



Executive Committee

Tue 14 Jan
2025
6.30 pm

Oakenshaw Community Centre
Castleditch Lane
Redditch
B97 7YB



If you have any queries on this Agenda please contact
Jess Bayley-Hill or Darren Whitney

Town Hall, Walter Stranz Square, Redditch, B98 8AH
Tel: (01527) 64252 (Ext. 3072) / 881650
e.mail : jess.bayley-hill@bromsgroveandredditch.gov.uk /
darren.whitney@bromsgroveandredditch.gov.uk

GUIDANCE ON FACE-TO-FACE MEETINGS

Please note that this is a public meeting.

If you have any questions regarding the agenda or attached papers, please do not hesitate to contact the officer named above.

GUIDANCE FOR ELECTED MEMBERS ATTENDING MEETINGS IN PERSON

Meeting attendees are encouraged not to attend the meeting if they have any of the following common symptoms of Covid-19 on the day of the meeting; a high temperature, a new and continuous cough or a loss of smell and / or taste.

PUBLIC ATTENDANCE AT MEETINGS

Members of the public are encouraged not to attend the meeting if they have any of the following common symptoms of Covid-19 on the day of the meeting; a high temperature, a new and continuous cough or a loss of smell and / or taste.

Notes:

Although this is a public meeting, there are circumstances when Council might have to move into closed session to consider exempt or confidential information. For agenda items that are exempt, the public are excluded.

Executive

Tuesday, 14th January, 2025

6.30 pm

Oakenshaw Community Centre

Agenda

Membership:

Cllrs:	Joe Baker (Chair)	Jen Snape
	Sharon Harvey (Vice-Chair)	Jane Spilsbury
	Juliet Barker Smith	Monica Stringfellow
	Bill Hartnett	Ian Woodall
	Wanda King	

1. Apologies

2. Declarations of Interest

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

3. Leader's Announcements

4. Minutes (Pages 5 - 24)

5. Food Waste Business Case and Associated Waste Related Issues (Pages 25 - 34)

This report is due to be pre-scrutinised at a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee scheduled to take place on Monday 13th January 2025. Any recommendations arising from this meeting will be published in a supplementary pack for the consideration of the Executive Committee.

6. Damp and Mould Additional Resources (Pages 35 - 52)

This report is due to be pre-scrutinised at a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee scheduled to take place on Monday 13th January 2025. Any recommendations arising from this meeting will be published in a supplementary pack for the consideration of the Executive Committee.

7. Housing Ombudsman's Findings Report (Pages 53 - 78)

This report is due to be pre-scrutinised at a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee scheduled to take place on Monday 13th January 2025. Any recommendations arising from this meeting will be published in a supplementary pack for the consideration of the Executive Committee.

8. Final Council Tax Support Scheme 2025/2026 (Pages 79 - 84)

Executive

Tuesday, 14th January, 2025

9. Council Tax Base 2025/2026 (Pages 85 - 88)

10. Independent Remuneration Panel Recommendations (Pages 89 - 104)

This report is due to be pre-scrutinised at a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee scheduled to take place on Monday 13th January 2025. Any recommendations arising from this meeting will be published in a supplementary pack for the consideration of the Executive Committee.

11. Medium Term Financial Plan - Tranche 1 Budget including Fees and Charges (following consultation)

(To follow)

12. Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Pages 105 - 116)

13. Minutes / Referrals - Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Executive Panels etc.

To receive and consider any outstanding minutes or referrals from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Executive Panels etc. since the last meeting of the Executive Committee, other than as detailed in the items above.

14. To consider any urgent business, details of which have been notified to the Head of Legal, Democratic and Procurement Services prior to the commencement of the meeting and which the Chair, by reason of special circumstances, considers to be of so urgent a nature that it cannot wait until the next meeting

15. Exclusion of the press and public

Should it be necessary, in the opinion of the Chief Executive, during the course of the meeting to consider excluding the public from the meeting on the grounds that exempt information is likely to be divulged, it may be necessary to move the following resolution:

“That, under S.100 (A) (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting for the following matter(s) on the grounds that it/they involve(s) the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in the relevant paragraphs (to be specified) of Part 1 of Schedule 12 (A) of the said Act”.

These paragraphs are as follows:

Subject to the “public interest” test, information relating to:

- Para 3 – financial or business affairs;

and may need to be considered as ‘exempt’.

Executive

Tuesday, 14th January, 2025

16. HRA Rent Setting 2025/26 (Pages 117 - 128)

The covering report and Appendix 1 are attached. Appendices 2 and 3 will follow in a supplementary pack.

This page is intentionally left blank



Executive Committee

Tuesday, 26th November,
2024

MINUTES

Present:

Councillor Joe Baker (Chair), Councillor Sharon Harvey (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Juliet Barker Smith, Bill Hartnett, Wanda King, Jen Snape, Jane Spilsbury, Monica Stringfellow and Ian Woodall

Officers:

Matthew Bough, Peter Carpenter, Amanda Delahunty, Claire Green and Sue Hanley

Principal Democratic Services Officer:

Jess Bayley-Hill

46. APOLOGIES

There were no apologies for absence.

47. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

48. LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Leader advised that at the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on Monday 25th November 2024, Members had pre-scrutinised the Carbon Reduction Strategy and Implementation Plan Annual Review report, scheduled for consideration at the Executive Committee meeting. Members were advised that at the end of their discussions, the Committee endorsed the recommendations in the report but did not propose any further recommendations.

Prior to the Executive Committee meeting, the Budget Scrutiny Working Group had pre-scrutinised the Quarter 2 Revenue and Performance Monitoring and the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) Tranche 1 reports. Again, the group had not proposed any recommendations on these items for the Executive Committee's consideration.

On behalf of the Executive Committee, the Leader thanked the members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Budget

Chair

Executive Committee

Tuesday, 26th November, 2024

Scrutiny Working Group for their hard work in pre-scrutinising these reports.

49. MINUTES

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee held on 15th October 2024 be approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chair.

50. HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION GRANT AND DOMESTIC ABUSE GRANT

The Housing Development and Enabling Manager presented a report on the subject of Homelessness Grant and Domestic Abuse Grant funding.

The Committee was informed that the report focused on the use of the funding that had been allocated to the Council by the Government to address homelessness and domestic abuse in the 2025/26 financial year. There were a number of risks that could arise if this funding was not allocated as proposed, including a potential increase in homelessness rates in the Borough and a possible increase in use of Bed and Breakfast accommodation, resulting in increased financial costs to the Council. There was also a risk that rates of rough sleeping could increase in Redditch if the proposals were not taken forward. Members were assured that all recipients of grant funding would be required to enter into agreements with the Council.

Following the presentation of the report, Members discussed the proposed allocations to Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) groups and questions were raised about how additional grant funding would be distributed if this was received from the Government. Officers clarified that a delegation had been requested to enable Officers to use both any unallocated funding and to make adjustments in relation to funding where necessary in order to meet local needs.

Reference was made to the reduction in Independent Living Support Grant funding from Worcestershire County Council to St Basils and Members highlighted the potential impact that this could have on services tackling homelessness in the Borough. Members also noted that whilst the proposals detailed in the report would result in a reduction in funding for the Bromsgrove and Redditch branch of the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB), the services that had been previously funded through the CAB would remain available for

Executive Committee

Tuesday, 26th November, 2024

residents to access elsewhere. The Council also continued to provide financial support to the CAB through other grant schemes.

Consideration was given to the proposal to allocate funding to the Maggs service for a rough sleeper outreach and support service. Members welcomed this proposal and commented that it was anticipated that this would result in an improvement to these services for vulnerable local people.

During consideration of this item, reference was made to the need for the Council to support victims of domestic abuse in the Borough and questions were raised about what further action the local authority could do to address this issue. Officers clarified that in a two-tier authority area like Worcestershire, the County Council had more responsibilities in respect of tackling domestic abuse and therefore Worcestershire County Council received more funding than the district Councils in relation to this area. However, Redditch Borough Council received domestic abuse grant funding in relation to addressing homelessness issues for victims of domestic abuse, as this was the responsibility of local district Councils.

Questions were raised about the number of victims of domestic abuse who tended to seek support from the Council when they were placed at risk of homelessness. The Committee was informed that domestic abuse was a significant cause of homelessness nationally and therefore the Council was required to report data relating to this subject to the Government. The Council also employed an Officer in the Housing Options team who had a specific role focused on supporting victims of domestic abuse and the available data demonstrated the value of this role and the impact that they were having locally.

Members discussed the various VCS groups in the Borough, including organisations that were not due to receive funding from the Council, that provided support to victims of domestic abuse. Questions were raised about the extent to which further grant funding opportunities could be accessed to support the work of those groups. Reference was also made to the potential for the Council to help better promote the work of these VCS groups in order to raise awareness of the support available amongst victims of domestic abuse as well as those at risk of domestic abuse. It was noted that the subject of domestic abuse had previously been discussed through the Overview and Scrutiny process and that this might be a subject that the Crime and Disorder Scrutiny Panel or the main Overview and Scrutiny Committee might want to revisit in due course.

Executive Committee

Tuesday, 26th November, 2024

RESOLVED that

- 1) the following initiatives be approved to receive allocation of funding 2025/26.

Allocation of Homelessness Prevention Grant.

Initiatives	£ (up to £442,395)
Redditch Nightstop – Accommodation and Support	34,005
Redditch Nightstop Core Funding	13,000
Maggs Rough Sleeper Outreach Service £102,906.60 (of which £44,225 funded from RSI)	58,682
GreenSquare Accord – 18 units of supported accommodation for Ex Offenders or those likely to offend	17,456
Newstarts - Furniture Project to provide furniture for homeless households.	10,000
Homelessness Prevention - Spend to Save budget for use by Housing Options Officers	17,060
Temporary Accommodation Management	66,380
St Basils Young Persons Supported Housing	63,647
St Basils Young Persons Pathway Worker	30,316
St Basils Crash Pad emergency accommodation	39,132
Onside Advocacy Mental Health Support Worker	36,757
Worcestershire Strategic Housing Partnership Co-ordinator – contribution towards county-wide development and delivery of housing initiatives in partnership with other agencies	7,500
CCP Single and Childless Couples Homeless Prevention Service	33,460
Batchley Support Group	15,000
Total	£442,395
Underspend	£0

Allocation of Domestic Abuse Grant

Initiatives	£ (up to £37,522)
Domestic Abuse Co-ordinator	4,813
Domestic Abuse Research and Intelligence Officer	4,426
Domestic Abuse Housing Solutions Officer Top Up	6,000
New Starts	5,000
Batchley Support Group	5,000
St Basils Young Persons Pathway Worker (YPPW)	10,000
Redditch Nightstop	2,283
Total	£37,522
Underspend	£0

- 2) **delegated authority be granted to the Assistant Director Community and Housing Services following consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Housing and the Portfolio Holder for Community Services and Regulatory Services to use any unallocated Grant during the year or make further adjustments as necessary to ensure full utilisation of the Grants for 2025/26 in support of existing or new schemes.**

51. CARBON REDUCTION STRATEGY AND IMPLEMENTATION PLAN ANNUAL REVIEW

The Strategic Housing and Business Support Manager presented the Carbon Reduction Strategy and Implementation Plan Annual Review for the Executive Committee's consideration.

Members were reminded that the Carbon Reduction Strategy had been introduced two years' previously. At the time that the strategy was introduced, Members had agreed that progress should be monitored on an annual basis and that a new strategy should be presented every three years. The next new strategy was due to be presented for Members' consideration in 2025/26.

Following the presentation of the report, Members discussed the targets detailed in the action plan and in doing so noted that financial costs and timelines had not been incorporated into the plan in many places. The suggestion was made that this information would be useful, where known, as this would help the

Council in terms of long-range forecasting for the Council's budget. Officers explained that for many of the targets, the financial costs would not become apparent until specific business cases were drawn up and presented for the consideration of Members.

Reference was also made to the information that had been provided in the report in respect of Electric Vehicle charging points and the projected income that the Council would receive through an agreement with Zest EV Charging. Questions were raised about the extent to which the Council would receive this income for car parks serving facilities operated by Rubicon Leisure Limited. Concerns were also raised about the extent to which the Council would be required to cover the utilities costs for the charging points. The Committee was informed that the Council would receive income in relation to the authority's assets and it was noted that Rubicon Leisure Limited used Council assets. In respect of the electricity costs, Members were advised that Zest would cover the electricity costs, which would be recharged to the customer when they were charging their vehicle.

During consideration of this item, Members noted that one of the targets in the action plan referred to reducing the amount of paper used for Council business. Questions were raised as to whether Members would be forced to go paperless for Council and Committee meetings in order to meet this target. Officers clarified that Members continued to be consulted as to whether they required paper or electronic access to agenda packs and paper copies were provided when requested. However, the modern.gov app could also be used to access and annotate agenda packs electronically and the Democratic Services team could provide training on how to use the app to Members who wanted to go paperless or reduce their use of paper.

RECOMMENDED that

the Council endorse the findings of this annual review of the Carbon Reduction Strategy.

52. QUARTER 2 REVENUE AND PERFORMANCE MONITORING 2024/2025

The Deputy Chief Executive and Section 151 Officer presented the Revenue and Performance Monitoring Report for the second quarter of the 2024/25 financial year.

Members were asked to note that the report updated the Committee on the following areas:

Executive Committee

Tuesday, 26th November, 2024

- The Council's forecast outturn revenue monitoring position for 2024/25 based on data to the end of the second quarter.
- The position in respect of balance sheet monitoring as requested by the Audit, Governance and Standards Committee.
- The updated procurement pipeline of Council projects due to be delivered over the following 12 months in order to properly plan for the delivery of these projects.
- The organisation's performance against the strategic priorities outlined in the Council Plan Addendum, including operational measures to demonstrate how the Council was delivering services to customers.

In terms of financial performance, the draft position was a £299,000 overspend, up from the £164,000 overspend reported in the quarter 1 report. As this related to expenditure at quarter 2, Members were asked to note that at this stage in the financial year, there were a number of instances where annual expenditure or accruals might distort the profiling. The projected figures assumed support services and grants were adjusted to budgetary levels and accruals were netted out of the figures.

The overspends of £2.35 million detailed in the report, were offset by additional income of £2.05 million in corporate financing from additional grant income together with increased investment interest receivable and lower interest payable. The Committee was asked to note that significant agency overspending in Financial Services related to the delivery of the Council's accounts. Overspends in Environmental Services were linked to greater costs arising with the Council's vehicle fleet and reductions in income from Bereavement Services.

Additional funding had been added for the level of the pay award to staff, which had been agreed recently and which was above the 4 per cent allowed for in the 2024/25 budget.

