasker (PA to Chief Executive and Office Services Manager), Angela Yale (PA to Ruth Bamford, Assistant Director of Planning Leisure & Cultural Services), and Sarah Carroll Senior PA.

APPENDIX 1

4. Planning Advisory Service (PAS)

- 4.1 PAS is a Local Government Association (LGA) programme which is funded primarily by a grant from the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG).
- 4.2 PAS's principal mission is to ensure that local planning authorities (LPAs) are continuously improving in their execution and delivery of planning services.
- 4.3 To achieve this, the PAS work programme focuses on:
- a) Helping local government officers and councillors to stay effective and up to date by guiding them on the implementation of the latest reforms to planning.
 - b) Promoting a 'sector-led' improvement programme that encourages and facilitates local authorities to help each other through peer support and the sharing of best practice.
 - c) Providing consultancy and peer support, designing and delivering training and learning events, and publishing a range of resources online.
 - d) Facilitating organisational change, improvement and capacity building programmes – promoting, sharing and helping implement the very latest and best ways of delivering the planning service.
- 4.4 PAS also delivers some of its services on a commercial basis, including change and improvement programmes for individual and groups of planning authorities in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

5. The peer team.

- Councillor Judy Emanuel – Uttlesford District Council (Independent)
- Councillor Linda Robinson – Wychavon and Worcestershire CC (Conservative)
- David Coleman – DAC Planning
- Tim Burton – timburtonplanning

APPENDIX 1

6. Decision Making Review

Scope and purpose

6.1 Planning Advisory Service (PAS) has been commissioned to undertake a review of planning committee decision-making at Bromsgrove District Council ('the council'). The review has examined decision making with a focus on the interaction and relationships between officers and members throughout the process, rather than a detailed review of processes and management.

6.2 The primary objectives of the review are to:

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

Key challenges

6.3 During its work, the review team found that the development management (DM) service has a comparatively stable team and whilst individual caseloads are high, officers are not generally overwhelmed. The service is well managed, motivated, and dedicated to delivering a high-quality planning service.

6.4 Bromsgrove District Council faces a particularly challenging set of circumstances:

- **Political Context:** The council operates under no overall control (NOC), with Conservatives as the largest group but without an overall majority. Political groups include Conservatives, Liberal Democrats, Labour, and two Independent groups. Elections are held on an all-out basis every four years, with the next elections due in May 2027.
- **Policy Context:** The Bromsgrove District Plan is now significantly out of date. The plan was adopted in 2017 and is approaching the end of its plan period (2030). More significantly, the council is unable to demonstrate a five-year housing land supply. As of 1 April 2025, the council can demonstrate only 2.24 years of deliverable housing land supply for the period 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2030. This means that the "tilted balance"² under paragraph 11(d) of the national planning policy framework (NPPF) applies to decision-making on planning applications, significantly increasing the risk of speculative development proposals being received and approved on appeal. The introduction of the revised [standard method](#) for calculating housing need as part of the has also resulted in a significant increase in local housing need in Bromsgrove from 383 dwellings per annum (dpa) to 715 dpa.

² Planning Legislation requires planning decisions to be made in accordance with the Development Plan as a starting point, and balance this with all other material considerations. Paragraph 11 of the NPPF, under the 'presumption in favour of sustainable development', sets out circumstances where this balancing exercise should be weighted towards granting permission. This is the case where there are no relevant policies in the Development Plan, or the relevant policies are 'out of date' including where the council cannot demonstrate a five-year supply of deliverable housing sites. These circumstances become a material consideration, which 'tilts' the balancing exercise from a neutral balance to one where there must be compelling reasons for permission to be withheld.

APPENDIX 1

- **Green Belt:** Bromsgrove has extensive green belt coverage (approximately 90% of the district). Release of green belt land for development has historically been highly controversial and politically contentious. The introduction of the "grey belt"³ concept in the NPPF adds further complexity.
- **Infrastructure concerns:** Bromsgrove faces significant infrastructure capacity challenges, particularly regarding secondary school provision, highways capacity, healthcare facilities, and surface water drainage. These constraints are a major source of public and political concern.

6.5 These circumstances create a tension for councillors between the national and local policy protections afforded to the green belt and central government's reform agenda, which seeks a step change in housing delivery. Decisions on major development—particularly new housing—are high-profile and often highly contentious, with proposals frequently attracting significant community opposition.

6.6 In the challenging circumstances outlined above, there is a heightened likelihood of planning decisions being subject to rigorous scrutiny and challenge. It is therefore essential that officers, councillors, and committee members work together to ensure decisions are based on sound judgement. Issues should be clearly understood by officers and councillors in advance of discussion or determination at planning committee.

6.7 The service has previously been at risk of designation (government intervention in decision making) for quality of decision-making for major applications. This is no longer the case as performance has improved in recent years supported by good performance monitoring – an essential part of ensuring that improvement is maintained.

Approach

6.8 The review was conducted in two distinct phases over a three-week period in October and November 2025:

- **Phase 1: Desk-based review (31 October – 12 November 2025)**

A review of documentation was undertaken to establish a baseline understanding of the council's processes and the key issues affecting decision making.

- **Phase 2: Engagement meetings (13-14 November 2025)**

Two full days of structured engagement sessions were held with key stakeholders at Bromsgrove District Council offices. In total, over 17 hours of direct engagement was undertaken with over 50 participants. The sessions were structured to enable each group to speak freely about their perspectives and concerns.

- Please refer to **Appendix 1** for full details of the documents reviewed and the interviews.

³ (NPPF December 2004 Annex 2: Glossary) Grey belt: For the purposes of plan-making and decision-making, 'grey belt' is defined as land in the Green Belt comprising previously developed land and/or any other land that, in either case, does not strongly contribute to any of purposes (a), (b), or (d) in paragraph 143. 'Grey belt' excludes land where the application of the policies relating to the areas or assets in footnote 7 (other than Green Belt) would provide a strong reason for refusing or restricting development.

APPENDIX 1

Key issues and risks

6.9 This section sets out the key issues and risks identified through the review, together with recommended mitigation measures for the council to consider. The issues are presented thematically, though it should be recognised that many are interrelated and cumulative in their impact.

Councillor engagement in the decision-making process

6.10 A councillor's role in decision-making should start before the planning committee meeting. Involving councillors early in the process for major schemes or those that could prove particularly contentious, for example during pre-application discussions, can help applicants not only better understand the application of planning policy, but also local priorities and community views, providing insight into how a development may be received before a formal application is submitted. Furthermore, if councillors are involved at pre application stage then applicants have an opportunity to tailor suitable proposals to make them more acceptable which generally should improve relationships between applicants, the council and the community.

6.11 To support this approach, the council has a protocol in place which encourages councillor input to this process without the risk of predetermination. The protocol sets out clear criteria and guidance for councillor involvement, engagement and conduct. This document represents best practice, and the review team considers there to be clear opportunities to make sure more regular councillor participation is supported at this early and critically important stage of the process.

6.12 Some councillors may perceive engaging with developers as beyond their role or potentially at odds with community expectations, but this should not be viewed as a conflict. By following the protocol (see 6.11 above), ensuring that an officer is always involved and that all meetings are openly and transparently reported, councillor involvement in pre-application work will invariably lead to better outcomes for both proposed and existing residents. It also represents a good example of how officers and councillors can work together to improve planning outcomes. For this and the reasons set out in paragraph 6.10, greater involvement of councillors in pre-application discussions and consultations is therefore to be strongly encouraged.

6.13 Effective councillor–officer engagement should extend beyond formal discussion at planning committee. Councillors may wish to ask questions, explore issues, or test their thinking on applications, and these matters are often best addressed in advance of the meeting. At Bromsgrove, the committee agenda is published five clear working days prior to the meeting giving members the opportunities to contact officers. Officers also make themselves available ahead of committee meetings for this purpose. However, take up of these opportunities is limited and the reasons for this should be explored with a view to finding ways to encourage greater and earlier interaction.

6.14 There is a clear opportunity for councillors and officers to discuss the details of applications and to recognise and record the political sensitivities of major development proposals earlier, which could help ensure that concerns are identified and understood well before committee debates take place. Councillors and committee members are encouraged to take an earlier approach to engagement as it would support better-informed decision-making, encourage wider participation, and make sure that the process works more effectively for both members and officers. 'Councillors will avoid any risk of

APPENDIX 1

predetermination if they comply with advice on such matters provided in the council's pre-application protocol.

- 6.15 Planning committee meetings should be focused on addressing the key determining issues and material planning considerations relating to the planning application under discussion. The planning committees observed by the review team were dominated by meticulous scrutiny of very detailed points, many of which could have been discussed and resolved in advance of the meeting. This is not the best use of planning committee time and can result in members and officers unnecessarily appearing at odds with each other.

Site visits

- 6.16 Carrying out site visits in advance of the committee meeting is beneficial to gaining an understanding of the context of a site and is an opportunity for councillors to ask officers questions and seek clarification. Therefore, the reintroduction of site visits (following their suspension during the Covid pandemic) is supported. The council has clear written procedures to ensure site visits are carried out appropriately which represents good practice. However, both officers and councillors agreed that site visits are often poorly attended. This is a missed opportunity to foster closer member-officer working relationships, and to address any issues earlier in the process. The timing of site visits is widely recognised as a contributory factor, and this is an opportunity to address that.
- 6.17 It can be difficult to find a perfect solution for the timing of site visits (they often need to take place during the working day). There may be an opportunity to review the timing of site visits. Consideration should be given to reducing the number of proposals requiring a site visit and focusing on schemes where a site visit adds the greatest value; some proposals will not be enhanced by a formal site visit, and some can easily be seen from public land, enabling councillors to visit independently at a time convenient to them. This is therefore an opportunity for the service to consider reducing the overall number of visits, which may then make it easier for councillors to attend. This should be combined with a reminder of the importance of attendance when site visits are scheduled.