In terms of cash management and borrowing, the Committee was informed that as of 30th September 2024, the Council had no short-term borrowings. The authority did have long-term borrowings of £103.9 million, although Members were asked to note that this linked to the Housing Revenue Account (HRA).

In respect of Council investments, Members were informed that on 30th September 2024 there were £15 million of short-term investments held by the authority.

The capital programme had been approved in the Council's budget for 2024/25 in February 2024. The Council's outturn spend in the capital programme was £3.682 million against a capital budget

Executive Committee

Tuesday, 26th November, 2024

totalling £20.507 million. Members were asked to note that, as part of the budget setting process, it had previously been decided that £8.051 million would be rolled forward from 2023/24 into 2024/25 to take account of slippage from 2023/24.

Included in this capital programme, the Council also had the following grant funded schemes which were being delivered in 2024/25:

- The three Town's Fund schemes:
 - The library would not now be moving to the Town Hall to become part of the Town Hall Hub, following the decision taken by the Executive Committee on the 29th July 2024. A meeting with experts from the former Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) on the 23rd May 2024 had identified that, were the Council minded not to proceed with the current proposals, there were three options that could be followed linked to the three schemes agreed in the original bid submission. The way forward would require a Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) Project Adjustment Request (PAR) form to be completed and approval by the Town's Board.
 - The Digital Manufacturing and Innovation Centre (DMIC) – Estimated costs were £10.1 million, but this figure still remained to be finalised on the date of the Executive Committee meeting. The DMIC funding needed to be spent by the 31st March 2026. However, it was expected that the scheme would be granted an extension by the Government and that library funding could be used to provide an enhanced scheme. The site had been cleared and was ready for development.
 - Public Realm – a specification had been delivered to Worcestershire County Council by the end of March 2024 for inclusion in their Capital Programme and works had begun.
- Community Hub - Reports had been received by the Executive Committee in July and September 2024 detailing a new design for the Town Hall Hub which no longer included the library. The final costs of the new design had been received and were being assessed to deliver an implementation timetable. There would be a write-off of design works that had been expended in relation to the library, as this could not be capitalised.
- UK Shared Prosperity Schemes for the year would total £1.694 million. This funding had to be spent by 31st March 2025.

An updated position on earmarked reserves had been provided in the report, taking account of the now submitted draft accounts for 2020/21 and 2021/22 as well as the reported outturn positions for

Executive Committee

Tuesday, 26th November, 2024

2022/23 and 2023/24. As part of the MTFP, all reserves were thoroughly reviewed to assess their continuing their requirement and additional reserves set up for inflationary pressures such as utility increases. At the 30th June 2024, the Council held £11.477 million of earmarked reserves.

The HRA position to the 30th September 2024 was detailed in the report. In revenue terms, the Council was expecting revenue spending to be £1.2 million over budget, with plans to transfer funding from balances.

Capital spending in the HRA was expected to be £556,000 over budget, with the main variances set out in the report.

The balance sheet reporting was set out as the Quarter 2 Treasury Report at Appendix C to the report. This report detailed the Council's debt and borrowing position for the second quarter of the 2024/25 financial year. Included in this was how the Council was using the authority's working capital as well as measurement of the Council's Prudential Indicators. The Committee was asked to note that one indicator was not compliant. This was a short-term loan between Redditch Borough Council and Bromsgrove District Council undertaken at year end which was repaid at the start of the second quarter of 2024/25. As reporting on the half yearly treasury position was a statutory requirement, this position would be reported on to Council.

The Council's Procurement Pipeline included details of contracts expected to be reprocured and new procurement projects expected to be undertaken in the future. The pipeline would be refreshed quarterly.

- There were eight contracts between the old threshold of £50,000 and the new threshold of £200,000.
- There were 11 contracts that were likely to be over the key decision threshold of £200,000.
- There were three contracts procured by Bromsgrove District Council on behalf of Redditch Borough Council.

In terms of performance, the first section of this report showed the organisation's performance against the strategic priorities outlined in the Council Plan Addendum. Additional comments and updates had been provided for the success measures to explain progress and activities. The final section of the report included some operational measures to demonstrate how the Council was delivering services to customers. As the year moved forward, these indicators would link to business plans and the requirements of the new Executive Member for Performance.

Executive Committee

Tuesday, 26th November, 2024

The process of performance reporting would develop iteratively. However, Members were asked to note that this document provided a snapshot in time and a temperature check of the organisation. The layout comprised:

- Strategic Priorities – success measures
- Operational Measures – by service area
- Financial Data (separate report on this occasion)
- Corporate Projects (by exception)

Following the presentation of the report, Members discussed the pressures that could impact on the Council's budget that were outside the authority's control. It was noted that this included the war in Ukraine and new policies that might be introduced by the next president of the United States of America. However, Members welcomed news that the Council had £11.5 million in reserves and the fact that three sets of accounts had now been closed for the authority, which brought the Council into line with other local authorities in the country.

RESOLVED that

- 1) the current revenue overspend position of £299,000 and actions the Council was taking to mitigate this position be noted;**
- 2) the current capital spending of £3.68 million against a budget of £20.5 million be noted;**
- 3) the Housing Revenue Account position be noted;**
- 4) the updated procurements position be noted, with any new items over £200,000 to be included on the Executive Committee's Work Programme;**
- 5) the Quarter 2 Performance data for the Period July to September 2024 be noted and that this will change over the year to link into the new administration's priorities; and**

RECOMMENDED that

- 6) the Balance Sheet Monitoring Position for Quarter 2 - the Treasury Monitoring Report, required to be reported to Council - be noted.**

Executive Committee

Tuesday, 26th November, 2024

53. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN - TRANCHE 1 BUDGET INCLUDING FEES AND CHARGES (PRIOR TO CONSULTATION)

The Deputy Chief Executive and Section 151 Officer presented the MTFP Tranche 1 report (including fees and charges) for 2025/26 to 2027/28.

The Executive Committee was reminded that the Council set a three-year MTFP every year, with the final Council Tax resolutions being approved by Council in February. Members were asked to note that this year's process took into account the following factors:

- The starting point from the 2024/25 MTFP being neutral starting balances (which was actually a £63,000 surplus on the date of the meeting).
- This was the first budget under a new Government and the local government settlement would be for only one year in duration for the first year of the plan. Future budgets would cover multiple years.
- The present cost of living crisis continued to impact on the Borough's most vulnerable residents.
- Three years' accounts had been submitted (2020/21 to 2022/23). Like many other Councils, the authority would receive a disclaimer opinion on these accounts.
- There was continued uncertainty of the Government's funding for projects detailed in the Chancellor's statement on the 30th October 2024, as allocations were not yet known.
- There was also uncertainty over what would be required by the new Government and other stakeholders.
- Loss of key personnel, present vacancy rates, and staff retention needed to be noted.
- Business Rates, Council Tax income and associated collection rates and reliefs linked to the "cost of living" crisis and Covid-19 grants were still working their way through the authority's system.
- Inflation was moving back to the Government's target level of 2 per cent.

As such, it was considered prudent to split the budget process into two tranches, in line with the approach taken in recent years. The initial tranche would seek to close as much of the deficit as possible using information known as at the end of October 2024, after the Chancellor's statement but before the Local Government Settlement and seeking approval for those savings to be implemented at Council in January 2025. The second tranche would be presented after the Christmas break, for which approval would be sought in February 2025. This tranche would take

Executive Committee

Tuesday, 26th November, 2024

account of the Local Government Settlement, in respect of which the final detail would not be known until early January 2025.

The Committee was informed that the emerging national picture was in many ways quite similar to the previous year:

- The war in Ukraine had still not been resolved and was impacting on inflation rates for everyone.
- Many Councils, including Redditch Borough Council, had declared “Climate Emergencies” and had challenging carbon reduction targets to deliver by 2030, 2040 and 2050. These needed to move into the implementation phase.
- The Office for Local Government was looking at Council data to assess performance and to try to predict if Councils were getting into difficulty.
- The data provided by the Council was important as the Government worked on an allocation method using data to inform decisions.
- In the Local Government arena:
 - There were a number of Local Authorities that had issued Section 114 Statements.
 - Redditch Borough Council would have three years of accounts that would have a Disclaimer Opinion issued by the External Auditor.
 - There were circa 700 local authority accounts up to 2022/23 that had still not been audited across England.

The Chancellor’s Autumn Statement was made on the 30th October 2024. Members was asked to note the following impacts on Council budgets:

- A 3.2 per cent real-terms increase in Core Spending Power (CSP) for the whole sector in 2025-26. This would include £1.3 billion additional grant funding, of which at least £600 million would be directed to social care.
- The budget was silent on Council Tax referendum limits, but the District Council Network’s (DCN) expectation was that referendum principles would stay at 2.99 per cent for district Councils.
- In total, £233 million new funding had been announced for homelessness prevention. This would be in addition to the £1.3 billion grant funding to Councils, as discussed earlier in the meeting.
- There would be £1 billion to extend the Household Support Fund and Discretionary Housing Payments into 2025-26.
- There would also be £1.1 billion new funding through implementation of the extended producer responsibility scheme for recycling.

Executive Committee

Tuesday, 26th November, 2024

- In terms of Right to Buy, Councils would be permanently allowed to retain 100 per cent of receipts locally and discount levels would revert to pre-2012 levels from 21st November 2024.
- Business Rates support would be provided to the retail, hospitality and leisure sector, although the route of compensation for Councils in relation to this remained to be clarified.
- A £500 million increase to the Affordable Homes Programme in 2025-26 had been announced.
- The UK Shared Prosperity Fund had been extended for 2025-26 at a reduced level of £900 million. This was a 40 per cent decrease compared to 2024/25 and it was not yet clear whether this funding would continue in the future.

Officers highlighted that it was good news that the local government sector would get a real-terms funding increase. However, the Committee was advised that it was not yet clear how this increase would be distributed.

The Government had signalled that it would reform the local government funding system after 2025-26. The Government had also signalled its intention to embark on local government reorganisation to deliver “efficiency savings”. The proposals would be set out in more detail in the English Devolution White Paper, likely to be published in late 2024. It was anticipated that the Government would publish a finance policy statement in mid/late November to set out the key decisions and principles for the provisional Local Government Finance Settlement.

In terms of staff costs, the following points were raised:

- Employer national insurance (NI) contributions would increase by 1.2 per cent to 15 per cent from April 2025 but the public sector would be covered. The Council’s rates, if not funded, would have been £92,000.
- The National Living Wage would increase by 6.7 per cent to £12.21. The minimum wage for 18-to-20 year olds would increase by 16 per cent to £10 per hour. The Council was assessing the impact of this, including on costs for Rubicon Leisure Limited.

The report took account of the Council’s existing strategic priorities, although new ones would be set over the coming months by the new administration. The Council’s strategic approach continued to be to set a balanced budget over the following three-year period having over the past two years moved to a fair level of financial sustainability.

Executive Committee

Tuesday, 26th November, 2024

In building the 2025/26 budget, the following underlying assumptions had been made:

- Council Tax – Figures assumed the full 2.99 per cent allowable increase over all three years of the MTFP. Housing growth had not been included, so this would need to be reviewed in tranche 2.
- For Business Rates it was assumed there would be growth based on pooling with the other district Councils in the county and Worcestershire County Council.
- There would be £25,000 in New Homes Bonus contributions.
- It was assumed that central Government grant funding would be at similar levels to previous years.

Other corporate pressures highlighted for Members' consideration included:

- At the second quarter of the 2024/25 financial year, the overall revenue financial position was a projected £299,000 overspend position.
- Officers were suggesting it would be prudent to budget for a Pay Award of 3 per cent for 2025/26, increasing from the assumption of a 2 per cent per annum Pay Award in previous years. This would represent an additional £100,000 cost to the Council. In her statement on the 30th October 2024, the Chancellor had announced that the Government would accept the recommendations of the independent Pay Review Bodies for public sector workers' pay. However, it was unclear whether this was included in the 3.2 per cent spending uplift.
- Pension Fund Actuarial Triennial Revaluation - although the fund continued to perform well, there were concerns about the reducing numbers of live members in the scheme and so an additional sum had been included from 2026/27 of £200,000 to address a potential risk.
- Fees and Charges had originally assumed an increase of 2 per cent. However, given 50 per cent of fees and charges costs linked to staff costs and these would possibly increase at 5 per cent for the 2024/25 financial year, it was proposed that 4% increases were instead looked at in order to cover costs. This would result in additional income of £142,000.
- Until more information was understood in the detailed Local Government Settlement in December, it was assumed that grant levels would remain at present levels.
- The largest change would link to upcoming requirements for waste collection services. The Council was required to implement these proposals from April 2026. The Council was challenging present Government funding allocations to these service changes because the impact on Council budgets was

Executive Committee

Tuesday, 26th November, 2024

significant in terms of both revenue and capital costs. The following such costs were highlighted:

- There was the requirement for additional capital investment, over and above any grant funding, of £193,000. It was assumed that this was required to be spent in 2025/26 and costs apportioned accordingly.
- At the present time, additional revenue costs to the Council were estimated to be circa £500,000 a year.
- A review had been undertaken of corporate budgets (Council Tax/Business Rates, Investment Income and Debt) against expected numbers and due to a number of factors, there was a positive position.
- The previous administration had mooted a freeze in Council Tax. It was assumed that this would not be enacted providing an additional £144,000 of funding.
- The Council had budgeted for 3 per cent increase in staff pay in 2024/25. The pay award had been announced at circa 5 per cent and so a 2 per cent adjustment had also been made in the corporate budgets.
- The Council would also need to deal with potential single status savings set to be implemented in the 2025/26 budget.
- As set out in the Chancellor's statement on the 30th October 2024, there was due to be significant additional grant funding to local government. The allocation of these grants would not be known until December, when the Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement would be announced.
- Adjustments, following the establishment review, would need to be made across both Councils to account for the £1 million imbalance between pay budgets and recharges across both Councils.
- Analysis would be undertaken on benchmarking data as well, as this would inform areas where further savings, if required, could initially be looked at.
- The Committee was asked to note that Rubicon Leisure Limited was assessing the impact of the National Insurance changes both in terms of the increases and the movement up of the minimum wage. The financial implications of this to the company could be valued between £100,000 and £200,000.

Corporate pressures amounted to a surplus of £317,000 in 2025/26 changing to an ongoing deficit of £436,000 from 2026/27.

Assistant Directors had reported on departmental pressures by the 24th October 2024. These covered both revenue and capital pressures. The departmental changes resulted in an overall £1.309 million revenue pressure in the 2025/26 financial year and then £897,000 by 2027/28. This would result in an ongoing pressure of

Executive Committee

Tuesday, 26th November, 2024

circa £1 million rising to £1.3 million. Members were asked to note that if the Council received the full 3.2 per cent core spending power increase set out in the 2024 Chancellor's budget, then this would result in circa £490,000 of additional funding, reducing the gap to circa £500,000 in 2025/26 and £1 million by 2027/28.

There were other initiatives that were due to be addressed in the Tranche 2 MTFP report. This would include funding relating to Ward Budgets, a Bid Writer and Neighbourhood Wardens.

Another key factor in balancing the budget would be the allocation methods for grants, as these impacted on a number of the pressure areas. This would not be known until the Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement was announced.

To meet strategic priorities, the Council required more funding. For Tranche 2 a number of areas needed to be reviewed including:

- Ensuring grants were maximised.
- Ensuring agency work reflected the income provided for its delivery.
- Reviewing the effectiveness of the Council's largest contracts.
- Reviewing the location and effectiveness of the authority's depot.
- Assessing the Council's Leisure and Cultural Strategy in terms of affordability.
- Reviewing recharging mechanisms between Redditch Borough and Bromsgrove District Councils for appropriateness.
- Rationalisation of back office services as technology was increasingly used more effectively.

The Council's Business Improvement Team had reviewed income and fees and charges levels in relation to:

- Deliverability in 2023/24 and 2024/25.
- Views on whether additional per centage increases would be deliverable.

The outcome of that high level analysis was that:

- A blanket per centage increase on all controllable fees and charges and budgets would not be advisable, as this would just increase the rolling year variances in specific areas. Instead, those budgets needed adjusting to the correct base (both up and down).
- Income for Bereavement Services had been heavily impacted by a newly created crematorium which the Bereavement Services Manager had an action plan to partially mitigate.
- Clarification was required on what was and was not subject to VAT in income lines, so that correct budgets could be set.

Executive Committee

Tuesday, 26th November, 2024

- Garden and trade waste services were areas where above inflation increases could be variable with previous years and current forecasting showed promise.

The existing 2024/25 MTFP resulted in general fund balances increasing by £63,000 over the three-year period as the original plan moved the Council towards sustainability. Following closure of the 2020/21 and 2021/22 accounts, the Council had far clearer positions on the 2022/23 and 2023/24 outturn positions and a stronger reserves position had been identified.

As part of the tranche 1 budget, it was requested that £300,000 should be allocated from the Economic Development reserve to undertake feasibility studies at the following district centres: Matchborough Centre, Winyates Centre and Woodrow Centre.

Members were asked to note that there would be an impact on general fund reserves from the decision to stop the library development. This was due to aborted design work which could not be charged to the capital budget. The magnitude of these costs remained to be finalised, but potentially could be in the region of £300,000 - £500,000.

Spend to date on the agreed Capital Programme by the end of the second quarter of 2024/25 was £3.628 million. To date, three new capital items had been proposed for addition to the Capital Programme and four further proposals from the Property Services team linked to health and safety considerations in respect of the Council retaining the value of the authority's leisure estate. Rubicon Leisure Limited had also submitted requests for capital funding for a number of areas.

Initial risk assessments and robust statement implications were included in the report. The Committee was asked to note that the MTFP highlighted that the current financial position was potentially untenable without some form of intervention or further substantial savings. The position would become clearer with the Provisional Local Government Settlement once this was announced in December 2024.

Tranche 1 was the first phase of the 2025/26 budget process. There would be consultation concerning the content via the quarterly Customer Survey and it was hoped that this would reach more stakeholders than previous budget consultations. This consultation process would occur in November and December and the outcomes would be reported to Members in the new year.

Once the report had been presented, Members discussed the following points in detail:

Executive Committee

Tuesday, 26th November, 2024

- The timeframes for obtaining further information about the local Government finance settlement and the reasons why limited information had been made available to the sector on this subject to date. The suggestion was made that further clarity would emerge once the Government's Devolution White Paper had been published.
- The hard work of the Council's Financial Services team which had resulted in the submission of three sets of accounts in a relatively short period of time.
- The increases that had been proposed to fees and charges for Bereavement Services and the reasons why these differed from the standard 4 per cent increase. The Portfolio Holder for Environmental Services explained that a lot of benchmarking work had been undertaken to ensure that the fees charged for services provided by the team were competitive. Income had not been as high as had been anticipated, partly due to mortality rates in the Borough having been lower than expected in recent years.
- The need for the Budget Scrutiny Working Group to scrutinise the figures and the date when this would occur. Officers confirmed that the Budget Scrutiny Working Group had pre-scrutinised the content of the report at a meeting held on 21st November 2024.
- The potential for a Bid Writer to be employed by the Council to help bid for grant funding. The Committee was advised that this was referenced in the report and a budget bid would be included in the tranche 2 report in relation to this position.
- The additional financial costs involved in introducing new neighbourhood forums and neighbourhood wardens. It was again confirmed that budget bids would be included in the tranche 2 report relating to these pressures.
- The proposed increases to Dial a Ride fees which would be subject to review.
- The fees paid by Council tenants for repair and maintenance jobs at their properties and the circumstances under which tenants were charged for these services. The Committee was advised that the Council had a Recharge Policy which provided further clarity in respect of when tenants would be required to pay fees for repair and maintenance services. The suggestion was made that the Portfolio Holder for Housing should be briefed on the content of this policy.
- The feasibility study in respect of Matchborough, Winyates and Woodrow District Centres for which additional funding was being requested from the Council. Members welcomed this proposal as it was suggested that clarity was needed regarding future arrangements for these district centres.

Executive Committee

Tuesday, 26th November, 2024

RESOLVED to note

- 1) the inputs into the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan as at the start of October, and the associated risks and opportunities;
- 2) these inputs had been used, along with the 2024/25-2026/27 Medium Term Financial Plan agreed by Council in February 2024, to project an initial "gap" to be closed;
- 3) an initial tranche of savings proposals and the associated Savings Proposal Document was published on the 18th November 2024 and any feedback would be considered by the Executive Committee in January 2025 prior to seeking approval at Council in January 2025;
- 4) tranche 2 of this process would add further information such as the Local Government Settlement to give a final financial position for the Council; and

RECOMMENDED that

- 5) the use of £300,000 of the Economic Development Reserve for feasibility studies at Matchborough, Winyates and Woodrow be approved.

54. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Leader noted that there were no outstanding recommendations from the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 14th October 2024 which required the Executive Committee's consideration.

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 14th October 2024 be noted.

55. MINUTES / REFERRALS - OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE, EXECUTIVE PANELS ETC.

There were no referrals from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee or any of the Executive Advisory Panels on this occasion.

The Meeting commenced at 6.31 pm
and closed at 7.29 pm

This page is intentionally left blank

Executive Committee14th January 2025**Introduction of Food Waste Collections**

Relevant Portfolio Holder	Councillor Sharon Harvey
Portfolio Holder Consulted	Yes
Relevant Head of Service	Simon Parry
Report Author: Matthew Austin	Job Title: Environmental Services Manager Contact matthew.austin@bromsgroveandredditch.gov.uk email: Contact Tel: 01527 548206
Wards Affected	All
Ward Councillor(s) consulted	No
Relevant Strategic Purpose(s)	Environment
Key Decision	
If you have any questions about this report, please contact the report author in advance of the meeting.	

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Executive Committee is asked to **RESOLVE** that:

- 1) **Subject to the outcome of negotiations, the introduction of a joint Food Waste Collection Service be approved, working with Bromsgrove District Council and Wyre Forest District Council to deliver the authority's statutory duties under the Environment Act 2021 regarding a Food Waste Collection service;**
- 2) **Delegated authority be granted to the Assistant Director of Environmental and Housing Property Services following consultation with the Section 151 Officer, the Principal Solicitor (Contracts, Commercial and Procurement) and the Portfolio Holders for Finance and Environmental Services respectively, subject to the agreement of recommendations 1 and 3, to:**
 - a) **negotiate and agree terms with Bromsgrove District Council and Wyre Forest District Council to enter into a joint tender for a shared food waste collection service;**
 - b) **tender and award a dedicated weekly food waste collection service through a third party for a period of 8 years commencing no later than 31 March 2026.**

The Executive Committee is asked to **RECOMMEND** that:

- 3) **The Council allocate £500,000 Revenue Funding in the Medium-Term Financial Plan as an operational budget from 2026/27 to fund the Food Waste Collection Service in the Borough, as accounted for within tranche 1 of the budget.**

Executive Committee14th January 2025

2. Context

- 2.1. The Government has set a new statutory duty under the Environment Act 2021 to introduce a dedicated separate weekly collection of food waste from all households by 31st March 2026, alongside expanded requirements on dry recycling.
- 2.2. Working closely with Worcestershire County Council as the Waste Disposal Authority, we are able to accommodate the changes to dry recycling without any changes to our existing green bin service, so this report is focusing primarily on the changes required from the new food waste service.
- 2.3. As we do not currently operate such a service, this will require additional resources to operate, and due to the current size restrictions of our depots, we are unable to add these to our existing arrangements without significant investment in additional land as well as an expansion of our Operators Licence with the Traffic Commissioner and DVSA.
- 2.4. In addition to the challenges regarding space restrictions on providing this service, it will require procurement and delivery of food waste caddies for each property, additional bins for communal properties, and additional dedicated vehicles and staff to collect the waste.
- 2.5. To achieve the Government requirements on time, it is vital that the Council takes decisions by the end of January 2026 to allow the procurement of resources to supply the service to our residents, either as an in-house service, or through an external provider.

3. Background

- 3.1. Over the last five years, considerable work has been carried out in partnership with the other Worcestershire Authorities to consider how to meet the new requirements, and model the resources required to operate such a service, as well as what the associated environmental benefits will be as a result of implementing this service.
- 3.2. This has given us a good understanding of what will be required, and the benefits arising from such a service, as well as potential other changes to offset some of the potential costs arising from the new burden.
- 3.3. Due to persistent delays in the communication of funding and precise requirements for local authorities, we are currently only able to give assurance on some of the costs and associated income relating to Capital costs, without any detail or confidence in additional revenue income to offset on-going costs of introducing food waste, despite assurances that the cost of this new burden will be supported by Central Government.
- 3.4. For this reason, many Local Authorities operating in-house services have been waiting for more detail on the financial support for implementing the new service, although a number of LA's with externally contracted services (such as Stratford on Avon District Council) have had to implement the new duties as part of contract renewals in advance of the deadline, and as a consequence have not received any funding from central government.
- 3.5. If we are to meet the deadline for implementing this new service though, there is now a need for a decision regarding how we will implement the new service, as procurement timescales and lead in times for the manufacture of food collection vehicles are currently estimated at up to 12 months, with the purchase and delivery of sufficient food caddies also requiring up to 6 months in order to ensure that the service is able to commence for all our residents.

Executive Committee

14th January 2025

- 3.6. These timescales will likely increase as councils nationwide are now starting to place orders to support their needs in time for the deadline, and funding announcements are expected in November that will support the remaining authorities to commit to spending.
- 3.7. It is important to note that management of waste in Worcestershire is split between ourselves as the Waste Collection Authority (WCA), and the County Council as the Waste Disposal Authority (WDA), who arrange for waste to be processed/treated once collected.
- 3.8. There is currently nowhere within Worcestershire that can support the disposal of food waste, and the nearest facility that can meet our needs is to the west of Stourbridge, but the County Council are not able to secure that as the destination for our food waste until there is clarity regarding our future collection service, and this presents a risk that the available capacity may be committed elsewhere, and require us to transport food waste further for disposal – increasing costs and reducing the efficiency of a collection service.
- 3.9. To support discussions and secure a disposal route, the WDA will need clarity around the parameters of the future service.
- 3.10. Key parameters include:
- assumption of food waste yield based on 1.25kg/hh/week
 - if caddy liners are to be provided;
 - Any changes to current residual services (which will influence yield);
 - planned service start date;
 - property coverage – if all premises will be covered from service start date or if the service will be phased in.
- 3.11. Options for the future management of collected food waste, including the provision of new transfer stations and/or combined transfer stations and collection depots, are being explored by WCC currently to support the longer-term efficiency of managing food waste.
- 3.12. A report to Worcestershire Leaders Board in July examined the implications of direct delivery versus the use of transfer stations. Transfer stations are generally beneficial for the WCA as they reduce mileage and impact on collection rounds. Additionally, transfer manages risk – for example if a facility is offline for any reason, bulked up waste can easily be diverted elsewhere.

4. Current Options:

- 4.1. There are currently three core options open to the Council regarding the new Statutory requirement, each with variant elements and different risks:
- 4.2. **Option 1:** Expand our current services to operate a Food Waste Collection ourselves.
- 4.3. **Option 2:** Outsource the Food Waste Collection service through the private sector.
- 4.4. **Option 3:** Consider the legal options to not meet the new statutory duty.

Executive Committee14th January 2025

4.5. Option 1 Outline Information: In House Provision

- 4.6. Approximately 40% of local authorities fulfil waste collections via an in-house workforce, and this would give opportunity to share local knowledge from our existing workforce, but also require us to take on the responsibilities associated with all aspects of the service.
- 4.7. This would consist of recruiting and training approximately 12 additional staff, and procuring/operating 5 vehicles.
- 4.8. This would also involve maintenance of the additional vehicles, which is a current concern for our existing fleet, and taking responsibility for all operational risks – which as a brand-new service are higher than normal.
- 4.9. In order to operate these additional resources, we would also need to acquire a new site to operate from, as our existing depots do not have capacity, or the relevant certification to operate the size of fleet that this would produce.
- 4.10. Our current O Licenses (that regulate the maximum number of Heavy Goods Vehicles we can legally operate) are already at capacity across the two existing sites, and cannot be extended without increasing the space and maintenance facilities to support such a fleet.

4.11. Option 2 Outline Information: Outsource a Food Waste Collection Contract

- 4.12. Option 2 under this requirement would be to commission the food waste collection service by procuring a new contract for waste collections.
- 4.13. The Council will be able to use the contract to allocate much of the uncertainty around participation and necessary logistics to the Contractor in return for a set cost that would allow the Council to budget more effectively, but potentially reduce the ability to make savings during the life of such a contract.
- 4.14. If the Council opted to outsource this service, then it will need to consider the procurement strategy which it adopts, but there are procurement frameworks that will support an open process with minimal risk – subject to sufficient interested parties looking to engage with this process.
- 4.15. The Council should be aware that undertaking a procurement exercise would not guarantee a satisfactory outcome. The waste collection market has contracted due to consolidation and companies exiting the market.
- 4.16. Contractors do not have sufficient capacity to bid for all projects, and so they are selective about which projects they pursue. It can therefore be difficult to generate sufficient competition to drive value for money through such a procurement exercise.
- 4.17. In addition, a dedicated waste collections contract for the Borough may not be an attractive proposition for private sector waste contractors not already operating in this area, unless they seek to use this as an entry-point to expand operations in the Worcestershire area.
- 4.18. To address this, opportunities to let a joint tender with Bromsgrove District Council under our shared service would help to increase the attraction of our contract, although further partnership with other Worcestershire LA's such as Wyre Forest District Council would further increase this and support increased resilience and best value if such an agreement could be reached, and transparency of costs between the individual authorities be built into the pricing.