Enforcement

- 6.18 Several councillors are concerned and frustrated at what they regard as the ineffectiveness of planning enforcement, and particularly a lack of communication on enforcement cases. Officers informed us that a monthly email is sent to councillors regarding enforcement cases, so there is a disconnect here on communication. Enforcement investigations are often sensitive in nature and at times there is information that cannot be shared. This is an opportunity for officers to help councillors (perhaps via a re-launch of the monthly email) to better understand the circumstances, sensitivities and constraints on enforcement cases and what information can be shared and where it is not appropriate for them to become involved.
- 6.19 Enforcement investigations are undertaken by Worcestershire Regulatory Services on behalf of Bromsgrove council, with planning assessments then being carried out by planning officers within the development management team. Officers interviewed recognise the challenges of juggling enforcement assessments with their other work and that a review of how all work is prioritised will help ensure that delays are avoided or kept to a minimum. Consideration could be given to having a resource within the planning team dedicated to / focused on enforcement matters.

APPENDIX 1

- 6.20 Councillors indicated that they would like to see additional performance information on planning enforcement which is linked to a view that low numbers of enforcement notices are being served. PAS would always encourage members to seek performance information and remind them that enforcement is about negotiating and assessing real planning harm and a key objective is to resolve as many breaches as possible without serving a notice, and that should be seen as a positive outcome and not a negative one. Performance data and 'numbers of notices served' is not the best indicator of performance – reporting on cases opened and resolved would be a better indicator.

The Planning committee

- 6.21 The Planning Advisory Service undertook a review of the council's planning committee procedures in early 2023. This concluded that *"from the information available and observation of the two committees, the meetings appear to be well managed and demonstrate good teamwork from the committee chair, planning officers and the democratic services staff. The production of the meeting is carried out professionally, and the democratic services staff ensure that the technology and process are working as planned."* Notwithstanding this, the report did make several recommendations, the majority of which have since been implemented.
- 6.22 As alluded to in para 6.15, planning committee meetings tend to focus on scrutinising the finer details of proposals at the risk of spending less time addressing more strategic issues and making the meetings unnecessarily drawn out. This may be partly driven by a lack of engagement between officers and members prior to the committee meeting. Where members attend committee meetings with unresolved questions or issues in their minds, it often leads to a high level of question and debate at committee – often on less important points of a proposal. The review team think this is a significant contributory factor to what it heard described as 'nervousness' and a 'lack of trust' between officers/councillors.
- 6.23 Closer working between officers and members outside of the committee forum as recommended will go a long way towards resolving issues prior to committee, as well as resulting in a collaborative approach where officers and members can get 'on the same page' and/or understand where the key areas of contention will be. This will have the knock-on benefit of focussing discussions at committee solely to the important planning considerations, rather than those detailed matters that are more appropriately addressed elsewhere / through other legislation.
- 6.24 The leadership role of ward councillors and how they represent their constituents can be particularly challenging in relation to contentious or high-profile planning decisions. In some cases, councillors' public comments and the lodging of appeals by applicants against non-determination (the council not making a decision within a specified period) on key sites highlight the difficulties and complexities involved in confidently reaching timely decisions. These circumstances present opportunities for officers and councillors to work together to strengthen understanding, communication, and confidence in decision-making processes.

APPENDIX 1

- 6.25 When asked, several members of the planning committee see their role as being advocates on behalf of the community. This is their prerogative but has consequences for that member's quasi-judicial role on planning committee. There is a resultant need to embed a greater understanding of the function of the planning committee to highlight its role in delivering the council's planning agenda as a whole and not just in the interests of individual wards.
- 6.26 The chair of the planning committee undertakes their duties competently and the review team believe there are opportunities and benefits to be had from the chair guiding committee members more strongly in appropriate circumstances.
- 6.27 An effective chair–vice-chair partnership is central to the smooth operation of the planning committee, before, during, and after meetings and to will help ensure clarity, transparency, and confidence in decision-making. Ahead of meetings, it is good practice for the chair and vice-chair to review applications together, identify items likely to generate debate, and agree on how to manage these constructively. During meetings, the vice-chair plays a vital supporting role—tracking speakers, noting potential conditions, and helping to 'read the room' so discussions remain focused and inclusive. Afterward, reflecting jointly on the meeting's outcomes and public perception strengthens accountability and continuous improvement. This collaborative approach goes beyond deputising in the chair's absence; it fosters two-way communication and constructive feedback, benefiting even the most experienced chair and ensuring the committee operates at its best.
- 6.28 The introduction of online streaming of the meetings is a positive step forward, and the service should now work on improving the quality of the broadcast. It is often not possible to identify the person speaking and officer presentation material is not displayed. This reduces the effectiveness of the visuals and subsequently the viewers experience. As a result, the proceedings can appear confusing for those that do not regularly attend the meetings in person. It is recommended that the council observes the streaming of meetings elsewhere with a view to improving the quality of its own stream.
- 6.29 Furthermore, the recording of each planning committee meeting is removed as soon as the minutes are approved and this conflicts with good practice elsewhere. Whilst there may be no reasonable justification for retaining the recordings in perpetuity, this approach means the recordings are often deleted before the relevant decision notice is issued and inevitably before the deadline for the submission of an appeal or to seek a judicial review. For these reasons it is suggested that the council considers retaining the recordings for a longer period of at least six months.
- 6.30 The council has clear procedures for how alternative motions (for example where councillors might come to a different decision than officers) should be dealt with and the circumstances where an adjournment may be appropriate. Planning committee members would like to understand what more support they can expect to receive in such circumstances.
- 6.31 When proposing an alternative motion, it is the responsibility of committee members to identify and set out their reasons. This is not an officer's role; officers are there to advise councillors on the soundness of those reasons and to finesse the precise wording of those reasons if necessary. There is no evidence from viewing recordings of recent meetings to suggest that this is not happening, but it is important that officers are seen to be being helpful in this sense. Whilst the democratic services team accepted that there has been a rise in adjournments being proposed to agree reasons for refusal recently, this should not be a common occurrence and avoided whenever possible to reinforce a sense of transparency in decision-making.

APPENDIX 1

- 6.32 The council has a protocol on appeals where a decision has been made by the committee that is contrary to an officer recommendation. This includes consideration of who is the most appropriate person to defend that appeal. There may be circumstances when the case officer is the most appropriate person to do this, but normally it would be preferable to avoid this. This has been raised as an issue and whilst a detailed review of cases has not been undertaken, it is important that consideration continues to be given to the most appropriate approach on a case-by-case basis.
- 6.33 Officer presentations to the planning committee are comprehensive and as a result can be quite long. There should always be a balance between providing councillors with the full details of all issues raised and a focus on what are the key ones for their determination. On balance, it is felt that the presentations are currently too focussed on ensuring that they are comprehensive to the extent that they are not highlighting sufficiently what are the most important considerations. Finishing the presentation with a summary slide with bullet points identifying key issues for councillors to consider in the overall planning balance may help give more focus to the subsequent debate.
- 6.34 Councillors have concerns about the late giving of apologies and the submission of late information, influenced by a few recent occurrences. The review team is satisfied that the council already has appropriate guidance in place. However, it may be beneficial to remind those involved of the need to provide as much notice as possible if they cannot attend a meeting and to ensure sufficient time is allowed to consider any information received following the publication of the officer report. Decisions on whether a late item should remain is a matter of judgement based on individual circumstances. Whilst the idea of introducing an earlier fixed cut off for late information may seem attractive, it could unintentionally delay the determination of some proposals unnecessarily.

Committee training and development

- 6.35 Whilst the protocols and procedures in place for the operation of the planning committee are clear and robust, it remains important that all concerned are regularly reminded of their existence and how they can be accessed. Many of the issues raised during the PAS interviews are covered in these documents. This implies that some councillors are not fully aware of what is in place to assist and support them in their role. There would be benefit in clarifying how all councillors in their various roles should engage appropriately with the planning decision-making process and this could be provided using the PAS defensible decision-making training module.
- 6.36 Planning committee members receive annual mandatory planning training to ensure they are kept up to date with key issues, policy and legislation. This includes training on the scheme of delegation and involvement in pre-application discussions, the call-in procedure and probity and conduct issues. This represents good practice, and a crucial element of ensuring that councillors understand the key aspects of their role and remain up to date.
- 6.37 It is important that training also addresses the various emerging changes to the legislative and policy framework, as well as new forms of development that are coming forward in the area. The council has already provided training on the grey belt and should also consider training on other topics e.g. battery energy storage systems (BESS).
- 6.38 There is a need to ensure that there is available time at the planning committee to review decisions and appeals in addition to performance monitoring information. Regular meetings to review the performance of the planning committee is also good practice.

APPENDIX 1

Communication/escalation of issues

- 6.39 There is a disconnect that needs addressing in terms of the collective ownership by of planning issues raised. Mechanisms for councillors to raise concerns with the planning team, and how issues are escalated need to be reinforced and better understood. Circumstances that led to the leader of the council raising an issue on environmental impact assessment (EIA) with the Secretary of State, rather than resolving the issue within the council is one such example.
- 6.40 A breakdown in trust in the transport advice provided by Worcestershire County Council has resulted in several major housing proposals being refused contrary to that advice and subsequently being allowed on appeal. Whilst the council's appointment of an independent transport consultant is noted, this is treating the symptom and is not the best means of creating a satisfactory and sustainable solution to improve the relationship issue. Issues with this relationship were apparent and raised at the time of the previous PAS review, but little seems to have changed. This is a corporate risk to the council in terms of delivery of its overall planning strategy. Therefore, there is an urgent need for a reset in the relationship. This should be led and afforded a higher priority by senior managers. The highways authority, where they have provided specific advice, should be represented in person at planning committee meetings where potentially controversial applications are being considered. This should be addressed through a service level agreement.
- 6.41 Councillors take the opportunity to pass on complaints from their residents to officers, but this appears to be the extent of their involvement. There would be benefit from having a more collaborative approach to the resolution of complaints, with councillors taking a more active role, working alongside officers where it is deemed appropriate.
- 6.42 In cases where it is clear from an early stage that a proposal will be controversial and likely to involve significant levels of correspondence and interaction with the community affected, a more proactive approach should be taken. Officers should work alongside councillors to identify roles and responsibilities to address the level and nature of response that may be required.

Conclusions

- 6.43 Notwithstanding recommendations around the content of officer presentations and the live streaming, the planning committee process is well organised with the necessary processes, procedures and safeguards in place. The work of the PAS review team finds no reason to question the quality of officer advice received by committee members and the process is supported well by the legal advisor and democratic services staff.
- 6.44 Whilst the council is not currently at risk of designation for the quality of decisions made, officers and councillors need to work together to ensure that decisions are only made contrary to officer advice when there is evidence to justify an alternative balancing of material considerations.
- 6.45 The business of the planning committee is currently too concentrated on scrutinising and challenging the intricate details of planning proposals – potentially at the expense of the broader strategic considerations, which are a more appropriate focus of councillors and committee decision-making.

APPENDIX 1

- 6.46 There needs to be more engagement between councillors and officers beyond that at the planning committee. At present this can result in opinions becoming entrenched rather than being explained and resolved through discussion. Officers and councillors have the opportunity via the recommendations in this report to actively improve engagement and enhance relationships.
- 6.47 This will have a positive effect on overall councillor-officer relationships that are generally accepted to have been in decline.
- 6.48 Whilst this report makes several specific recommendations, the overriding message is that there is need for a fundamental reset in the way officers and councillors interact. Senior managers and council leaders have a key role to play in leading this reset, encouraging and cultivating closer and more collaborative working and boosting morale. The resolving of many of the issues can be supported by reemphasising, communicating and following existing procedures more consistently and proactively addressing inappropriate behaviour where it occurs.

APPENDIX 1

7. Plan-Making

Scope and purpose

- 7.1 The Planning Advisory Service (PAS) was commissioned to undertake a review of local plan related work and processes at Bromsgrove District Council. The review was undertaken in parallel with a review of the development management (DM) function of the council (see section 6 of this report).
- 7.2 The review was designed to examine the approach being taken to local plan production and to evaluate the interaction and relationships between officers and councillors throughout the plan-making process.
- 7.3 This report provides a summary of the findings and recommendations arising from the review.
- 7.4 The primary objectives were to:
- Assess the effectiveness of governance arrangements and member engagement in local plan preparation.
 - Evaluate the working relationships between officers, members, and external partners (particularly Worcestershire County Council).
 - Identify barriers to progress and risks to successful plan delivery.
 - Understand the challenges related to evidence base preparation and stakeholder cooperation; and
 - Provide practical recommendations to strengthen the plan-making process and improve the likelihood of successful plan adoption.

Planning Policy Context

Current Development Plan and progress on the emerging plan

- 7.5 The current development plan for Bromsgrove comprises:
- Bromsgrove District Plan 2011-2030 (adopted January 2017)
 - Worcestershire Waste Core Strategy (adopted 2012)
- 7.6 The Bromsgrove District Plan is now significantly out of date. The plan was adopted in 2017 and is approaching the end of its plan period (2030). More significantly, the council is unable to demonstrate a five-year housing land supply. As of 1 April 2025, the council can demonstrate only 2.24 years of deliverable housing land supply for the period 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2030. This means that the "tilted balance"⁴ under paragraph 11(d) of the [National Planning Policy Framework](#) (NPPF) applies to decision-making on planning

⁴ Planning Legislation requires planning decisions to be made in accordance with the Development Plan as a starting point, and balance this with all other material considerations. Paragraph 11 of the NPPF, under the 'presumption in favour of sustainable development', sets out circumstances where this balancing exercise should be weighted towards granting permission. This is the case where there are no relevant policies in the Development Plan, or the relevant policies are 'out of date' including where the council cannot demonstrate a five-year supply of deliverable housing sites. These circumstances become a material consideration, which 'tilts' the balancing exercise from a neutral balance to one where there must be compelling reasons for permission to be withheld.

APPENDIX 1

applications, significantly increasing the risk of speculative development proposals being received and approved on appeal.

7.7 Progress on the emerging 'new' local plan has been protracted. The council undertook an issues and options consultation in September 2018, followed by a review update and further consultation in September 2019. A call for sites process resulted in over 400 possible development sites being submitted from across the district. A draft preferred option plan was prepared approximately four years ago (under an earlier iteration of the national planning policy framework (NPPF) and a lower local housing need), but this was subsequently not progressed by the council.

Emerging local plan and the government's [new plan-making system](#)

7.8 The council is now progressing the emerging Bromsgrove district plan under the 'new' plan-making system being introduced by the government. The council's local development scheme (LDS) published in February 2025 sets out a 30-month programme from the notice of the start of plan-making to adoption, with a target adoption date of May 2028.

7.9 The new plan-making system introduces a gateway process:

- **Gateway 1 (Advisory):** Early-stage advisory checkpoint.
- **Gateway 2 (Advisory):** Mid-stage advisory checkpoint; and
- **Gateway 3 (Stop/Go):** Final mandatory checkpoint before proceeding to examination.

7.10 The LDS indicates that the council intended to give the required notice of the start of plan-making in October 2025, commencing the 30-month timeframe. The programme includes:

- Draft plan consultation (8 weeks) – completed in summer 2025.
- Public consultation (6 weeks) – scheduled for 2026.
- Examination; and
- Finalisation and adoption – May 2028.

7.11 The council has not yet been able to give the 30-month notice as intended due to a delay in the introduction of the regulations that will govern the implementation of the new plan-making system, meaning that for all councils, not just Bromsgrove, the 30-month period has yet to commence.

7.12 The council published a draft development strategy for consultation in June 2025. This consultation ran for 16 weeks (double the planned 8 weeks) and generated approximately 8,000 responses. The plan is described as an "initial draft" requiring further work to firm up the development strategy. Notably, the draft strategy consultation document did not include draft policies, employment land allocations, and was not informed by a complete evidence base.

Understanding of the New System

7.13 Engagement sessions undertaken as part of the PAS review highlighted a range of outstanding issues or questions in relation to the council's local plan position and how this would be addressed under the new local plan system. For example:

APPENDIX 1

- The transitional arrangements for local plans to progress under the current ‘legacy’ local plan making system (which has a deadline of 31 December 2026 for submission).
- The ability/options to progress a local plan under the new plan making system currently and in the absence of regulations.
- The potential risks and implications of seeking to progress a plan under the ‘new’ plan making system; and
- How the new system will differ from the current (legacy) system.

7.14 This uncertainty creates additional risk, as the council is operating under a system of plan making that is not yet fully implemented or tested, with guidance still emerging from government.

Government Announcement on the New Plan-Making System (27 November 2025)

7.15 On 27 November 2025, the government published a [written ministerial statement](#) providing further details on the new plan-making system which will be introduced through regulations under the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act (LURA) 2023. The new system introduces a 30-month statutory period from the date a local planning authority gives notice of the start of plan-making to submission for examination, with a further period of up to 12 months for examination and adoption. The process includes three gateway checkpoints: Gateway 1 (around 9 months) and Gateway 2 (around 18 months) are advisory stages where the Planning Inspectorate (PINS) provides feedback to help authorities stay on track, while Gateway 3 (at 30 months) is a mandatory assessment where planning inspectors will determine whether the plan is ready can proceed to examination. At Gateway 3, planning inspectors will assess whether the plan has been prepared in accordance with legal and procedural requirements, is supported by adequate and proportionate evidence, has properly considered reasonable alternatives, and is deliverable.

7.16 For Bromsgrove District Council, the delay in introducing the regulations governing the new system means there is currently uncertainty about when the 30-month statutory period will formally commence and consequently whether the May 2028 adoption target can realistically be achieved. Once the regulations are introduced and the council can give formal notice of its intention to start the plan making process, the 30-month period will start. The new plan making system places great emphasis on ‘front loading’ the process making it essential that the foundational work is substantially progressed before that point to maximise the chances of successfully navigating the Gateway process.

Key Challenges

7.17 Bromsgrove District Council faces a particularly challenging set of circumstances:

- **Political context:** The Council operates under no overall control (NOC), with Conservatives as the largest group but without an overall majority. Political groups include Conservatives, Liberal Democrats, Labour, and two Independent groupings. Elections are held on an all-out basis every four years, with the next elections due in May 2027.
- **Housing requirements:** The introduction of the revised standard method for calculating housing need as part of the NPPF (December 2024) has resulted in a significant increase in local housing need from 383 dwellings per annum (dpa) to 715 dpa for Bromsgrove.