Executive Committee

14th January 2025

4.19. **Option 3 Outline Information: Alternatives to full implementation of a Food Waste Collection Service**

4.20. This option may breach our statutory duty under the Environment Act 2021, and is not one presented lightly.

4.21. It is currently unknown what the funding from Central Government will support regarding the new burden of implementing a food waste collection service, and it is expected that there will likely be some initial shortfall against our costs, with further financial pressure over time in the form of future capital investment and uncertainties regarding the period for which central government will support revenue funding of the new service.

4.22. Current estimated costs of implementing the service are presented in section 4 below, but place an exceptional additional pressure on Council Finances.

4.23. If the funding from Central Government does not meet our expected costs, we may require legal advice to consider our options, and any relevant interpretation of the new requirements that may allow us to either defer, partially implement, or simply not meet the new statutory duty.

4.24. **Summary of Options:**

4.25. Whichever mechanism is chosen, the logistical challenges will remain, and due to the number of Local Authorities that are also planning to implement additional services to meet this requirement, there are now significant concerns that further delay in making arrangements will result in us failing to meet this new Statutory Duty.

4.26. Due to the costs and capacity concerns outlined in the main body of this report associated with operating a new in-house food waste collection service, Officer recommendations at this point will be to outsource this element of our services, as per option 2 above, and will be reviewed to support a final report paper in January to present additional detail and appraisal of options to meet this duty.

5. **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

5.1. Working with external consultants "Circulogic", who have supported modelling for the new requirements, the modelled indicative cost of operating a food waste collection service across Redditch is just over £500,000 per year, not including any additional expenditure on infrastructure.

5.2. Government is providing three funding streams to support Councils implement food waste collections:

- Capital transitional funding (to buy vehicles and containers)
- Transitional resource funding (one off revenue start-up costs)
- Ongoing resource (revenue) funding

5.3. The details of this revenue funding were expected to be provided in November 2024, but have still not been shared.

5.4. Waste Collection Authorities (WCA) have been given a one-off capital fund for the purchase of vehicles and containers to commence the service, although future Capital costs to replace

Executive Committee14th January 2025

vehicles and bins are expected to be funded by Collection Authorities thereafter, which is an additional financial pressure for the Council.

5.4.1. RBC - £766,498

Waste Collection Authority	Allocated DEFRA capital funding for containers	Actual capital funding needed for containers	Shortfall
Redditch BC	£254,998	£292,061	£37,063

- 5.5. An appeal regarding the allocated Capital funding was submitted to Defra in early March 2024.
- 5.6. In our appeal to Defra, for illustrative purposes, we also highlighted the current market rate of land with an estimate of the additional land area required to support the operation of a food waste fleet and meet the criteria to support potential expansion of our Operators Licence.
- 5.7. For RBC this added a further **£160,400** to the total funding shortfall (without any other investment in facilities/infrastructure on that land).
- 5.8. Food waste collection vehicles are generally smaller than those used for the main residual and recycling collections. 7.5 tonne vehicles have been used in our modelling and by Government to calculate funding. The funding does not cover the cost of procuring alternative fuel vehicles and equates to just over £100,000 per 7.5 tonne vehicle. Electric versions of these vehicles are quoted at more than £300,000.

Waste Collection Authority	Allocated DEFRA capital funding for Vehicles	Actual capital funding needed for vehicles	Shortfall
Redditch BC	£511,500	£613,800	£102,300

- 5.9. Ongoing revenue funding will be paid from 2026/27 when the New Burden payments commence, but the estimated figures have not yet been provided for consideration.
- 5.10. Transitional resource funding will be provided in late 2024/25 and again in early 2025/26 with a caveat from Defra that this will be 'subject to agreement and our spending review allocation, we plan to fund procurement, project management, communications and container delivery'.
- 5.11. Based on the modelling carried out for Redditch, we will need up to 6 vehicles, with a minimum of 2 staff per vehicle, not including cover for annual leave/sickness.

Executive Committee14th January 2025

- 5.12. The Revenue costs associated with operating this service are estimated at just over £500,000 per year for Redditch, although updated modelling from *Circulogic* is currently being reviewed to more clearly define this to support inclusion in the MTFP.
- 5.13. It is worth noting that the figures above are solely for Redditch, and there may be financial benefits arising from our shared service arrangements with Bromsgrove District Council that would support a reduction on these figures, although this cannot be verified until planning has commenced in earnest to deliver the service operationally – either inhouse, or through an external supplier.
- 5.14. In addition to the funding and resource requirements linked to Food Waste, the Council has now had confirmation that DEFRA will be transferring funding of **£814,000** to Redditch Borough Council linked to dry recyclable material through the Extended Producer Responsibilities (EPR) scheme for the 2025/26 financial year.
- 5.15. This is effectively a tax on packaging manufacturers under the “producer pays” principle and not direct government funding per se.
- 5.16. EPR funding is intended to support costs of our existing waste collection arrangements and support service changes, communication and education on dry recycling to further improve this to divert waste from landfill/incineration; and although there are currently no limits on how this money is spent, this is not guaranteed income and we expect further guidance on this in 2025.
- 5.17. From 2028 this funding will be linked to the quality as well as quantity of recycling we collect, and may be required to support education and engagement with residents regarding their waste in order to secure and maintain this level of funding.
- 5.18. On 29 November the Government set out a new policy statement regarding “Simpler Recycling¹”, which set out a “maximum default requirement” for councils to collect card and paper separately from April 2026. No reference is made to new burdens funding for this activity which – at a minimum – would require provision of separate containers and either separate containers in vehicles for holding the material (with slower collection times as crews have to empty two containers rather than one) or even separate vehicles and crews to undertake the collections.
- 5.19. The additional costs of moving to a twin stream recycling service would be significant as an addition to our existing service, but such a system would support a transition to a three weekly residual collection cycle alongside the weekly food waste service and alternating fortnightly collections of the two dry recycling streams and our existing fortnightly garden waste service.
- 5.20. This would likely generate the highest quality of recycling as well as influence recycling behaviour and engagement to a greater degree with residents to realise the reductions in residual non-recyclable waste identified from previous waste sampling across the Borough, whilst also reducing our operating costs to offset the costs associated with the additional arrangements for recycling.

¹ This is the umbrella term for the rationalisation of waste collection arrangements nationally to ensure that all residents can dispose of the same core recyclable items wherever in the country they live.

Executive Committee14th January 2025

- 5.21. It is recognised within this that councils and other waste collectors will “still have the flexibility to make the best choices to suit local need” though, and it is believed that as with previous legislation regarding waste collection, there is scope to maintain our existing comingled approach using a TEEP (Technical, Economic and Environmentally Practicable) assessment.
- 5.22. We are already discussing this with the other Worcestershire Authorities as a joint initiative to support our current service arrangements, as this will require us to set out how we will attain the required quality of recycling, and so will need to be considered alongside the ERP funding to ensure we can demonstrate the necessary outcomes and benefits to justify this.
- 5.23. Whilst this funding may be used to offset potential shortfalls in funding for food waste, the government have emphasised repeatedly the need to demonstrate “efficient” collections ensuring a high quality of collected recycling, and it should not be seen as a windfall that can be relied on without careful consideration of the potential impact of not being able to demonstrate how this funding has been used to support this.

6. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1. The Environment Act 2021 sets out the legislative framework for Simpler Recycling which was launched in October 2023. The Council already meets many of the requirements, but it will need to provide new services to provide a separate weekly collection of food waste from homes from 31 March 2026.

7. OTHER – IMPLICATIONS**7.1. Climate Change Implications**

- 7.2. The introduction of food waste will give the potential to divert nearly a third of the residual waste (by weight) we currently collect based on sampling of what Redditch residents are throwing away.

Residual Waste – Composition Analysis 2022 (Percentage by weight)			RBC
ORGANIC CATERING	UNAVOIDABLE FOOD WASTE		5.00%
	POTENTIALLY AVOIDABLE FOOD WASTE		0.74%
	AVOIDABLE FOOD WASTE - LOOSE		5.86%
	AVOIDABLE FOOD WASTE - PACKAGED		15.19%
	CONSUMABLE LIQUIDS, FATS AND OILS.		1.94%
			28.72%

- 7.3. For Redditch, it is estimated that the food waste service has the potential to reduce the Carbon impact of managing our residents waste by up to 1,800 tons per year subject to how well our residents engage with the service.

Executive Committee

14th January 2025

- 7.4. Subject to the success of the new service, the diversion of this waste out of the residual waste stream may also support improved efficiency in our wider waste collection rounds, giving further reductions to our carbon impact.

8. Equalities and Diversity Implications

- 8.1. People with disabilities may require assistance in presenting their food waste caddy for collection, which will be provided as part of our existing assisted collection scheme, and will be publicised alongside the introduction of a new collection scheme as part of the information provided directly to every household when the caddies are delivered.
- 8.2. There could potentially be a negative impact on people from particular ethnic groups whose first language is not English and any subsequent misunderstandings about the correct food waste disposal instructions. Imagery will be used to help simplify the message as much as possible, and further assessment will be needed to identify the scale of this, and consider how to address these concerns.
- 8.3. A detailed Equality Impact Assessment will be carried out as part of final selection and implementation of the new service alongside the creation of a final specification and implementation plan.

9. RISK MANAGEMENT

- 9.1. There are several risks to meeting the domestic requirement to collect food waste by April 2026, which include:
- Capital and revenue financial uncertainty (New Burdens)
 - Capacity of supply chain to meet unprecedented nationwide demand for specialist vehicles, caddies, and bins
 - Capacity and suitability of existing depot(s) to accommodate increased number of trucks (impacts on O Licence)
 - Capacity and availability of local AD facilities to reduce travel time and impact on collection rounds
 - Availability of supporting infrastructure (waste transfer stations) which will increase the cost of providing service in short-medium term
 - Lack of suppliers for provision of food waste collection contract.
 - On-Going ERP funding not guaranteed, and still uncertainty over how this will be calculated and linked to service provision, efficiency of collections, and quality of recycling material collected in the future, which will be needed to support appropriate use of this funding.
- 9.2. Five of the Worcestershire councils collaborated on a Soft Market Testing exercise in June this year to identify factors relevant to outsourcing food waste with potential suppliers, but did not receive any responses to the questions posed to the private sector.
- 9.3. A further market engagement exercise is being developed alongside this report to address the uncertainty regarding interest from the private sector in providing the service as a dedicated food waste contract only, using a simpler premise to gauge interest specifically to support a decision on whether the private sector will engage with a tender process should we start one.

This page is intentionally left blank

Executive Committee named m

14th January 2025**Damp and Mould Additional Resources**

Relevant Portfolio Holder	Councillor Bill Hartnett
Portfolio Holder Consulted	Yes
Relevant Head of Service	Assistant Director of Environmental and Housing Property Services
Report Author	Job Title: Andrew Rainbow / Mike Walsh email: andrew.rainbow@bromsgroveandredditch.gov.uk Contact Tel: 1678
Wards Affected	All Wards
Ward Councillor(s) consulted	No
Relevant Strategic Purpose(s)	Communities which are safe, well maintained and green Finding somewhere to live
Non-Key Decision	
If you have any questions about this report, please contact the report author in advance of the meeting.	

1. RECOMMENDATIONS**The Executive Committee RESOLVE that:-**

- 1) Subject to approval of recommendation 2, Members approve the contents of the Damp and Mould Business Case and the establishment of a Damp and Mould Team.**

The Executive Committee is asked to RECOMMEND that;-

- 2) £115,770 be released from the HRA budget for the financial year 2024/25 to cover the costs of the new team and that thereafter the costs summarised at paragraph 4.3 of the report of £463,078 be met from the HRA budget.**

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The death of Awaab Ishack on 21 December 2020 due to a severe respiratory condition as a result of prolonged exposure to mould in the family home, prompted a campaign for the introduction of "Awaab's Law".
- 2.2 Following the subsequent coroner's report and public outcry the government announced plans to make major changes to the law on damp and mould. "Awaab's Law", was introduced through the Social Housing Regulation Act 2023 which received the royal assent in July 2023. The new legislation regarding tenants affected by damp and mould

requires landlords to investigate and repair reported health hazards within specified timeframes

- 2.3 Although the primary legislation has been enacted, further details of the exact scope of the new regime will only become clear once secondary legislation has been introduced. This was originally expected by the Autumn of 2024 but has been delayed following the change of government. Based on the contents of a public consultation carried out by the previous government in January 2024, it is possible that the final version of Awaab's Law will be wider than the original expectation and could cover other housing health hazards in addition to damp and mould.
- 2.4 In anticipation of the legislative changes, social housing providers are being advised to review the level of specialist support they have in place to deal with damp and mould repairs. This support will need to cater for the new statutory timescales to be introduced for responding to complaints and completing repairs.
- 2.5 Housing Property Services have made great efforts to minimise the growing problem of damp and mould over the last few years acting within the limited resources available. However, in light of the new law the council will need to improve its delivery of repair services and ensure action is taken to comply with the appropriate timescales. Accordingly, this report sets out the need for additional resources to enable these new demands to be met.

3. OPERATIONAL ISSUES

- 3.1 Members are referred to the business case attached at Appendix 1. This business case proposes the employment of a dedicated "Damp and Mould" team to address the prevalent issue of mould and dampness in council homes and to ensure that the council can meet the challenging timescales to investigate and remedy issues that have been set out in Awaab's Law.
- 3.2 The introduction of this specialised team aims to provide timely, efficient, and high-quality repair services to improve the living conditions of residents and prolong the lifespan of council properties. The proposed team will consist of skilled trade professionals trained in identifying, assessing, and remedying damp and mould problems. Their specialisation in this area will result in more effective solutions, ultimately reducing the recurrence of issues and lowering long-term maintenance costs for the council.
- 3.3 Investing in a damp and mould team aligns with the council's commitment to providing safe and habitable homes for residents.

REDDITCH BOROUGH COUNCIL

Executive Committee named m

14th January 2025

Proactively addressing these issues, can contribute to improving residents' quality of life, health outcomes, and overall satisfaction with their housing arrangements.