APPENDIX 1

- **Green belt:** Bromsgrove has extensive green belt coverage (approximately 90% of the district). Release of green belt land for development has historically been highly controversial and politically contentious. The introduction of the "grey belt"⁵ concept in the NPPF adds further complexity.
- **Infrastructure:** Infrastructure is a major source of public and political concern. The extent of the challenges, particularly regarding secondary school provision, highways capacity, healthcare facilities, and surface water drainage are an important part of what the evidence base for the local plan seeks to establish.
- **Public opposition:** There has been organised public opposition to the local plan, including a march during the summer 2025 consultation period that required a specific risk assessment and event management processes to be put in place. There have also reportedly been serious threats made to individual councillors regarding the Local Plan.
- **Local government reorganisation (LGR):** Proposals for local government reorganisation nationally and in Worcestershire create uncertainty about the future structure of local government. The outcome of these proposals is expected prior to the summer recess in 2026 with new structures of unitary authorities formally replacing existing councils in April 2028. This raises questions about whether the Bromsgrove local plan can be adopted before any reorganisation takes effect and who will be responsible for implementing it.
- **New plan-making system uncertainty:** The council is one of the early adopters of the new plan-making system. This creates uncertainty as the detailed requirements, expectations for Gateway assessments, and examination processes are still being clarified through government guidance and early testing.

Approach to the review

7.18 The review was conducted in two distinct phases over a three-week period in October and November 2025:

- Phase 1: Desk-based review (31 October – 17 November 2025)

A comprehensive review of documentation was undertaken to establish a baseline understanding of the council's position and the key issues affecting local plan progression.

- Phase 2: Engagement meetings (26-27 November 2025)

Two full days of structured engagement sessions were held with key stakeholders at Bromsgrove District Council offices. In total, over 12 hours of direct engagement was undertaken with approximately 30+ participants. The sessions were structured to enable each group to speak freely about their perspectives and concerns.

Please refer to **Appendix 1** for full details of the documents reviewed and the interviews

⁵ (NPPF December 2004 Annex 2: Glossary) Grey belt: For the purposes of plan-making and decision-making, 'grey belt' is defined as land in the Green Belt comprising previously developed land and/or any other land that, in either case, does not strongly contribute to any of purposes (a), (b), or (d) in paragraph 143. 'Grey belt' excludes land where the application of the policies relating to the areas or assets in footnote 7 (other than Green Belt) would provide a strong reason for refusing or restricting development.

APPENDIX 1

Key Issues and Risks

7.19 This section sets out the key issues and risks identified through the review, together with recommended mitigation measures for the council to consider. The issues are presented thematically, though it should be recognised that many are interrelated and cumulative in their impact.

7.20 Approach to the draft development strategy consultation

7.21 *Issues*

- The latest consultation approach to the draft development strategy (published in June 2025) was voted on and agreed at Full Council in June. However, a consistent and significant theme emerging from the PAS interviews is a dissatisfaction among some councillors with the decision to consult on a single spatial option rather than presenting a range of alternatives for public consideration. These concerns have been compounded by using separate political group briefings, as well as the SPSG meetings in advance of the full council meeting to discuss the strategy.
- In line with the council's plan making responsibility, it is important to recognise that the decision to consult on a draft development strategy reflects officers' efforts to re-establish momentum and progress the emerging local plan following a prolonged period of delay (see 'Planning Policy Context' above). This delay has been influenced by a combination of factors, including protracted changes to national planning policy, shifts in local political control, and the inherent complexity of the plan itself. These circumstances help explain the approach taken and highlight the difficulties officers face in navigating the differing levels of understanding among councillors about the risks associated with further delay in progressing the local plan towards a preferred spatial strategy. While acknowledging the challenges faced, it remains notable that more than seven years after the first consultation took place on the emerging local plan, the council has not been able to collectively agree a preferred spatial approach. Taking all this context together, the full council agreement to consult on a single spatial option is understandable given the urgency to progress the plan, but the approach does not enjoy the support of a significant number of councillors.
- Some councillors have raised concerns about the site assessment and selection process, citing perceived issues around transparency, consistency, and the level of information available on future infrastructure provision. The process has been characterised by some councillors as being 'developer-led through the call for sites', rather than council-led. While this characterisation does not fully reflect the necessary role of the call for sites process (a statutory part of the plan making process) in informing site assessment, it does point to the absence of a clearly articulated and widely shared spatial vision to guide site selection and command broad member confidence.
- There is a need for improved shared understanding of the importance of reaching political consensus on a preferred spatial strategy for the emerging local plan, and the implications of continued delay for the council's ability to proactively manage and shape future development in the district. There is also evidence of a gap in understanding among some councillors regarding the statutory role of evidence and professional officer advice in informing plan preparation and site selection.
- For the local plan to progress effectively, councillors need to take ownership of the emerging document as the 'council's plan', rather than perceiving it primarily as an

APPENDIX 1

officer-led exercise. During the recent consultation, a significant number of councillors publicly distanced themselves from the draft development strategy, with some expressing reservations about its approach and status. There is a key role here for the strategic planning steering group (SPSG) to provide the confidence, clarity, and leadership required to move the plan forward.

- Officers rightly regard the publication of the draft development strategy for public consultation as an important and long-awaited milestone in the progression of the emerging local plan. The plan has been in preparation for a considerable period, reflecting both its complexity and the repeated challenges of maintaining momentum in a changing policy and political context. The decision to move forward to consultation at this stage was intended to provide focus and direction, and to help progress the plan following earlier periods of stalling. At this point, however, the supporting evidence base needed to fully underpin the identification of preferred housing sites is still being developed, and the absence of draft planning policies alongside the proposed site options has made it difficult for some stakeholders to appreciate how development will be mitigated. In addition, the draft strategy approved for consultation does not currently identify land for economic uses, which may give the impression that the emerging plan is more strongly focused on housing than intended.
- Taken together, these issues extend beyond a purely technical disagreement about the consultation approach. They reflect a combination of long-standing challenges associated with the length of time taken to reach this stage, differences in perspective and confidence between councillors and officers, and varying views across political groups. While the approach taken was shaped by a desire to make progress, the consultation highlights the importance of clear governance, shared understanding, and strengthened working relationships as the local plan progresses.

7.22 Risks

- That the consultation approach requires councillors to be comfortable considering the overall needs of the district relative to their ward priorities and the very local needs of the public in their area.
- The spatial strategy lacks political consensus.
- The plan may not achieve the votes needed for approval at full council and at key Gateway stages, and if the plan progresses to examination without political support, there is high risk of it being withdrawn or found unsound.
- Work on the remaining evidence base (particularly the green belt assessment, infrastructure delivery plan, viability assessment and the transport assessment) may yet indicate that the draft development strategy needs to be updated.

7.23 Mitigation - before proceeding to the next stage of plan preparation the council should:

- Reflect upon the challenges arising from the latest consultation approach and identify lessons learned to consider when planning the next stages of the local plan and future consultation.
- Review the effectiveness of governance arrangements relating to the progression of the local plan to ensure that arrangements, processes and communications are robust.

APPENDIX 1

- Facilitate a cross-party workshop for councillors (potentially with external facilitation) to explicitly address the concerns about process and to rebuild political consensus on taking the local plan forward.
- Consider whether additional consultation on alternative spatial strategies is necessary to restore confidence and bolster the status of the plan.
- Facilitate a cross-party workshop (potentially with external facilitation) to develop understanding and appreciation of risk relating to the local plan, including the implications of the 'tilted balance'.
- Establish training for all councillors on the role and importance of the local plan to reduce future risk and enable more effective and collaborative approaches to plan progression in the future.
- Empower councillors to communicate a strong positive vision for the future of the district arising from the emerging local plan to their electorate.
- Ensure that councillors consider the macro district-wide benefits of the emerging local plan rather than just the micro impacts for their wards.
- Ensure that any future consultation approach has explicit agreement from political group leaders before proceeding to full council.
- Urgently complete an up-to-date green belt assessment and ensure that key inputs relating to future infrastructure planning are secured from Worcestershire County Council without delay.
- Establish an agreed spatial vision and objectives to guide the development of a preferred spatial strategic approach that is evidentially grounded and robust.
- Produce an infrastructure delivery plan (IDP) to inform and justify the preferred approach being taken to the emerging local plan.
- Consider whether an independent peer review of the site selection methodology and its application would provide additional confidence.
- Commission spatial master planning work and utilise design coding to show what development could look like.
- Move beyond allocation boundaries to illustrate placemaking, design quality, and integration with existing communities.
- Show how infrastructure provision and community facilities would be delivered.
- Organise site visits to exemplar developments elsewhere so members can see what good growth looks like.
- Ensure that employment, retail, community facilities, green infrastructure, and design quality receive equal prominence to housing in plan presentation.

7.24 Service resilience and wellbeing

APPENDIX 1

7.25 Issues

- Planning policy officers are working in an extraordinarily challenging and unsustainable environment. With more political ownership of the local plan required, and no political consensus on the direction it should take, it is difficult to make meaningful progress. This, together with finding themselves caught in the middle of the different political groups, has a highly negative effect on officer's morale.
- Officers and councillors experienced a high level of public reaction during the draft development strategy consultation. In some instances, the strength of feeling was intensified by wider commentary that did not always support constructive or collaborative discussion about how the plan could move forward. Officers report significant pressures arising from working on two local plans (Bromsgrove and Redditch) simultaneously. This is compounded by a high level of turnover within the team and ongoing planning reform at a national level. Officers acknowledge receiving good support from other departments and corporate communications, but the overall environment is described as not sustainable.
- Councillors face considerable pressures and challenges in seeking to progress the emerging local plan. Public feelings are running high, with high levels of objections to development. The district has several major infrastructure challenges that need to be properly quantified and evidenced through the plan making process, including local congestion, ongoing roadworks, health capacity and school constraints which make it very difficult indeed to sell the positive benefits of development to the electorate. Added to this is the fact that almost 90% of the district is subject to green belt designation, which means that until the publication of the updated NPPF in December 2024 the district has been largely shielded from speculative development proposals. The 2024 NPPF has changed the way the green belt is considered in plan making and decision making⁶ through the introduction of 'grey belt'⁷.
- Councillors require sufficient training and strong leadership to support them to fulfil their roles appropriately for the long-term benefit of the electorate and the district as a whole. In short, councillors need to be supported to make politically very difficult decisions.
- Allied to strong political leadership is the need for senior officers to continue to support the professional advice and work provided by planning policy officers. Without this the scale and scope of risks associated with delays in local plan progression will be difficult to address.

7.26 Risks

- Further staff departures and difficulty recruiting to vacant posts due to the challenging environment.
- Officer ill-health and burnout.
- Reduced quality of work due to pressure and low morale.
- Inability to meet Gateway milestones due to inadequate resources.

⁶ Paragraph 155 of the NPPF 2024 stipulates that development in the Green Belt may not be regarded as inappropriate where it utilises grey belt land and other relevant conditions are met.

⁷ 'Grey belt' is defined as land in the Green Belt comprising previously developed land and/or any other land that, in either case, does not strongly contribute to any of purposes (a), (b), or (d) in paragraph 143. 'Grey belt' excludes land where the application of the policies relating to the areas or assets in footnote 7 would provide a strong reason for refusing or restricting development.

APPENDIX 1

- Officers do not feel supported making difficult professional recommendations, and councillors in making difficult political decisions.

7.27 Mitigation - Senior leadership continue to actively support the planning policy team:

- Continue to position the local plan as a key corporate risk. Assistant Director and Strategic Plans Manager to provide regular briefings to senior leadership team (SLT) with chief executive, executive director invited where their support is required. This should extend into the new system planning process e.g. when 'gateway' decision points are reached.
- Re-state the council's protocols for acceptable councillor-officer interaction, backed by guidance from the monitoring officer.
- Ensure political group leaders take responsibility for councillors' conduct, and are reminded of the professional role, expertise and dedication of the planning policy team.
- Ensure adequate resources are in place through:
 - Ensuring that the 'assurance form' process is followed by all assistant directors.
 - Active efforts to recruit to vacant posts.
 - Consideration of agency or interim support if permanent recruitment is difficult.
- Providing additional project management capacity to coordinate parallel workstreams and Gateway preparations.
- Dedicated communications support for local plan matters (not just general corporate comms)
- Ensure that officers get continued:
 - access to appropriate human resources (HR) support
 - regular supervision and support through line management
 - opportunities for team building and peer support
 - clear and effective escalation routes for issues
- Senior officers should attend consultation events and member meetings to support the work of more junior, less experienced officers.
- Consider whether additional recognition or reward mechanisms are appropriate.

7.28 **Improved governance arrangements**

7.29 *Issues*

- The current governance structure for the preparation of the local plan is fairly new and needs to bed in so that it can robustly support the progression of the local plan, especially in a no overall control political environment.
- The strategic planning steering group (SPSG) needs to be reviewed (see recommendation RLP2) to promote a more cooperative approach among political groups to resolve difference, build consensus and reach agreement.

APPENDIX 1

- Attendance at the SPSG is variable due to its open membership, resulting in no core group of consistently engaged, well-informed councillors. It also needs a more formalised role - the group currently functions primarily as an information-sharing forum.
- Engagement has been fragmented in the lead up to the consultation on the draft local plan. Each political group has had briefings from officers and group leaders meet separately with the chief executive, monitoring officer, and directors. Establishing joint sessions would promote genuine cross-party dialogue and reduce information silos.
- A formal coalition or confidence and supply agreement would help to provide stability, and members to exercise independence in voting on proposals.
- Under the new plan-making system, key decisions will need to be regularly made in a timely and predictable fashion if the plan is to progress successfully through Gateway checkpoints and meet the 30-month timetable.

7.30 Risks

- The council cannot build the cross-party consensus necessary to progress the plan in a timely fashion.
- Councillors make decisions without full information or understanding of alternatives.
- Political positioning and electoral considerations dominate over evidence-led planning.
- There is a lack of political buy-in to or ownership of the emerging plan.
- Delays continue as different groups pursue different objectives and agendas.
- Officers are caught in the middle, unable to progress work effectively.
- The district is left without an up-to-date local plan, and the tilted balance continues to apply for a prolonged period to the detriment of place making and delivering the priorities of local communities.

Mitigation

- The Council should ensure that the governance arrangements are fully embedded and support a genuine cross-party local plan member working group with:
 - Defined membership proportionate to group sizes (not open attendance).
 - Requirement for continuity of attendance (named councillors with named deputies).
 - Clear terms of reference including collective responsibility for recommendations
 - Authority to make recommendations to cabinet/full council.
 - Regular meetings with effective and efficient administrative arrangements which minimise demands on planning policy officers.
 - Independent chairing by the council leader or assistant director rather than portfolio holder to emphasise the corporate priority.
- Ensure all councillors receive the same information at the same time in joint sessions, ending separate group briefings.

APPENDIX 1

- Build in sufficient time for the working group to properly understand evidence and options.
- Require a commitment from group leaders that decisions made collectively by the working group will be supported by their wider groups (subject to normal democratic accountability).
- Consider whether a formal coalition agreement or confidence and supply arrangement between groups could provide greater stability for local plan progression.
- Ensure that members on the working group have sufficient understanding of the 'new' plan making process and are sufficiently representative of their groups.
- Ensure that all members receive appropriate information and briefings regarding the emerging local plan to enable them to keep abreast of progress prior to key decisions being taken by full council.
- Consider establishing an officer working group to be chaired by a senior officer to include representatives from teams across the council and county council to secure engagement and buy-in to local plan production and implementation.

7.31 **Infrastructure Delivery Uncertainty**

7.32 *Issues*

- The single most significant barrier to councillor and public confidence in the local plan is the lack of certainty about infrastructure delivery, particularly transport and education.
- There is concern that existing capacity is already at breaking point and that development in neighbouring authorities will place cumulative additional pressure. There is considerable concern that additional school places required to support future growth will not materialise.
- Delays in the provision of strategic transport modelling from the county council have severely impacted upon plan progress. In addition, the approach of the county council to proactively and collaboratively input into the production of the local plan has been questioned.
- Existing approaches to engagement with the county council, including attempts at escalating concerns, appear to be wholly ineffective.

7.33 *Risks*

- Councillors need assurances over the delivery of infrastructure if they are to confidently support the local plan.
- The plan could fail at Gateway 3 or be found unsound at examination if the position on infrastructure means failing to demonstrate the deliverability of the plan.
- Infrastructure providers do not engage positively in plan progression which delays progress and compromises outcomes.
- Even if adopted, the plan cannot be implemented effectively without infrastructure.
- Public opposition continues to mobilise around infrastructure concerns.
- Developers may challenge deliverability of sites due to infrastructure constraints.

APPENDIX 1

7.34 *Mitigation - The council must secure infrastructure delivery commitments as a matter of urgent priority:*

- Continued chief executive-to-chief executive engagement with Worcestershire County Council with clear expectations, deliverables, and accountability for county council support, ensuring Worcestershire County Council responds formally and substantively to local plan consultations.
- Establish regular councillor-level engagement (not just officers) between district and county cabinet members on local plan matters.
- Establish a formal memorandum of understanding (MoU) or service level agreement (SLA) for transport planning support, including:
 - Agreed timescales for transport model delivery
 - Specification for transport assessment reporting
 - Clear escalation procedures if deadlines are not met
- Ensure direct engagement between district council officers and the transport model team (Jacobs) with district input into model scenarios.
- Consider commissioning independent peer review of county council transport work.
- Develop fallback option to commission the council's own transport assessment work if county council cannot deliver to required timescales.
- For education obtain formal confirmation from county council of:
 - Current capacity issues in each catchment area.
 - Proposed solutions (expansion, new provision, catchment changes).
 - Trigger points for new provision linked to development phasing.
 - Funding commitments and mechanisms.
- Consider and explore how developer contributions may be front-loaded to enable infrastructure provision ahead of or alongside development.
- Consider how other sources of funding may help to secure future infrastructure delivery, including central government funding streams.
- Produce a robust Infrastructure delivery plan that is explicitly owned and endorsed by all relevant providers (not just produced by the district council).
- Consider adoption of community infrastructure levy (CIL) to provide more predictable and front-loaded infrastructure funding.
- Establish clear governance for ongoing infrastructure delivery and monitoring, with provider engagement continuing through to plan implementation.
- Ensure infrastructure requirements are a key consideration in site selection, with sites unable to be served by necessary infrastructure excluded or phased appropriately.

7.35 Programme management and timeline risks

7.36 *Issues*

APPENDIX 1

- While the new plan-making system provides a 30-month programme from notice to adoption, there remain significant concerns about the council's ability to meet the LDS timetable targeting May 2028 adoption.
- The current LDS programme is optimistic given:
 - The extent of remaining evidence base work.
 - The lack of political consensus.
 - The challenging relationship with county council on critical evidence.
 - Challenges relating to the approach to the draft development strategy consultation.
 - The resource constraints within the planning policy team.
 - Uncertainty about the detailed requirements / regulations associated with the new plan making system (until published by government).
 - Timescales for local government reorganisation (LGR).
- The Council needs a detailed project plan which provides clarity on:
 - Key tasks required between now and Gateway 3.
 - Critical path dependencies.
 - Resource allocation and capacity.
 - Contingency for slippage or unexpected issues.
 - How the 8,000 plus consultation responses received will be processed and analysed.
 - Decision points and member engagement requirements.
 - Engagement with statutory consultees and infrastructure providers.