- 3.4 There are a variety of applications that can be employed and to different property types design, there are a mix of applications such as Mechanical, electrical and non-mechanical, no one element will fix the problem. The team must assess the building to understand the root cause before they can repair.
- 3.5 As set out on pages 3 and 4 of the business case (and based on the 2024 consultation exercise) social housing providers will be expected to meet very strict deadlines for processing and responding to complaints about damp and mould. The anticipated time limits are set out in the table below.

Stage 1	Notification of complaint by tenant
Stage 2	Investigation of potential hazard to be carried out by landlord within 14 days
Stage 3	Landlord to provide a written summary of the investigation within 48 hours of completion of investigation.
Stage 4	If hazard poses a “significant risk to the health and safety of the resident” landlord to commence work within 7 days of the written summary being provided
Stage 5	Works to be completed within a “reasonable time” – no definition given of what a “reasonable time” would be.

- 3.6 As detailed on pages 5 and 6 of the business case, having reviewed the current staffing levels, it is anticipated that recruitment to extra posts would be needed to enable the proposed time limits to be complied with. The full detail is set out in the business case and summarised below:-

Trade requirement

- 3 x multi trade decorators
- 2 x multi trade builders
- 1 x scheduler/administrator

With regard to supervision, it has been identified that there is capacity in the current structure that can undertake this additional element.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

4.1 From 01/04/23 to 31/03/2024 the Repairs and Maintenance team received reports of damp and mould from 373 properties. These ranged from small, isolated patches to issues that affected the whole property. Of the 373, 45 jobs had to be outsourced to an external contractor. These were a range of larger and small scale works that the team could not complete in house that were mould treatments only. This was at a cost of £66,634.38, averaging £1480.76 per property.

4.2 If the team were to have outsourced all of this work to a contractor instead of delivery in house, then the cost based on the numbers of reports of damp and mould received is estimated to have been approx. £552,343.28. This would have been for mould treatments only. If ancillary works such as plastering, carpenters and builders work were to be included, then the figures would be significantly higher as noted below.

4.3 The cost to bring this work in house is as follows: -

Labour (inc on costs) £252,696.00 made up of : -

- 5 x tradespersons paid on grade 6 SCP 24 £219,080.00
- 1 x admin paid on grade 4 SCP 10 £33,616.00

Materials (estimated) £150,000.00

PPE, training & equipment (estimated) £10,000.00

Vehicles (estimated) £50,382.00

Total £ 463,078.00

This is an estimated cost based on quotations and data for the last 12 months.

4.4 Based on the estimated costs of going to an external contractor to undertake the works based on last year's data it is estimated that the costs would be £650,000. This includes labour and material costs of building works carried out by our internal workforce on jobs completed by contractors that were mould treatments only. Accordingly, providing this service in house would enable the provision of safe and habitable

REDDITCH BOROUGH COUNCIL

Executive Committee named m

14th January 2025

homes for residents and in addition would yield a potential saving of approximately £187,000.00.

- 4.5 It should be noted that the new damp and mould service would be HRA funded.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The relevant legislation is the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 which made amendments to the Housing and Regeneration Act 2008. Further guidance is also set out in the government publication "Understanding and Addressing the Health Risk of damp and mould on the home" which was published in September 2023.
- 5.2 As explained at paragraph 2.3, the introduction of the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 lays the foundations for introducing Awaab's law, but the new law requires the introduction of secondary legislation which to date has not happened. The government consultation carried out in January 2024 gives an indication of the details the government were considering at the time. The full scope of the housing health hazards that may be covered remains to be seen. However, the industry expectation is the damp and mould response times will be as set out in this report.
- 5.3 Registered Social Landlords are being strongly advised to review and update their service provision and response times in advance of the secondary legislation being introduced so as to be fully prepared for the changes. Under the new system tenants will not be required to provide medical evidence to support their claims, and where there is uncertainty over the extent of a hazard, landlords are being advised to err on the side of caution and complete the repairs identified.
- 5.4 In the event that the Council is not able to meet the deadlines set out in paragraph 3.4, tenants would have recourse to complain to the Housing Ombudsman. It is not entirely clear at this time how the two regimes of the new requirements under Awaab's law and the existing civil law remedies for Housing Disrepair will interact with each other.

6. OTHER - IMPLICATIONS**Relevant Strategic Purpose**

- 6.1 Investing in a mould and damp team aligns with the Council's commitment to providing safe and habitable homes for residents.

Climate Change Implications

- 6.2 Mould, damp and condensation are common problems in many buildings, often linked to poor ventilation, water ingress, and temperature differences due in part to climate change. There are 10 factors that can contribute to mould and damp. Each is a root cause and must be addressed moving forward.

Equalities and Diversity Implications

- 6.3 Damp and mould can have a greater impact on some of the council's more vulnerable tenants. The implementation of a dedicated damp and mould resource should have positive impacts relating to the following protected characteristics:

- Age: very young and older tenants are more likely to be affected by damp and mould issues, so prompt resolution would be beneficial.
- Pregnancy and maternity: pregnant women and their babies could be at greater risk from the impact of damp and mould, so prompt resolution is beneficial.
- Disability: tenants with a disability may be unable to resolve damp and mould issues without assistance. There are also certain health conditions which would be protected under the disability characteristic of the Equality Act that are at a greater risk from the damp and mould (including skin conditions, respiratory conditions or those with a weakened immune system), so early resolution would benefit these tenants.

- 6.4 If approved, a full Equality Impact Assessment will be undertaken on the service to be provided and the standards it will follow.

7. RISK MANAGEMENT

- 7.1 The risks identified in relation to this report are as follows:

- There is a risk to the health and welfare of council tenants arising from the Council not being able to deliver a speedy and effective repair service.
- There is a risk that tenants will not allow access to tradespersons attending to carry out surveys or repairs. This will have to be properly documented and records kept of efforts to gain access.
- The new timescales as set out in paragraph 3.4 will be more challenging to comply with and there is a risk that they will not be met. This risk is being mitigated by reviewing the service and

Executive Committee named m

14th January 2025

seeking approval for the introduction of a damp and mould team to make the service more resilient and able to comply with statutory timelines.

- There is a risk to the Council's reputation from failing to properly prepare for the new legislation; these risks are being mitigated by the steps in this report.

8. APPENDICES and BACKGROUND PAPERS

Appendix 1 Damp and Mould business case.

This page is intentionally left blank



Damp and Mould team Business Case

Contents

Author:	Mike Walsh
Date:	02/09/2024
Release Version:	V1.0

Business Case Outline

Contents

Executive Summary

Business Problem and Opportunity

Proposed Project Objectives

Risk

Options.....

Cost Implications

Summary Recommendation.....

Appendices.....



Executive Summary

Following the death of Awaab Ishack on 21 December 2020 as a result of a severe respiratory condition due to prolonged exposure to mould in his home, Awaab's Law, which was introduced in the landmark Social Housing Regulation Act 2023, requires landlords to investigate and fix reported health hazards within specified timeframes. Awaab's Law is part of the biggest government reforms affecting social housing in a decade. Since 2010, there has been a steady improvement in the quality of social housing with a reduction in the proportion of non-decent social rented homes from 20% in 2010 to 10% in 2021.

A Levelling Up White Paper has pledged to reduce non-decency in rented homes by 50% by 2030. Awaab's Law will contribute to this mission by making sure that social housing landlords are taking swift action on the assessment and remedy of the most serious hazards.

This business case proposes the employment of a dedicated mould and damp team to address the prevalent issue of mould and dampness in council homes and to ensure we meet the challenging timescales to investigate and remedy issues that have been set out in Awaab's Law. The introduction of this specialised team aims to provide timely, efficient, and high-quality repair services to improve the living conditions of residents and prolong the lifespan of council properties.

The current maintenance team is made up of 22 directly employed tradespersons. They are working to capacity undertaking a variety of repairs commensurate to their individual skillsets. The timescales that are proposed within Awaab's Law indicate that there is no current capacity within the team to be able to meet these stringent targets with the existing resource. By establishing a dedicated team, we can meet these tight deadlines, streamline the repair process, reduce turnaround times, and enhance overall customer satisfaction.

The proposed team will consist of skilled professionals trained in identifying, assessing, and remediating mould and damp problems. Their specialisation in this area will result in more effective solutions, ultimately reducing the recurrence of issues and lowering long-term maintenance costs for the council.

Investing in a mould and damp team aligns with the council's commitment to providing safe and habitable homes for residents. By proactively addressing these issues, we can contribute to improving residents' quality of life, health outcomes, and overall satisfaction with their housing arrangements.

Through this business case, we seek approval to allocate resources for the recruitment, training, and ongoing operation of the mould and damp team. The long-term benefits of this initiative include cost savings, improved property conditions, and enhanced relationships with residents, reinforcing the council's reputation as a responsible and proactive housing provider.



Business Problem and Opportunity

It is indicated in Awaabs Law proposal that the following timescales to investigate and subsequently start works to remedy the cause and effect of damp and mould will be implemented.

Inspection/diagnosis of hazards

The Awaab's Law campaign proposed that social landlords be given 7 days to begin work to a property if a medical professional believes there is a risk to a residents' health. Whilst it is proposed that landlords be given 7 days to begin work where there is a risk to a residents' health or safety there will be no requirement from the affected tenant to provide medical evidence to determine this risk.

The Awaab's Law campaign recommended that social landlords be required to investigate the causes of damp and mould within 14 calendar days of a complaint being made where there is no report from a medical professional.

The campaign for Awaab's Law called for landlords to be required to provide residents with a report on the findings of the investigation. It is proposed that residents be issued with a written summary of the findings of the investigation within 48 hours of the investigation concluding.

The written summary must specify, at minimum:

- How and when the investigation was conducted, and the job title of the individual who conducted the investigation.
- Any following investigations that are required, and if so when they will take place
- If a hazard was found and if so what
- Whether the hazard is likely to pose a significant risk to residents' health or safety
- If it does pose a risk:
- [If applicable] what temporary repairs are needed to make the property safe until the problem can be permanently rectified
- what the registered provider will do to permanently rectify the problem and the likely timescales for this
- How to contact the registered provider with any queries

Within 14 calendar days of being made aware that there is a potential hazard in a social home, the registered provider must provide a written summary of findings to the resident that includes details of any hazard identified and (if applicable) next steps, including an anticipated timeline for repair and a schedule of works.

If, within 48 hours of the investigation, the registered provider is not able to set out full details of wider repair works, and only the immediate steps they are taking (i.e. temporary repairs), they should inform the resident of when they can expect a full schedule of works.



Carrying Out works identified on inspection

If the investigation indicates that a reported hazard poses a significant risk to the health or safety of the resident, the registered provider must begin repair works within 7 calendar days of the written summary being issued.

It is considered that 'beginning' repair works would entail a worker being on site physically starting to repair and rectify a hazard. It will be irrelevant whether works are carried out by in-house workers, external contractors, or a combination.

Because of the range of hazards, and varying ways they can impact individuals' health and safety, there is a significant challenge in prescribing a clear threshold for beginning works that can apply to all circumstances. It is believed that defining the hazards in scope of Awaab's Law as those that pose a significant risk of harm to the health or safety of the resident is appropriate. As noted above, if a registered provider is unable to determine whether a hazard poses a significant risk to a resident's health or safety, they should take a cautious approach and take any necessary action to mitigate health risks.

In some situations, registered providers may wish to take a phased approach to more complex remediation works, and temporary works will be required to keep the property safe before wider works are completed. For example, in cases of damp and mould this could include temporary works to remove the mould spores to mitigate the health risk, with wider repair works to follow. In such situations, registered providers must still begin works within 7 days, and details of further works must be included in the written report

The business problem in this scenario is the how we as an organisation currently deal with the presence of damp and mould issues in council properties, and how we will gear up to conforming with the proposals set out in Awaabs Law.. Without a dedicated team to address these issues, the council may struggle to effectively manage and resolve damp and mould problems in a timely manner. This would have the potential to put our tenants and the organisation at risk.

We currently have one dedicated tradesperson(decorator) that undertakes the treatment of mould and damp identified in our properties. Any building related issues that contribute to mould and damp are dealt with by our in-house R&M team. We have 2 builders that carry out a majority of building repairs in the existing team and due to demand, we currently have works booked in 20 weeks in advance. This means that if building works are identified, we would have no capacity to meet the target timescale of 21 days that is to be set out in Awaabs law.



Proposed Project Objectives

In order to be in a position to deliver on the stipulations set out in Awaabs law I propose that we need to recruit into the following roles.

- 2 x multi trade builders – by having 2 dedicated builders we will be able to respond to any repairs or structural issues that are causing/adding to presence of damp or mould a property. They will be able to be booked in to inspect and repair issues within the specified timeframes.
- 3x multi trade decorators – by having 3 additional decorators we will be able to assess and respond to minor and major damp and mould issues within the specified timeframes. Being multi trade, they will be able to undertake minor building works and plastering which will ensure best use of resource with the 2 builders.
- 1 x scheduler/administrator – Given the focus that these works will attract and the guidelines we will have to work to in regards providing reports to the customer within 48 hrs of the inspection, we will need an administrator to book in the works for the trades and correspond to the tenants as per the guidelines within Awaabs law. They will also be tasked with the scheduling works and aftercare which will include follow up calls up to 6 months after to ascertain if there is a repeat of the damp and mould issues.
- Senior trade/supervisor – we have identified that there is capacity within the current senior trades personnel we have to provide the required supervision for this new team. The scheduler / administrator role will be managed under the BSU team Leader and by doing this will provide resilience during times of A/L and sickness.

We are currently delivering damp and mould remedial works with 1 decorator and utilising the R&M trade operatives. Over the last 12 months we have employed a contractor (QEST) to assist with inspection and delivery of the larger scale jobs or at times where we have not had the capacity within the team.

From 01/04/23 to 31/03/2024 received reports of damp and mould from 373 properties. These range from small, isolated patches to issues that affect the whole property. Although a majority of these works were attended to in house, we had to outsource 45 jobs to an external contractor. These were a range of larger and small scale works that we could not complete in house that were mould treatments only. This was at a cost of £66634.38, averaging £1480.76 per property. If we were to have outsourced all of the work to a contractor instead of delivery in house, then the cost based on the numbers of reports of damp and mould we had is estimated to have been approx. £552,343.28. This would have been for mould treatments only.

I have analysed the works we carried out in house over the last 12 months and found that the time taken for us to attend a property and carry out an inspection following a report of damp and mould issues is approximately 9 days on average. This means we are currently able to deliver on the 14-day target that is anticipated to be set. There were a few instances where it took more than 14 days, but this was over the winter months when we had a higher volume of jobs reported, which is to be expected.



It was found that the time taken for us to attend a property and start works following a report of damp and mould issues was an average of 41 days. This is where we will fail to meet the 21-day target that is anticipated to be set. This is due to currently utilising the existing workforce within R&M that are already stretched with volumes of works.