7.37 Risks

- The May 2028 adoption target, already ambitious, cannot realistically be met.
- Insufficient time is allowed for evidence production, policy development, member engagement, and consultation processing.
- The plan fails at Gateway 3 because required work has not been completed.
- Delays in achieving political consensus continue, causing slippage against the LDS timetable.
- Inadequate contingency means any problem causes significant delay.
- The need for urgency continues to be under-appreciated and difficult decisions continue to be delayed/deferred.
- While an adopted Local Plan would continue to have statutory weight following local government reorganisation, current timescales suggest reorganisation may occur before adoption, creating uncertainty over whether a new authority would support and adopt the plan.

7.38 *Mitigation* - The Council must establish realistic and achievable programme management which builds upon existing work already undertaken to develop the emerging local plan, including the recently completed draft development strategy consultation findings. This should include:

- A comprehensive project plan working forward from the current position to May 2028, showing:

APPENDIX 1

- All tasks required for each phase of work.
 - When evidence must be complete for Gateway assessments.
 - Site selection and spatial strategy finalisation programme.
 - Policy development and testing schedule.
 - Sustainability appraisal iterations.
 - Member working group meetings and decision points.
 - Consultation periods and processing time.
 - Gateway preparation and assessment periods.
 - Contingency for each phase.
- A capacity assessment of planning policy team against project plan requirements, enabling the council to identify where additional resources (permanent, agency, or consultant) are required.
 - Consider whether dedicated project management support is needed.
 - Work backwards from each Gateway to understand:
 - What must be complete before each Gateway.
 - What evidence must be available.
 - What member decisions must be made.
 - What consultation/engagement must have occurred.
 - How long Gateway assessment may take.
 - Implement monthly Red/Amber/Green progress reporting showing:
 - Progress against LDS milestones and project plan.
 - Risks to programme.
 - Decisions required from members.
 - Resource issues.
 - Consequences of any slippage
 - Maintain and actively use a local plan specific risk register to:
 - Have mitigation plans ready for high-priority risks.
 - Be prepared to escalate issues to senior leadership and members quickly.
 - Consider whether an interim planning policy statement (PPS) could be adopted to:
 - Articulate and demonstrate the council's commitment to the emerging spatial strategy.
 - Provide some limited weight to emerging policies in decision-making.
 - Help manage speculative development before plan adoption by proactively prioritising the delivery of development proposals that accord with the council's agreed spatial strategy.
 - If detailed programme planning reveals that May 2028 cannot realistically be met, the LDS should be revised and republished with a more realistic timetable

Conclusions

7.39 Bromsgrove District Council is at a critical juncture in its plan-making process. Whilst a considerable amount of work has been undertaken towards the development of a draft local plan, the production process has been significantly affected by:

- The lack of councillor / political support for the consultation approach.

APPENDIX 1

- Exceptionally challenging environment for planning policy officers.
- Lack of compelling strategic spatial vision.
- Lack of cross-party consensus.
- Limited recognition of the scale of risks arising from a prolonged period without an up-to-date local plan and the application of the ‘tilted balance’.
- Notwithstanding attempts to engage at chief executive level, challenging and ineffective relationships with Worcestershire County Council on critical infrastructure matters.
- Governance arrangements for a no overall control political environment still bedding in.
- Evidence base gaps and unclear critical path interdependencies, including the timescales for completion of key evidence and workstreams which are interdependent, such as the green belt assessment, site selection, transport assessment, infrastructure delivery plan and viability assessment.
- Variable member understanding of plan making and the new plan-making system.
- Lack of detailed programme management aligned to Gateway requirements.

7.40 However, the situation is not irrecoverable. The planning policy team is experienced and professional. The evidence base can be completed. Infrastructure delivery planning can be progressed. Political consensus can be built. The Gateway process can be successfully navigated. Achieving this will require:

- Acknowledgment that the process to date has not achieved its objectives.
- Willingness to continue to establish the new governance processes that will help reset governance and rebuild cross-party consensus.
- Continued and active senior leadership intervention and support.
- Realistic programme management with clear alignment to Gateway requirements.
- Investment in member development, particularly regarding the new system.
- Improved risk management and corporate acknowledgement of the need to mitigate risks associated with the emerging local plan.
- Improved partnership working, particularly with county council.
- Development of a compelling spatial vision for Bromsgrove's future.
- Sustained political leadership to make difficult but necessary choices.

7.41 Based on the assessment undertaken, and the amount of ground to make up and reset required on collaboration and engagement, there are very serious concerns about the likelihood that the council will successfully navigate the Gateway process and adopt a sound and legally compliant local plan by May 2028 as set out in the LDS.

7.42 However, progressing the emerging local plan is vitally important if the council is to provide for a plan-led approach to future development and infrastructure provision. Without an up-to-date local plan, the district will remain subject to the risk of widespread speculative development and ‘planning by appeal’ for a prolonged period which would be undesirable and detrimental to local communities. There is also a risk of government intervention in plan-making which would see decisions on the future direction of growth being taken away from the council.

7.43 A considerable amount of work has already been undertaken which can be built upon, including the outputs from the recent draft development strategy consultation. The council should seek continue to progress the emerging local plan as a corporate priority as swiftly as possible.

APPENDIX 1

APPENDIX 1

8. Implementation, next steps and further support

- 8.1 The council and service will want to consider and reflect on these findings. To support openness and transparency, we recommend that this report is shared internally. There is also an expectation that the council responds to the findings in the report and develops an action plan to be published alongside the report.
- 8.2 Where possible, PAS and the LGA will support councils with the implementation of the recommendations. PAS provides other advice, resources, and practical tools which may help Bromsgrove address challenges, build on strengths, and prepare for upcoming changes in the planning landscape. Notably, PAS maintains a suite of training materials for planning committees, including guidance on protocols, schemes of delegation, and committee operations and will continue to update these to align with new legislation, including the Planning and Infrastructure Bill.
- 8.3 While official performance figures for Bromsgrove are healthy, the council should consider the PAS [Development Management Challenge Toolkit](#) and using PAS guidance on managing DM performance effectively, and the [PAS planning committee best practice self-assessment toolkit](#).
- 8.4 Finally, given how much change to the planning system is envisaged over the next 12 months, we strongly encourage all authorities to [sign up to the PAS bulletin](#) where updates and new guidance is promoted.
- 8.5 It is recommended that the council discuss ongoing PAS support with Martin Hutchings, martin.hutchings@local.gov.uk and any corporate support with Helen Murray, LGA Principal Adviser, helen.murray@local.gov.uk


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APPENDIX 1

Appendix 1 – Approach to the Review

Approach – Decision Making Review

The review was conducted in two distinct phases over a three-week period in October and November 2025:

Phase 1: Desk-based review (31 October – 12 November 2025)

A review of documentation was undertaken to establish a baseline understanding of the council's processes and the key issues affecting decision making.

Documents reviewed included:

- Planning review questionnaire responses from members and officers
- Team structure and staffing information
- Position statement
- Enforcement data
- Planning performance reports
- Planning committee member protocols and extracts from the constitution
- Customer satisfaction data

The desk-based review identified a series of questions and issues for exploration during the engagement phase.

Phase 2: Engagement meetings (13-14 November 2025)

Two full days of structured engagement sessions were held with key stakeholders at Bromsgrove District Council offices. In total, over 17 hours of direct engagement was undertaken with over 50 participants. The sessions were structured to enable each group to speak freely about their perspectives and concerns.

Day 1 (13 November 2025):

- Assistant Director and DM Managers
- Chief Executive and Executive Director
- Assistant Director – Democratic, Legal and Procurement Services (Monitoring officer) and Legal Services Manager (Deputy Monitoring Officer)
- Chair-Planning Committee
- Conservative Group
- Labour Group
- Independents 2025 Group
- Liberal Democrats Group

Day 2 (14 November 2025):

- Development Management team – planning officers of various roles
- Planning Committee (including substitutes)
- Planning Portfolio Holder
- Democratic and Legal Services Officers
- Worcestershire Regulatory Services Enforcement Team

APPENDIX 1

- Local Planning Agents

The planning committee's legal advisor was interviewed subsequently via Zoom, and the Leader of the council was interviewed on 24th November 2025.

The stream recordings of the planning committee meetings held on 4th October 2025, 1st November 2025 and 6th December 2025 have been observed.

This review represents a snapshot in time based on the perspectives shared during the engagement period in late 2025. The review did not include direct engagement with:

- Parish and town councils
- Worcestershire County Council officers or members
- Infrastructure providers (education, highways, utilities, health)
- Members of the public or community groups

However, the perspectives of these stakeholders were reflected in the views expressed by members and officers during the engagement sessions.

The process did not involve detailed scrutiny of individual planning applications.

Approach – Plan Making Review

The review was conducted in two distinct phases over a three-week period in October and November 2025:

Phase 1: Desk-based review (31 October – 17 November 2025)

A comprehensive review of documentation was undertaken to establish a baseline understanding of the council's position and the key issues affecting local plan progression. Documents reviewed included:

- Self-assessment questionnaire completed by officers
- Planning review questionnaire responses from members and officers
- Local development scheme (LDS) (February 2025)
- Draft Bromsgrove district local plan: Draft development strategy consultation document (June 2025)
- Housing land supply position statement (April 2025)
- Team structure and staffing information
- Local plan risk register
- Project initiation document (PID)
- Work programme
- Recent relevant reports to the strategic planning steering group
- Recent relevant reports and minutes of the overview and scrutiny board
- Reports to extraordinary meeting of the council 19th June 2025

The desk-based review identified a series of questions and issues for exploration during the engagement phase.

Phase 2: Engagement meetings (26-27 November 2025)

Two full days of structured engagement sessions were held with key stakeholders at Bromsgrove District Council offices. In total, over 12 hours of direct engagement was

APPENDIX 1

undertaken with approximately 30+ participants. The sessions were structured to enable each group to speak freely about their perspectives and concerns.

Day 1 (26 November 2025):

- Conservative group members – including the Leader of the council, Deputy Leader, Portfolio Holder for Planning, and other members
- Assistant Director and Strategic Plans Manager
- Portfolio Holder for Planning
- Chief Executive and Executive Director
- Liberal Democrat Group members

Day 2 (27 November 2025):

- Local Plan team – planning policy officers at various levels
- Labour Group members
- Bromsgrove Independents Group members
- Independents 2025 Group members

Limitations

This review represents a snapshot in time based on a desk-based review of relevant documentation and the perspectives shared during the engagement period in late November 2025. Some scheduled participants were unable to attend certain sessions. The review did not include direct engagement with:

- Parish and town councils
- Worcestershire County Council officers or members
- Infrastructure providers (education, highways, utilities, health)
- Developers and landowners
- Members of the public or community groups

However, the perspectives of these stakeholders were reflected in the views expressed by members and officers during the engagement sessions. It is also important to note that this advice note is advisory only rather than providing a legal view, and it should be read in the context of relevant legislation, national planning policy, and guidance.

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APPENDIX 2

	Decision making	Actions Required	Responsible Officer/s	Timescale	Updates
RDM1	<p>There is an urgent need for a reset in the relationships and interaction between councillors and officers.</p> <p>This is essential to improve collaborative working between officers and members that will improve the quality of decision-making. All the mechanisms and processes are in place to enable this but are not being used as widely and effectively as they could be. This should be led and given the highest priority by senior managers and political leaders with buy-in from all political groups as well as the planning team.</p>	<p>Run a workshop for all Councillors and Planning Officers that will facilitate collaborative working by reviewing working through a planning application from beginning to end so that all can understand the full process and requirements.</p>	<p>CX/SLT/ADPL&CS/ Planning Services Managers/ Group Leaders</p>	<p>End March 2026 (proposal)</p> <p>May / June (Workshop)</p>	<p>Officers have met with Planning Consultant to discuss them developing a workshop for Members and Officers that will ensure that all involved fully understand the key elements relating to planning applications this will include an overview of the planning application process from end to end.</p>
PDM2 Page 127	<p>Recommendation: Strengthen and formalise councillor planning training</p> <p>The council should establish a comprehensive and structured programme of planning training for both planning committee members and ward councillors, designed to strengthen defensible decision-making, clarify roles and responsibilities, and ensure decisions are made within a clear legal and governance framework. The training should be mandatory for committee members.</p> <p>This programme should include the following components:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Defensible decision-making training for planning committee members, based on the PAS <i>Defensible Decision-Making</i> resource and, where appropriate, the use of relevant case 	<p>Develop a training programme for Planning Committee Members, Substitutes and Planning Officers.</p> <p>Develop a training package for ward Members to fully understand the role that they can play in the planning process.</p>	<p>Exec Director / ADPL&CS/Planning Services Managers /Legal Democratic Services/Chair and Vice Chair of Planning Committee</p>	<p>End March (Meeting with PAS)</p> <p>May/June Proposal to Planning Committee at start of new municipal year)</p> <p>Planning Training Programme to run</p>	<p>Joint planning training is already booked for the 12th and 14th May, and (joint planning refresher training) is booked for the 18th of May.</p> <p>The Executive Director has met with the AD legal, Democratic and Procurement Services to review the current training provision and is meeting with the Planning advisory Service to review fully the current training programme for both Members, Members and Officers and Officers.</p>

APPENDIX 2

Page 128	<p>studies. The purpose of this training is to ensure committee members are fully aware of their statutory role and responsibilities, to reinforce the principles of sound, evidence-based decision-making, and to reduce the risk of challenge. It is recommended that this element of the training is delivered by a suitably experienced external consultant to provide independence and specialist expertise.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An ongoing programme of training for planning committee members focused on emerging national and local planning issues, developed alongside the council's existing annual training offer. This should include briefings on new and evolving forms of development (for example, grey belt development and battery storage) and reinforce understanding of how key policy concepts, including the application of the '<i>tilted balance</i>¹', should be applied in decision-making. • A dedicated programme of planning training for ward councillors, aimed at improving understanding of how councillors can appropriately influence planning decision-making, the limits and parameters of that influence, and the wider council context within which planning decisions are taken. This training should cover the legal framework governing planning decisions, the importance of decisions being robustly evidenced, and ensure 			through out 26/27	
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APPENDIX 2

	councillors are fully cognisant of the council's code of conduct and constitution as they apply to planning matters. The programme should also include an overview of the role of planning enforcement and how it interacts with planning decision-making.				
RDM3	<p>To continue exploring ways of working more effectively with Worcestershire County Council (especially highways).</p> <p>The need to cultivate better joint working and engender a more effective role within the decision-making process is recognised by the council. The Bromsgrove chief executive is encouraged to continue to engage with their counterpart at Worcestershire County Council and establish clear expectations and deliverables. This may be achieved via and memorandum of understanding (MOU) regarding highway matters, developed by the planning service with the support of the executive director and chief executive.</p>	Explore closer working relationships with WCC and Development Management and Strategic Planning and Conservation, possibly via MOU (Overlap with RLP4)	CEO/Exec Director/ADPL&CS/ Planning Managers/Legal Services	End May 2026	<p>An MOU has been drafted which was shared with the LPCPWG for comments at its meeting on 4th March.</p> <p>The CEO has regular meetings with the CEO of WCC regarding a range of matters and the MOU will be shared with him more specifically once the MoU is finalised.</p>
RDM4	<p>To undertake a review of the processes and performance monitoring associated with planning enforcement. This should be undertaken with a specific emphasis on improving the interaction between the investigating officers and the planning officers responsible for undertaking planning assessments, as well as on how this work is prioritised. In terms of performance, a key objective of planning enforcement is to resolve as many breaches as possible without serving a notice, and that should be seen as a positive outcome and not a negative one. Performance data and 'numbers of</p>	Review planning enforcement processes and monitoring with emphasis on communications and appropriate performance reporting.	WRS//Development Management/Legal/ Corporate Policy and Performance		<p>The ADPL&CS and Planning Services Manager will meet with WRS, Legal Services, and Corporate Policy and Performance to review the performance management and monitoring of Planning Enforcement and look at how communications with Councillors can be improved. This will be presented in the new municipal year.</p>

APPENDIX 2

	<p>notices served' is not the best indicator of performance – reporting on cases opened and resolved would be a better indicator.</p>				<p>The Planning Services Manager and the WRS lead for enforcement have met and identified that additional resource is required to speed up the planning service review of enforcement cases. This has been addressed in the short term and additional resource will be put in place in the new financial year. This resource would also assist with the processing of planning applications.</p>
<p>Page 130 M5</p>	<p>To undertake a review of officer presentations to the planning committee. This is to ensure that officer presentations are proportionate and provide a greater focus on identifying what are the key issues to assist committee member's consideration.</p>	<p>Consider other Council's presentation style.</p>	<p>Development Management/Democratic Services/Chair and Vice Chair of Planning Committee</p>	<p>April 2026</p>	<p>The Planning Services Manager responsible for the BDC Planning Committee has considered the style of presentations and Planning Officers will be changing the way that they deliver their presentations, to concentrate on key issues that Members need to consider. These changes will be discussed with the Chair and Vice Chair of the planning committee.</p>
		<p>Prepare guidance for officers to ensure key issues are made clear.</p>	<p>Development Management/Democratic Services/Chair</p>	<p>April 2026</p>	<p>The last slide of all officer presentations will identify the key issues that Members need to debate.</p>

APPENDIX 2

			and Vice Chair of Planning Committee		
RDM6	<p>Review the quality of streaming of planning committee meetings and the timescale for retention of recordings. This needs to be aimed at identifying ways of improving the viewing experience, taking note of best practice elsewhere. Previous legal advice around the retention of recordings should be revisited to ensure that the recordings are retained until they cease to perform any useful purpose.</p>	Explore and apply best practice to improve viewing experience.	Legal/Democratic and Property	Complete June 2026	<p>The MTFP contains a capital budget for improved equipment for streaming council meetings.</p> <p>Purchase and installation of new equipment</p>
		Set clear timelines for retention of recordings	Information Management/Legal Services	May / June 2026	Legal Services are reviewing the length of time that recordings can be kept and the rational for this in line with the information commissioner's guidance. This will then be presented to the constitutional review group.
RDM7	<p>To provide greater encouragement for councillors to contribute to pre-application work and to explore how interaction between councillors and officers outside of the planning committee more generally can be improved. This should involve reviewing the operation of existing procedures to understand why they are not leading to greater interaction, and how further opportunities can be encouraged. This should be supplemented</p>	Review pre-application protocol.	ADPL&CS / Development Management Manager supported by SLT	May / June 2026	A review of the pre application protocol will be presented in the new municipal year.