I am confident that by taking on the resource set out in this business case, we will be able to meet the targets set out.

Risk

There will be a risk of not gaining access to some properties that we receive a report of damp and mould for. These are more likely to be from third party referrals, i.e tenancy officers, carers etc that have attended the property for reasons other than repairs. These tend to be properties where the tenants do not report issues and have not done so for a number of years and tend to have vulnerabilities or other issues that causes them not to or be able to report. There are some that will refuse access for reasons of instruction by solicitors in no win no fee claims of disrepair.

In this instance Awaabs Law advises the following;

Access

If a registered provider is unable to access a property to conduct an investigation or make repairs despite several reasonable approaches to do so the following actions would be taken to constitute reasonable attempts for access.

Landlords must make at least 3 attempts to contact the resident (or appointed representative) and arrange a suitable time to access the property

Landlords must work with residents to arrange a suitable time to visit the property. Landlords should offer timeslots for residents to choose from and should take into consideration the residents' needs (for example their working pattern) when offering timeslots to attend to the property

If the registered provider is unable to access the property within the agreed timeslot, they should leave the resident a notice stating that an attempt was made and providing contact details. The registered provider should contact the resident and offer an alternative slot

Landlords will not be expected to make more than 3 attempts to access the property within agreed timeslots. They will be expected to keep evidence that they have made best efforts to work with the resident to identify a timeslot and the resident has either not responded or has refused access within that slot

Throughout this process, we will require landlords to keep a record of all correspondence made with residents, noting the date, time and actions attempted

If a resident is unwilling or unable to provide access to the registered provider within the timescales, landlords will not be in breach for missing the timescales. However, they will be expected to continue to work as quickly as possible to enter the property to investigate and/or remedy the



hazard. Once the registered provider has accessed the property, the proposed timescales will apply. For example, if a landlord enters the property on day 16 to investigate, they will still be expected to provide the written summary within 48 hours, and to have begun work within 7 days (i.e. by day 23) unless they are again unable to obtain access.

Reduction in reports of damp and mould in the summer months.

Looking at the data for 2023-2024 there is a slight reduction in the reporting of these issues over the summer months. This could mean downtime for the trade operatives in the damp and mould team. However, it is envisaged that following ratification of this Law, we can expect an increase in reports initially due to claims from no win no fee solicitors taking advantage of this new legislation.

In the unlikely event that there is a slowdown in work, the trades team for damp and mould will be utilised on void works or repairs and maintenance works which will help in bringing wait times down. In order to facilitate this, we will be employing multi trade operatives that have more skills than just painting and decorating. This will give us greater flexibility in ensuring best use of resource and minimise any potential downtime.

Options

Outlined below are the options to consider.

- **Do Nothing /continue as we are.**

If we continue as we are going with the current resource, we will ultimately fail our responsibility to meet the compliance targets set out. This could result in potential loss of life or serious illness for tenants and huge reputational damage and financial repercussions for the organisation.

- **Procure an external contractor/contractors to undertake this work.**

As previously mentioned, we have had the support of QEST, a damp and mould contractor that undertook works that we did not have the capacity for in house. As they do not currently undertake the structural element of the works this would have to go out to tender to find a contractor that would be able to complete all elements of this work. If we were to continue to utilise an external contractor then we could expect the costs for this to be in excess of £650k to complete the volumes of work we had last year.

- **Create in house damp and mould team.**

Delivering this work with an internal damp and mould team will give RBC better control of how and when this work will be done, along with better quality control and cost efficiency. Having an in house team, our customers will receive a better quality of service as our team will have better understanding of RBCs principles and goals. This will help build increased employee morale, which fosters loyalty and commitment and a stronger sense of purpose.



Cost implications

The cost to bring this work in house is as follows.

Labour (inc on costs) = £252696.00

5 x tradespersons paid on grade 6 SCP 24 = £219080.00

1 x admin paid on grade 4 SCP 10 = £33616.00

Materials (estimated) = £150.000.00

PPE, training & equipment (estimated) = £10,000.00

Vehicles (estimated) = £50382.00

Total = £ 463,078.00

This is an estimated cost based on quotations and data for the last 12 months materials usage allowing a sum for jobs put out to external contractors.

Based on the estimated costs of going to an external contractor to undertake the works based on last years data I estimate the costs to be £650,000. This includes labour and material costs of building works carried out by our internal workforce on jobs completed by contractors that were mould treatments only.

Bringing this work in house would yield a potential saving of approx. £187,000.00

Summary Recommendation

In summary, the decision to create an in-house damp and mould team will ensure we are fully able to be compliant with Awaabs Law. It will also boost the morale of the current in-house team as it will demonstrate a commitment by RBC to delivering works in house which in turn gives people job security etc. We will also have a better control of the quality and cost of the service we provide to our customers which is a positive outcome for RBC.

Next steps

If this proposal is agreed we will put forward the Job Descriptions for Job Evaluation, when complete we would run a recruitment drive to fill the posts. Concurrent to this we would commence hiring vehicles and provide uniforms, PPE, stores, and work equipment.

As soon as the above is completed, the service would commence (after the new recruits undergo necessary training. Then, as, and when Awaabs law is ratified, we will already be delivering our damp and mould remedial works in line with its proposals.



Appendices

- **Appendix A – Salary costs including on costs**
- **Appendix B – vehicle costs**



Executive14th January 2025**Housing Ombudsman findings**

Relevant Portfolio Holder	Councillor Joe Baker
Portfolio Holder Consulted	Yes
Relevant Head of Service	Claire Felton
Report Authors	Job Title: Assistant Director for Legal Democratic and Procurement Services and Monitoring Officer Contact email: c.felton@bromsgroveandredditch.gov.uk Contact Tel: 01527 64252
Wards Affected	N/A
Ward Councillor(s) consulted	N/A
Relevant Strategic Purpose(s)	All
Key Decision / Non-Key Decision: This is a non-key decision	
If you have any questions about this report, please contact the report author in advance of the meeting.	

1. RECOMMENDATIONS**The Executive resolves that:-**

- (a) The findings, orders and recommendations from the Housing Ombudsman be noted.**
- (b) Compliance with those matters by the Council and the wider learning points be noted.**

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The complaint considered by the Housing Ombudsman concerned the Council's response to the resident's concerns of damp, mould and a ticking noise and the Council's complaint handling.
- 2.2 The Housing Ombudsman found there was severe maladministration in the Council's response to the resident's reports of damp and mould and reports of a ticking noise.
- 2.3 The Housing Ombudsman found there was maladministration in the Council's response to the resident's request for non-damp and mould repairs.
- 2.4 The Housing Ombudsman found there was maladministration in the Council's complaint handling.

Executive14th January 2025

-
- 2.5 The matter was determined by the Housing Ombudsman on 28th May 2024. The Housing Ombudsman ordered that the Council:-
- (a) Pay the resident £3,114.95 compensation comprised of:-
 - i) £364.95 for the impact of its response to the resident's reports of damp and mould on her enjoyment of her home.
 - ii) £1,200 for the distress, inconvenience, time and trouble caused by the Council's failures in its response to the resident's reports of damp and mould.
 - iii) £400 for the distress, inconvenience, time and trouble caused by the Council's failures in its response to the resident's request for non-damp and mould related repairs.
 - iv) £1,000 for the distress, inconvenience, time and trouble caused by the Council's response to the resident's reports of a ticking noise.
 - v) £150 for the distress caused by the Council's complaint handling failures.
 - (b) Arrange for the Chief Executive to apologise for the failings in the case. The resident should be given the option to receive her apology in person, over the phone or by letter. If the resident opts for a verbal apology the Council should write to the resident to confirm the outcome of their discussion. A copy should be provided to the Ombudsman, also within 4 weeks.
 - (c) Offer to visit the resident to:-
 - i) Discuss the outcomes of the survey reports with her.
 - ii) Satisfy itself that all repairs have been carried out to an acceptable standard.
 - iii) Agree an action plan for any outstanding works, including what will be done, when and by whom.
 - iv) Discuss how it might support and work with her to reduce condensation, damp and mould.
 - v) Discuss her request for compensation for items damaged by damp and mould, including her mattress. It should review the evidence and write to the resident to set out its decision in line with its policies and procedures.
A detailed summary of the visit, including any action plans, should be provided to the resident in writing. A copy should be provided to the Ombudsman, also within 4 weeks.
- 2.6 The Housing Ombudsman ordered that the Council carry out a senior management review of the case to identify what went wrong and what it would do differently. This should be presented to the senior leadership team and the Ombudsman within 8 weeks. It should include assessment against the spotlight reports, unless the landlord can demonstrate it has done these within the last 12 months on:-

Executive14th January 2025

- (a) Damp and mould
- (b) Noise complaints
- (c) Attitudes, respect and rights.
- (d) Knowledge Information Management

- 2.7 As part of the review the Council should also consider developing a policy and procedure on compensation and noise complaints.
- 2.8 Within 8 weeks of the date of the determination the Council is ordered to arrange training for relevant staff to ensure that they are equipped to respond to queries from vulnerable residents. This should include having difficult and delicate conversations with residents about matters such as mental health. The date and content of the training should be provided to the Ombudsman, also within 8 weeks.
- 2.9 Within 12 weeks of the date of the determination the Council is ordered to arrange for relevant staff involved in this case to complete the learning modules on the Ombudsman Landlord's Learning Hub for noise complaints, knowledge information management and attitudes, respect and rights. Confirmation that training has been completed should be provided to the Ombudsman, also within 12 weeks.
- 2.10 The orders and recommended actions above have been undertaken by the Council. The Housing Ombudsman closed the case on 13th November 2024.
- 2.11 Officers are currently producing Noise and Compensation Policies in line with good practice and the Housing Ombudsman's Spotlight Reports.

3. OPERATIONAL ISSUES

The Constitution Article 12.3 requires the Monitoring Officer to report to Executive (or Council for non-executive functions) if any decision or omission has given rise to maladministration. This report concerns actions that the Housing Ombudsman has determined were maladministration/service failings.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 There are no direct financial implications arising out of this report, other than the recommendation that £3,114.95 be paid to the resident.

Executive

14th January 2025

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

This report is required under section 5A of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 in view of the decision by the Housing Ombudsman.

6. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

Relevant Strategic Purpose

- 6.1 The requirement for the Monitoring Officer to report findings of maladministration is relevant to all of the Council's strategic purposes.

Climate Change Implications

- 6.2 There are no specific climate change implications.

Equalities and Diversity Implications

- 6.3 There are no implications for Equalities and Diversities arising out of the this report.

7. RISK MANAGEMENT

- 7.1 The main risks associated with the details included in this report are the risk of the Council being found to have caused maladministration in the future.

- 7.2 The risks are being managed by compliance with the recommendations and ongoing training.

8. APPENDICES and BACKGROUND PAPERS

Appendix 1: Housing Ombudsman Report - 202216635

Housing

Ombudsman Service

REPORT

COMPLAINT 202216635

Redditch Borough Council

28 May 2024

Our approach

The Housing Ombudsman's approach to investigating and determining complaints is to decide what is fair in all the circumstances of the case. This is set out in the Housing Act 1996 and the Housing Ombudsman Scheme (the Scheme). The Ombudsman considers the evidence and looks to see if there has been any 'maladministration,' for example, whether the landlord has failed to keep to the law, followed proper procedure, followed good practice, or behaved in a reasonable and competent manner.

Both the resident and the landlord have submitted information to the Ombudsman, and this has been carefully considered. Their accounts of what has happened are summarised below. This report is not an exhaustive description of all the events that have occurred in relation to this case, but an outline of the key issues as a background to the investigation's findings.

The complaint

1. The complaint is about the landlord's response to the resident's:
 - a. Reports of damp and mould.
 - b. Request for non-damp and mould related repairs.
 - c. Reports of a ticking noise.
 - d. Request for adaptations to her bathroom.
2. The Ombudsman has also considered the landlord's complaint handling.

Background

3. The resident is the secure tenant of the landlord, which is a local authority. The landlord's records show that the resident suffers with her mental health and is supported by the mental health team.
4. The property is a 1 bedroom ground floor flat in a block of 4 properties. There is one flat above the property, no adjoining property to the left and one adjoining house to the right of the property. There is a metal staircase adjacent to the exterior of the hallway.
5. The resident contacted the landlord on several occasions during January 2022 to report damp and mould. On 22 October the resident emailed the landlord to report that the problem was ongoing. She also highlighted a number of non-damp and mould related repairs, including a missing kitchen cupboard and garden gate. In January 2023 the resident contacted the landlord to report a ticking noise which was occurring "every 10 minutes" causing her distress. On 1 August 2023 the resident told this Service that she had made a request for

disabled adaptations to her bathroom which the landlord had declined to carry out.

6. During November and December 2022 the landlord was put on notice that the resident had instructed solicitors regarding a disrepair claim. This investigation has not seen any evidence that a claim was made to the court. Furthermore, in an email to this Service on 25 April 2024 the landlord confirmed that proceedings in the matter had not been issued.
7. The landlord raised a stage 1 complaint on 12 December 2022. This was in response to an email it received from the resident's MP the day before, on 11 December, and to an email from the resident on 12 December. In her email, the resident said that following a cold weekend the mould had turned black. She attached a photo of the socket for her electric cooker which had droplets around it. She said her wall was "soaking" that morning.
8. The landlord provided its stage 1 complaint response on 23 December 2022 in which it confirmed that it had received communication from her solicitor regarding her disrepair claim. It had subsequently agreed to carry out a joint survey which took place on 14 December. It said a report would be compiled and both parties would then agree on what works would be undertaken. It confirmed that its mould specialist had visited the property and provided a report. It intended to approve works in the new year. Finally, it confirmed that following a recent inspection it had agreed to carry out electrical works to change the bathroom fan and install a Passive Input Ventilation (PIV) system.
9. The resident emailed her MP on 10 January 2023 who relayed her ongoing complaint to the landlord on her behalf on 16 January. The resident was dissatisfied that repairs had been delayed for 2 years. Furthermore, she felt the landlord had not acknowledged her phone calls or emails which had caused her to contact mental health services for help. There were so many operatives coming and going to the property, she felt a decant would be beneficial. She reported that her were possessions were "ruined" and her mental health was in a "terrible state." She said she had been without a cooker for 5 days in the run up to Christmas because of the damp around the socket which made it spark.
10. The landlord issued its stage 2 complaint response on 6 February 2022. It said it had received the report from its mould contractor and was aiming to start works on 20 February. It confirmed that works to install additional and new ventilation fans were complete. However, it was aware of the resident's concerns regarding installation which it said it would rectify. Works to box in pipes and install ducting were to be carried out 8 February. Once the work was complete it would engage a contractor to carry out the remaining works.