APPENDIX 2

	by reinforcement by senior officers and political party leaders of the importance and benefits arising from greater officer-councillor engagement in planning matters more generally.	Meet with Members to discuss how interactions with officers could be improved.	Exec Director/ADPL&CS/ Planning Services Manager	March 2026 During 26/27	This will form part of the workshop (RDM1) and the training programme (RDM2)
RDM8	To undertake a review of the planning committee site visit process to encourage better attendance. This should explore and seek to resolve the issue of poor attendance, including reviewing the timing and number of accompanied site visits undertaken.	Review with Planning Committee Members the timing of the site visits and which type of applications qualify	Development Management supported by Legal Services and the Chair/Vice-Chair of Planning Committee	May/June 2026	The CEO has written to all Group Leaders asking that they encourage their members on the planning committee to attend these meetings. The Planning Services Manager will be reviewing the site visits and will present in the new municipal year.

Page 132

	Local Plan Review	Actions Required	Responsible Officer/s	Timescale	Updates
RLP1	Build political consensus. Reflect upon the challenges arising from the draft development strategy consultation approach and identify lessons learned. Facilitate an impartially chaired cross-party workshop of all councillors/and or the strategic planning steering group (SPSG) to address concerns about process, rebuild consensus, and	Procure external support to run cross party workshop	Exec Director/ Strategic Planning and Conservation Manager	End March 2026	Meeting held with a Planning Consultant on 27 th Feb to agree them developing a proposal for the Cross-Party Local Plan workshop and training/ support that will involve both Members and officers
		Arrange date and scope for	SLT/ADPL&CS/ Strategic Planning and Conservation Manager	May / June 2026	The Planning consultant is drawing up proposals for this

Agenda Item 6

APPENDIX 2

	develop understanding of risks relating to the 'tilted balance' (see recommendation RDM2 above). This will empower elected members to communicate a strong positive vision for the district's future and consider 'macro' district-wide benefits rather than just 'micro' ward impacts.	Local Plan workshop			workshop; this is expected in mid-March
Page 133	<p>Review the operation and terms of reference for the strategic planning reference group (SPSG) to improve governance arrangements and support a genuine cross-party local plan member working group. A review should include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Defined membership proportionate to group sizes (not open attendance). • Requirement for continuity of attendance (named councillors with named deputies). • Clear terms of reference including collective responsibility for recommendations and 	Seek agreement from members to introduce new Local Plan Cross Party Working Group (LPCPWG)	CX/Legal Dem services	Complete	Local Plan Cross-Party Working Group (LPCPWG) has been established with a defined membership proportionate to group sizes with immediate effect (3 Conservative, 2 Liberal Democrat, 2 Labour and 2 Independent).
		Produce new structure and Terms of reference for new LPCPWG	Legal/Dem services/Planning	March 2026	ToR have been prepared for members to discuss.
		Procure/develop training	Exec Director/ADPL&CS/ Strategic Planning and Conservation Manager	End March 2026	A barrister has been retained and attended the meeting of the LPCPWG on 11 th Feb and 5 March 2026 and presented the legal position and answered Members questions.

APPENDIX 2

Page 134	<p>efficient administrative arrangements.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Authority to make recommendations to cabinet/full council. • Regular meetings with effective and efficient administrative arrangements. which minimise demands on planning policy officers. • Impartial chairing by the council leader or assistant director rather than portfolio holder to emphasise the corporate priority. • End/avoid separate political group briefings and ensure all members receive the same information simultaneously. 				Meeting held with Planning Consultant on 27 th Feb to discuss them developing a proposal for training for the LPCPWG Members, For discussion by the Cross-Party Group
		Schedule meetings and training	Planning and Dem Services	April/May/June 2026	These will be agreed following the discussions with the Planning Advisory Service
RLP3	<p>Develop the strategic spatial vision and complete evidence base. Urgently complete an up-to-date green belt assessment and establish an agreed spatial vision and approach to guide development of a preferred spatial strategy. Commission spatial master planning work and utilise design coding to illustrate what development could</p>	Procure external support to facilitate workshop sessions on spatial vision (potential to have duplication with RLP1 Above)	SLT/ADPL&CS/Strategic Planning and Conservation Manager	March 2026 Proposal Apr/May 2026 Workshop	Meeting held with a Planning Consultant on 27 th Feb to agree them developing a proposal for workshop/s for the LPCPWG to develop a special vision.

APPENDIX 2

	look like, moving beyond allocation boundaries to show placemaking, design quality, and community integration. Ensure employment, retail, community facilities, and green infrastructure receive equal prominence to housing .in future iterations of the draft plan. Organise councillor site visits to exemplar developments.	Design session using planning for real techniques	SLT/ ADPL&CS/ Planning Services Managers and Planning / consultants	June 2026	Meeting held with a Planning Consultant on 27 th Feb to agree them developing a proposal for planning for real with LPCPWG
		Present the draft design code to members	ADPL&CS/Planning Services Managers	June / July 2026	To follow the design training session above
RLP4	Secure infrastructure delivery commitments as a priority. Build on chief executive-to-chief executive engagement with Worcestershire County Council with clear expectations and deliverables. Create a formal memorandum of understanding for transport planning support with agreed timescales and escalation procedures. Work closely with the county council to jointly identify solutions and agree future plans to fund and deliver new and enhanced education provision to serve planned growth. Produce a robust infrastructure delivery plan (IDP) endorsed by all providers. Consider adoption of community infrastructure levy (CIL) and explore front-loading of developer contributions.	Set clear expectation of what information is required from infrastructure providers	ADPL&CS/Planning Services Managers	April 2026	Mou to be agreed with WCC setting out clear infrastructure evidence required.t. Other infrastructure requirements to be agreed individually with providers as part of ongoing engagement element of plan making.
		Prepare paper on CIL for PMWG	Planning		Initial discussion on CIL development at CPLPWG 4 th March, further note to be prepared following initial discussion if required.
		Draft Memorandum of understating for WCC	Legal Services / Strategic Planning and Conservation Manager	May 2026	An MOU has been drafted which was shared and agreed with the LPCPWG at its meeting on 4 th March. The CEO has regular meetings with the CEO of WCC regarding a range of matters and the MOU

APPENDIX 2

					will be shared with him more specifically once the MoU is finalised.
RLP5	<p>Strengthen Programme Management and Resources. Develop a comprehensive project plan aligned to the new planning system Gateway requirements, showing all tasks, critical path dependencies, resource allocation, and realistic contingency. Undertake capacity assessment of the planning policy team and secure additional resources (e.g. Assistant Directors have been proactively asked and reminded to submit budget bids, including bids for additional capacity) where needed. Implement regular progress monitoring and actively maintain risk register. If May 2028 target proves to be unachievable through detailed planning, revise and republish the local development scheme (LDS) with realistic timescales.</p>	Develop detailed Local Plan project plan.	ADPL&CS / Strategic Planning and Conservation Manager / Business Improvement Team	April 2026	The LP project Plan will be presented to the April meeting of the LPCPWG
RLP6	<p>Continue active senior leadership support. Use the corporate risk register to reinforce and recommunicate that the local plan is a key corporate risk. There should be regular progress reporting to the</p>	Develop the Local Plan entry on the corporate Risk register	Strategic Planning and Conservation Manager	Complete	<p>New corporate risk added to the Risk Register.</p> <p>This will be reviewed updated on a 1/4ly basis or if new risks emerge</p>

APPENDIX 2

P7 Page 137	senior leadership team from the assistant director and the strategic planning manager. Chief executive and executive director should keep a dialogue going with planning policy officers and attend key meetings where appropriate to provide their support where required. Reinforce clear protocols for engagement and councillor-officer interaction and ensure group leaders take responsibility for councillor's following them and continue to provide wellbeing support for planning officers.	Local Plan Standing item on CLT/SLT and additional longer form meetings to discuss	CX support	Complete	Monthly update is now given at the SLT Assurance/Governance Meeting
		As part of the new LPCPWG Terms of reference established reporting lines for member on local plan issues	Legal Services / Strategic Planning and Conservation Manager	March 2026	ToR discussed at LPCPWG on 4 th March
	Introduce a training and support programme for councillors. Establish training for all councillors on the role and importance of the local plan to reduce future risk and enable more effective and collaborative approaches to plan progression in the future. Councillors require sufficient training and strong political group leadership to support them to fulfil their roles appropriately for the long-term benefit of the electorate and the district as a whole. In short, members need to be supported to make politically very difficult decisions.	As per RLP/2/3	Exec Director / ADPL&CS/Planning Services Managers /Legal Democratic Services	End March 2026	Meeting held with a Planning Consultant on 27 th Feb to agree them developing a proposal for training/ support that will involve both Members and officers

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APPENDIX 3

Summary of comments of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee regarding consideration of the PAS Report (meeting date 10th February 2026)

- The need for joint Officer-Member behavioural, culture, trust and relationship building training (external trainer was suggested).
- Possible Officer training required for complex subjects i.e. grey belt areas.
- The suggested recommendation *to continue active Senior Leadership support* - should include all Officers and Members, who could provide influence.
- Cross party working groups should include a chair but not include the portfolio holder, to encourage neutrality.
- Why it had taken so long for a PAS report review when individual issues had been raised by Members for some time?
- Urgency of progressing the Local Plan due to speculative applications.
- How would the recommendations be progressed and when would the action plan be published to ensure accountability, transparency, and mitigate risks?
- Clearer communication on enforcement performance.
- What solutions are being put in place for resource and staffing capacity issues? (Members have experienced difficulties contacting Planning Officers).
- Why there was a breakdown in relations with WCC and when would a Memo of Understanding (MOU) be in place for transport planning support?
- Concerns about historic delays and political management.
- A requirement for consistent updates and improved engagement mechanisms.
- What was a realistic timescale for the Council to consider the adoption of Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)?
- Frustrations with past working groups not working collaboratively, inconsistent Member attendance and numerous recommendations had been suggested but not carried through.
- Stream retention and transparency for public confidence was agreed as a recommendation.

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