11. The resident contacted this Service on 29 October 2022 to report that issues with damp and mould was ongoing. She also reported that she was dissatisfied with the landlord's repairs service and wanted the landlord to complete all outstanding works.

Assessment and findings

Jurisdiction

12. What we can and cannot consider is called the Ombudsman's jurisdiction. This is governed by the Housing Ombudsman Scheme. When a complaint is brought to the Ombudsman, we must consider all the circumstances of the case as there are sometimes reasons why a complaint, or part of a complaint, will not be investigated.
13. In accordance with paragraph 42(a) of the Housing Ombudsman Scheme, the Ombudsman may not consider complaints that "are made prior to having exhausted a member's complaints procedure, unless there is evidence of a complaint-handling failure and the Ombudsman is satisfied that the member has not taken action within a reasonable timescale".
14. After carefully considering all the evidence, the resident's complaint concerning the landlord's response to her request for adaptations sits outside of the Ombudsman's jurisdiction.
15. During her correspondence with this Service on 1 August and 16 November 2023 the resident said she was struggling to use her toilet and shower. She said she had contacted "numerous departments" to request to have a shower installed and had submitted medical evidence. However, the landlord had declined her request.
16. There is no evidence that the resident raised the issue as part of her formal complaint and the landlord has not provided a response on this point. Therefore, this investigation cannot assess whether its response was reasonable. The resident may wish to make a fresh complaint to the landlord if she remains dissatisfied.

Landlord's obligations, policies & procedures

17. The landlord must ensure that homes it provides meet the Decent Homes Standard. This was updated in 2006 to take account of the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) which lists damp and mould as a potential hazard. According to the Standard, for a home to be considered 'decent' it must: be in a reasonable state of repair.

18. The Homes (Fitness for Habitation) Act 2018 ('The Homes Act 2018') requires the landlord to ensure that the property is fit for human habitation. Section 10(1) of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1985, as amended by the Homes Act, states that in determining whether a property is unfit for habitation, regard should be given to whether the property is so far defective in matters including repair, freedom from damp and ventilation, that it is not reasonably suitable for occupation in that condition.
19. The landlord's repairs and maintenance policy sets out its response times as follows:
 - a. Emergency repairs need to be carried out to avoid serious danger to the health and safety of the occupants or where a failure to carry out the repair could cause extensive damage to buildings and property - 2 hours.
 - b. Routine repairs will be assessed and prioritised and typically do not pose an immediate risk to health and safety and/or imminent danger to the structure - 20 working days
20. The landlord's complaints and enquiries standard (complaints policy) defines a complaint as "any expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions, or lack of action, by the Housing Service, its own staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting an individual resident or group of residents and that requires a response."
21. It also says that it will log and acknowledge all complaints within 5 working days. It will provide a response to stage 1 complaints within 10 working days and to stage 2 complaints within 20 working days.

Scope of the investigation

22. While this service is an alternative to the courts, it is unable to establish legal liability or whether a landlord's actions or lack of action have had a detrimental impact on a resident's health. Nor can it calculate or award damages. The Ombudsman is therefore unable to consider the personal injury aspects of the resident's complaint. These matters are better suited to consideration by a court or via a personal injury claim. However, this investigation has taken into account the resident's vulnerabilities when considering her circumstances.
23. This investigation notes that the resident said she began reporting issues with damp and mould in early 2020. However, this investigation has primarily focussed on the landlord's handling of the resident's recent reports from January 2022 onwards that were considered during the landlord's recent complaint responses. This is because residents are expected to raise complaints with their landlords in a timely manner so that the landlord has a reasonable opportunity to consider the issues whilst they are still 'live,' and

while the evidence is available to reach an informed conclusion on the events that occurred.

24. During her complaint the resident raised concerns about a number of repairs raised as a result of damp and mould. Due to the volume of repairs these have been assessed together as remedial works as part of the landlord's response to damp and mould. Key issues have been highlighted where it was appropriate to do so as part of the assessment.
25. During the resident's communication with this Service on 1 August and 8 October 2023 the resident raised a number of issues including that the floor in the property was uneven, the external courtyard full of rubbish and weeds and that the internal doors were not fire doors. There is no evidence that the resident raised the issues as part of her formal complaint therefore, the landlord has not been given the opportunity to provide a formal response. There is no evidence that these complaints have exhausted the landlord's internal complaints process and therefore, they have not been assessed by this investigation.
26. During a telephone call with this Service on 17 May 2024 the resident said that she had made a formal complaint to the landlord about its response to reports of antisocial behaviour (ASB) and it provided a stage 1 response. This investigation has not seen a copy of the stage 1 response and this investigation has not been provided with any evidence in relation to ASB. Furthermore, this investigation cannot be certain that the complaint has exhausted the landlord's internal complaints process. Therefore, it has not been assessed by this investigation.
27. This is consistent with paragraph 42 (a) of the Housing Ombudsman's Scheme which says the Ombudsman may not consider complaints which, in the Ombudsman's opinion, are made prior to having exhausted a member's complaints procedure, unless there is evidence of a complaint-handling failure and the Ombudsman is satisfied that the member has not taken action within a reasonable timescale

Damp and mould

28. The Ombudsman's spotlight report on damp and mould says that residents living in homes with damp and mould may be more likely to have respiratory problems such as asthma. It notes there are also broader impacts on mental health which highlights the urgency for change and says landlords should adopt a zero-tolerance approach to damp and mould.
29. A medical professional emailed the landlord on the resident's behalf on 25 January 2022. They said that the resident suffered from mental health issues

and was under the care of the mental health team. They said the resident was feeling suicidal due to the condition of the property and felt “asthma symptoms frequently.” They also said the resident experienced joint pain due to the damp. The resident followed with her own email on 28 January saying her property was “full of damp” and the landlord was “pushing her to the brink.” In a further email of 31 January the resident said she was experiencing flare ups with her asthma and asked the landlord to “help me out of a bad situation.”

30. There is no evidence that the landlord provided any form of response to the resident’s emails. Given the issues raised and the impact described this was insensitive and unreasonable, causing distress and frustration. Furthermore, it is evidence that the landlord failed to have regard to its duties under the Equality Act 2010, Human Rights Act 1998 and the decent Homes Standard and The Homes (Fitness for Habitation) Act 2018.
31. Due to the lack of response the resident was caused further inconvenience, time and trouble when she sought the assistance of another medical professional. A second medical letter, this time from her mental health worker, was submitted on 19 October 2022. It described that there was damp in every room which was impacting on the resident’s physical and mental health. Again, the landlord failed to respond which was inappropriate. This compounded the resident’s distress and further eroded the landlord/resident relationship. The resident was caused inconvenience, time and trouble when she emailed the landlord herself on 22 October, 16 and 20 November.
32. Due to the lack of response the resident sought legal assistance regarding a disrepair claim. The landlord tried to visit the property to carry out an inspection on 5 December 2022 but the resident declined to give access. She said this was because her solicitor had advised her not to.
33. It emailed the resident on 9 December 2022 to apologise for the number of outstanding repairs and said it was liaising with her solicitor to arrange to carry out a joint survey. It said it had also instructed its own contractor to carry out a mould survey as this had been reported to the landlord previously.
34. The resident emailed the landlord on 12 December 2022 to highlight ongoing issues with damp and mould in her property. The landlord replied on the same day to say that housing disrepair protocols were causing some delays in getting the survey carried out but it was confident collectively it would resolve the issues.
35. While this was a positive step it came late in the process. The landlord failed to acknowledge the significant delay in responding to the resident’s request for repairs and the impact this had on her physical and mental health. There is no evidence that it carried out a risk assessment taking into account its duties

under the Equality Act 2010 or that it considered what support it might offer while it assessed the situation. This was a failure.

36. The joint survey was carried out on 14 December 2022 and a 'scott schedule' produced accordingly. It set out works to be carried out including a misaligned gutter section on the rear elevation and damage to the concrete stair to the exterior of the downstairs hallway. The survey concluded that it was safe for the resident to remain in occupation while the recommended works were undertaken. It said, however, that it was clear the resident would "suffer some disruption."
37. Given what the landlord knew about the resident's vulnerabilities and its duties under the Equality Act 2010 it would have been appropriate for the landlord to have considered this advice in relation to her own individual circumstances. This is because some residents' circumstances mean that they are more affected by landlords' actions or inactions than others. In her email to her MP on 10 January 2023 the resident said she would rather be decanted during the works. There is no evidence that the landlord discussed the works with the resident and how it was best placed to support her which was a failure.
38. In her email to the landlord of 23 December 2022 the resident said her mattress was ruined and she was sleeping in the lounge. She said the situation was driving her "insane."
39. During January 2023 the landlord tried to arrange access to begin works to install fans in the property. On 17 January the resident emailed the landlord to confirm that her solicitor had advised her to stop communicating with it. Her solicitor had advised it should liaise directly with them. However, on 19 January the resident emailed the landlord to say she had decided not to follow the solicitor's advice and was prepared to give access for the repairs.
40. The landlord responded on 19 January 2023 and appropriately provided an update considering the resident's recent email. It confirmed it was able to proceed with works to install additional ventilation and for its specialist to carry out the mould clean. In an internal email dated 27 January the landlord confirmed that the PIV unit and fans had been installed.
41. The landlord provided a further update in its stage 2 complaint response of 6 February 2023 to say an appointment had been made for its mould cleaning specialist for 20 February. It said it was aware that the resident had raised concerns about installation of the PIV and fans which it intended to rectify.
42. On 21 February 2023 the resident emailed the landlord to raise concerns about the work it had carried out. She said the newly fitted unit was blowing cold air into the property. In an internal email dated 22 February the landlord said it

would inspect the property to do a “full” list of repairs. This was an appropriate step, ensuring that both the resident and landlord were satisfied that works carried out to date were acceptable, and that any outstanding works were remedied as soon as possible.

43. The property inspection took place on 3 March 2023. On 17 March the landlord emailed the resident to provide an update. It said it had authorised remedial works by its specialist contractor. It said it was aware the resident was in communication with them but had not yet agreed a start date and asked her to do so as soon as possible. Works were to include removal of the kitchen units and treatment of any mould found on the external wall before refixing the units. It said it would make good any damage caused by installation of the PIV ducting in the bathroom.
44. The landlord’s internal email of 14 March 2024 said that works carried out during 3 to 11 April 2023 included a mould treatment behind the kitchen cupboards, new vent covers fitted in the lounge and hallway, mould treatment to the hallway cupboard and around the front door. Groundwork was carried out to the front of the property to dig a trench filled with gravel. Guttering to the front and rear of the property was fixed.
45. The email also says that following a further property inspection on 13 February 2024 a radiator had been added to the hallway. A further works order was raised to carry out a mould treatment in the bedroom and hallway and to all the external bedroom walls. This is evidence that the previous attempts to eradicate damp and mould had failed and that the problem was ongoing.

Events post internal complaints process

46. During a call with this Service on 16 November 2023 the resident said that the damp and mould had returned. She was not satisfied that the landlord had addressed the route cause of the problem hence it kept returning. She was also dissatisfied that certain works remained outstanding, including the external concrete stairs. She was also dissatisfied that the newly installed fans were not working correctly.
47. The landlord carried out a further property survey on 13 February 2024 which concluded that the external staircase was not causing water ingress into the property and the guttering system was not defective. The fans were found to be in good working order and were effective if left switched on by the resident. It noted there was evidence of mould in the hallway which was “likely caused by condensation due to the high humidity within the property.” It noted there was no radiator in the hallway and that it would be replaced.

48. It observed some mould around the windows in the living room, kitchen and bedroom which it said was caused by condensation. At the time of the survey the newly installed humidistat fan in the kitchen had been turned off at the wall. It raised orders to replace a number of vents in the property. There is evidence that the landlord had a conversation with the resident about how she may be able to reduce condensation within the property which was appropriate.
49. In its response to this Service on 9 April 2024 the landlord said it did not undertake an assessment against the Ombudsman's damp and mould recommendations for landlords. It said that "although it does note some mould and or damp, it was not considered excessive and in fact some of it could be cleaned off by the tenant and is noted as such, we did undertake a variety of work throughout and we used a mould eradication paint to good effect, to date the mould is in abeyance any mould found now is as a result of poor use of the building." It cited behaviour such as the following taping over air vents, using a tumble dryer in the lounge and turning off extractor fans and the PIV unit. The landlord's position is concerning and does not reflect a zero tolerance approach to damp and mould.
50. The spotlight report on damp and mould highlights the importance of effective communication in relation to customised advice to residents about how best to manage the environment within their home to help prevent damp and mould occurring. This investigation does not consider the landlord went far enough to try to engage meaningfully with the resident about the outcomes of the survey, works it undertook and how those works and steps taken by the resident could collectively reduce the impact of condensation, damp and mould within her home.
51. The Ombudsman's dispute resolution principles are to be fair, learn from outcomes and put things right. The landlord was not fair to the resident because it failed to respond to the resident's reports of damp and mould for 11 months, only taking action to put things right when she instructed solicitors to make a disrepair claim. When it did respond, it failed to acknowledge the serious detriment caused to the resident's mental and physical health. It failed to have due regard to its duties under the Equality Act 2010 and Human Rights Act 1998. It is not clear whether all the works have been carried out satisfactorily which is due in part to ineffective communication with the resident.
52. It also failed to engage in meaningful dialogue with the resident about how it could work with her to reduce the impact of condensation, damp and mould in the property. The landlord has not identified any learning from the complaint in terms of what went wrong, why and what it would do differently. While it tried to put things right by carrying out remedial works it failed to consider compensating the resident for distress and inconvenience. It has failed to

respond to and consider compensation for damage caused to her items, including her mattress.

53. For these reasons the landlord's failures amount to severe maladministration. This is because there have been serious failings which had a significant physical and emotional impact on the resident over a significant period.
54. During 2023/24 the rent was £81.10 per week. The Ombudsman considers it appropriate to require the landlord to provide financial redress which recognises the impact of the damp and mould on her enjoyment of her home. The period considered for this calculation is 25 January 2022 to 5 December, which is 45 weeks (rounded up).
55. In the circumstances, the Ombudsman considers it reasonable to require the landlord to pay the resident £364.95 compensation. This figure has been calculated at a 10% amenity loss calculation for the property $£8.11 \times 45 = £364.95$.
56. While the Ombudsman acknowledges that this is not a precise calculation, this is considered to be a fair and reasonable amount of compensation taking all of the circumstances into account.
57. This investigation also considers that the landlord's failings caused additional distress and inconvenience to the resident. The Ombudsman's remedies guidance sets out that compensation in the range of £600 to £1000 should be awarded where there was a failure which had a significant impact on the resident. Compensation may be higher where there was a severe long-term impact. Therefore, in line with the guidance the landlord has been ordered to pay the resident £1200 which is in line with the Ombudsman's remedies guidance where there was severe long term impact.

Non-damp and mould repairs

58. On 12 December 2022 the resident emailed the landlord and provided photographic evidence of water droplets around the electrical socket for her cooker. The landlord offered to visit that same day and asked the resident to provide access. The landlord assessed the risk and acted appropriately in accordance with its repairs and maintenance policy.
59. On 19 October 2022 a mental health professional wrote to the landlord on the resident's behalf. She said that the garden gate and fence panel repairs were outstanding. There is no evidence that the landlord responded which was unreasonable. This caused inconvenience, time and trouble to the resident who completed another online report form on 21 February 2023 to follow up. She said she needed a gate to stop people walking onto her property from the street

and “ideally a new fence.” There is no evidence that the landlord replied which was a further failure.

60. The landlord’s internal email of 14 March 2024 confirms that a new gate was fitted during works which took place 3 to 11 April 2023. The landlord did not comply with its repairs policy to complete non urgent repairs within 20 working days.
61. On 8 August 2022 the landlord wrote to the resident to confirm that it had booked an appointment for a surveyor to attend her home on 18 August as part of its composite front door replacement programme. On 22 October the resident completed an online report form and requested an update.
62. There is no evidence that the landlord provided a response before its update of 12 December 2022 in which it said the door was being manufactured. It said the target delivery date was 9 January 2023 after which it would arrange to fit it. The landlord did not communicate effectively with the resident around timescales. It failed to provide any further updates between the survey of 18 August and the update of 12 December, 4 months later, even after the resident chased on 22 October.
63. The resident was provided with a further update on 10 January 2023, via her MP, that the door was expected to be with the contractor the following week. On 13 January the resident emailed the landlord to ask to defer installation of the front door until the stairs and plastering around the front door had been carried out.
64. On 7 February 2023 the resident emailed the landlord to try to expedite matters as her front door was “hanging off.” The resident sent a further email on 21 February to say that her door handle was broken and it was difficult to get to get the key in the lock. She acknowledged that she had requested the new door be delayed while the damp was being remedied. However, she said if all the landlord was going to do was paint over it then she wanted it fitted. The landlord had initially said it would be 9 January and it was now 21 February.
65. Given that the resident requested to delay the installation of the new door it was not unreasonable that the landlord had not adhered to the original response target. However, there is no evidence that the landlord provided a response to the resident’s email which was inappropriate. The landlord’s internal email of 14 March 2024 says that a new front door was fitted during the works carried out between 3 and 11 April 2023.
66. In her online report form of 22 October 2022 the resident asked for an update on when the cupboard in her kitchen would be replaced. There is no evidence that the landlord responded which was unreasonable. This was because the

resident was caused inconvenience, time and trouble when she completed another online report form on 21 February 2023 by way of follow up. She said the cupboard was removed in 2021 due to mice and was never replaced.

67. In its email to the resident of 17 March 2023 the landlord said it would resolve the issue as part of its package of works to take place between 3 and 6 April. In her email to this Service on 1 August the resident said that the kitchen cupboard had not been replaced. There are no repair records relating to the kitchen unit which is a record keeping failure. Furthermore, it means there is no independent evidence on which this investigation can rely to make a determination on this point. This has been reflected in the orders made.
68. On 22 October 2022 the resident completed the landlord's online report form in which she said the toilet was leaking and there was water on the floor from condensation caused by the toilet being positioned "less than 30cm away from the radiator." There is no evidence that the landlord provided a response to the resident which was unreasonable. This caused inconvenience, time and trouble to the resident when she raised the issue again in her email to the landlord on 21 February 2023.
69. In an email to the resident dated 17 March 2023 the landlord said it would replace the porcelain cistern with a plastic one which would help reduce condensation. The landlord did not carry out works until 3 to 11 April 2023, 6 months after the issue was first reported. This was inappropriate because it did not comply with its repairs policy.
70. Also on 22 October 2022 the resident asked for an update on when her meter cupboard would be repaired. There is no evidence that the landlord responded, causing inconvenience, time and trouble to the resident because she had to chase during her email of 12 December. There is no evidence that the landlord responded to this further enquiry which compounded the resident's frustration.
71. In an email to the resident of 17 March 2023 the landlord said that it would repair any issues with or around the meter cupboards. However, in an online report form submitted to this Service on 18 October 2023 the resident said that works to the meter cupboard were outstanding.
72. The landlord failed to communicate effectively with the resident, failing to respond to the resident regarding several different repairs. This suggested it did not take her issues seriously which eroded the landlord/resident relationship further and caused distress. Except for its response to the electrical socket it did not carry out the repairs within the timescales set out in its complaints policy. There were also record keeping failures because information was missing from its repair logs.

73. These failures amount to maladministration because they adversely affected the resident. Furthermore the landlord did not acknowledge its failings or demonstrate learning from the complaint. It has completed some of the repairs in an attempt to restore the resident to the position she would have been in were it not for its failure. However, it has failed to consider redress for the distress, inconvenience, time and trouble caused.
74. The landlord has been ordered to pay the resident £400 which is in line with the Ombudsman's remedies guidance where there was no permanent impact. This reflects the number of repeat failures and the overall lack of an effective repairs service provided to the resident.

Ticking noise

75. The landlord's records show that the resident emailed on 24 March 2022 to report that she was hearing a "ticking in her walls all the time, every 10 minutes." She said she was disabled because of mental health issues and the noise was detrimental to her. There is no evidence that the landlord responded which was inappropriate, particularly given the evidence of the impact it was having on the resident. Furthermore, the resident was caused inconvenience, time and trouble when she emailed the landlord again on 1 December 2022. She said she was hearing a constant ticking in the walls which was "driving me nuts."
76. On 14 December 2022 the landlord inspected the property as part of its investigation into the ticking noise. It said it was at the property for 30 minutes but could not hear the noise and was unable to find the source of any issue. There is no evidence that the landlord provided an update to the resident which was inappropriate. This is because it would have reassured the resident it was taking proactive steps to investigate her complaint and helped manage her expectations.
77. The resident emailed the landlord on 13 January 2023 to report that a ticking noise started shortly after it left following its visit to the property. She said it was occurring every 10 minutes or so and was driving her "insane." She felt the neighbour was doing something on purpose to cause the noise. She said the situation had escalated to the point where she had shouted at them.
78. The landlord failed to respond to the email which was inappropriate. It is noted that the resident also said the housing team had made an appointment to visit her to discuss the incident. However, a file note of the visit has not been provided for this investigation which is a record keeping failure. This is because it is unclear exactly what was discussed and/or agreed in relation to the noise itself.

79. The resident was caused time and trouble when she emailed the landlord again on 18 January 2023. In her email she said the problem, combined with the other issues, “was all too much.” The landlord replied on 19 January to confirm it was trying to resolve the noise but that it needed to access to the adjoining property as part of its investigation. Its response lacked empathy because it failed to respond to the impact on the resident’s mental health. Furthermore, there is no evidence that it considered how it could best support her while it tried to resolve the issue which was inappropriate.
80. There is no evidence that the landlord provided any further updates to the resident which was inappropriate, particularly given the detrimental impact caused to her and the need to proactively manage her expectations by providing regular updates.
81. The landlord’s stage 2 complaint response of 6 February 2023 confirmed that its housing and repairs teams would work together to identify the noise which it believed was located within a neighbouring property. It said that during its visit to her to discuss the incident with her neighbours they had agreed that she would continue to engage with support she was receiving from external providers. This investigation has not seen any evidence, such as a file note, to confirm what the support entailed and/or how the landlord could work jointly with providers to ensure the resident’s needs were being met.
82. In her email to the landlord of 7 February 2023 the resident said she had been kept awake by the noise since 3.00a.m. She told the landlord it needed to be “sorted out.” The landlord reiterated the content of its email to the resident of 19 January. It is concerning that it was still trying to gain access to inspect the property. There is no evidence to explain what steps it had taken and/or why it was unable to gain access which is a record keeping failure.
83. Given the impact described by the resident, and the landlord’s duties under the Equality Act 2010, it would have been appropriate for the landlord to take all reasonable steps to gain access. There is no evidence that it considered a more formal approach to its request for access at this stage. This would have been appropriate to expedite its investigation and bring relief to the resident.
84. On 9 February 2023 the resident emailed the landlord to say that she had taken an overdose the previous night when she heard the noise, adding that she “couldn’t take any more.” She said she would therefore not be able to make a repairs appointment booked for that day.
85. The landlord’s response was silent on the matter of the overdose which was insensitive and inappropriate. It asked for access to remedy the situation as there were a number of jobs to complete and a plan to complete them. It

acknowledged the lengthy delays but advised not allowing access would not allow them to improve the situation.

86. The resident replied to say she could not let anyone in because she was in hospital and asked the landlord to rearrange the appointment. The landlord did then say it was “sorry to hear that” and confirmed it would rearrange the visit accordingly. It also said it had visited the neighbour’s property the previous day regarding the ticking noise but could not gain access.
87. There is no evidence that the landlord followed up with the resident to check on her welfare and/or considered how it might best proceed given her vulnerabilities. There is also no evidence that the landlord provided any further updates until over a month later when it emailed the resident on 17 March 2023. This was particularly inappropriate given the resident’s vulnerability.
88. In its email to the resident of 17 March 2023 the landlord said that it had visited the property on 2 occasions and had not witnessed the ticking noise. However, having viewed videos taken by the resident it believed it was caused by noise transfer from the heating pipes in the adjoining property. It said it had tried to gain access to the neighbour’s property “several times” and would “keep trying.” It said it intended to send a formal access letter to ensure access was given and would update the resident accordingly. While this was a positive step it should have happened earlier in the process. This is because it was a year after the resident first reported the issue and 2 months after she confirmed the noise was ongoing and having a serious impact on her mental health.
89. In its email to this Service on 2 May 2023 the landlord said it was investigating the ‘ticking’ noise. It confirmed it had accessed the neighbouring property and identified an issue related to the expansion of pipework. It said that “whilst the solution is not obvious we are looking at all ways to resolve this.” There is no evidence as to what steps the landlord took following its discovery which is a failure.
90. Furthermore, in its response to this Service of 9 April 2024 the landlord said that an inspection of the neighbouring property took place on 17 November 2023. It ran the boiler on service mode for 30 minutes but its contractor could not hear a ticking. He advised the resident that he unfortunately did not hear a ticking noise and “therefore was unable to fix or do anything about this at the time.” It is concerning that 7 months after it emailed this Service to confirm it had discovered the source of the noise, it still had not resolved the issue and in fact had to carry out a further inspection.
91. There is no evidence that the landlord carried out a thorough investigation of the noise complaint. For example, there is no evidence that it provided the resident with diary sheets or considered offering her the use of recording

equipment, such as the noise app. Methods such as these would have been appropriate to help the landlord further establish the frequency and time of the noise, as well as identifying any emerging patterns.

92. There is also no evidence that the landlord considered the risk posed to the resident by the noise which was increased by her worsening mental health. It failed to have regard to its duties under the Equality Act 2010 and Human Rights Act 1998 which was a failure. There is no evidence that it sought to support her by working with the mental health practitioners that were already engaged with her. The landlord failed to give sufficient regard to the potential severity of the impact on the resident, even after she was admitted to hospital following an overdose. Had it done so it may have recognised the importance of regular, clear communication and the need to gain access to the neighbouring property as soon as reasonably possible.
93. This investigation was hampered by the poor quality of the landlord's records that were provided to this Service. In conducting its investigations, we rely on 'live' documentary evidence from the time of the complaint to ascertain what events took place and reach conclusions on whether the landlord's actions were reasonable in all the circumstances of the case.
94. This investigation has identified the following failures:
 - a. The landlord failed to respond to the resident's initial report of March 2022 and did not act until she chased again in December.
 - b. The landlord failed to take timely action to gain entry to the neighbouring property for the purposes of carrying out an inspection.
 - c. Its communication was not effective and was sometimes insensitive.
 - d. It failed to have regard to its duties under the Equality Act 2010 and Human Rights Act 1998.
 - e. There were record keeping failures.
95. These failures amount to severe maladministration because there were serious failings by the landlord which had a seriously detrimental impact on the resident over a prolonged period. Its response exacerbated the situation and further undermined the landlord/tenant relationship. The landlord is ordered to pay the resident £1000 which is consistent with the Ombudsman's remedies guidance where there was a severe long term impact.

Complaint handling

96. The evidence provided by the landlord for this investigation shows that it logged the following complaints for the resident:

- a. 24 March 2022 – about damp and mould and repairs, resolved on 17 June.
 - b. 13 June 2022 – about damp and mould and repairs, resolved on 22 December.
 - c. 1 December 2022 – about damp and mould, resolved on 20 December.
 - d. 12 December 2022 - about damp and mould, resolved on 23 December.
 - e. 27 November 2023 – about damp and mould and the ticking noise, resolved on 14 December.
 - f. 30 November 2023 - about damp and mould and repairs, resolved 14 December.
97. The Housing Ombudsman’s Complaint Handling Code states that a full record must be kept of the complaint, including the original complaint and all correspondence with the resident (...). For the purposes of this investigation the landlord has provided a stage 1 response dated 23 December 2022 and a stage 2 response dated 6 February 2023. It has not responded to a request to provide further information on the remaining complaint responses for the purposes of this investigation which was inappropriate.
98. The Ombudsman’s investigation was hampered by the lack of records provided by the landlord to this Service. In conducting our investigations, we rely on ‘live’ documentary evidence from the time of the complaint to ascertain what events took place and reach conclusions on whether the landlord’s actions were reasonable in all the circumstances of the case. This was a record keeping failure which impacted on the landlord’s ability to provide an effective complaints service to the resident.
99. The landlord raised a stage 1 complaint on 12 December 2022 however, considering the landlord’s definition of ‘what is a complaint’ in its complaints policy it should have raised it earlier in the process.
100. The resident completed an online report on 22 October 2022 where she clearly expressed her dissatisfaction on the landlord’s response on a number of issues. The landlord failed to provide a response until the resident contacted her MP who in turn contacted the landlord on 11 December.
101. It was unreasonable that it took the landlord over a month to acknowledge and raise the resident’s complaint which far exceeded its target of 5 working days. This delayed the resident’s ability to resolve her complaint through the internal complaints process. Furthermore, it undermined the landlord/tenant relationship from the outset and caused distress and inconvenience to the resident.

102. The Code says that where a resident raises additional complaints during the investigation, and the stage one response has been issued, the complaint should be logged as a new complaint.
103. The resident raised the issue of the 'ticking' noise on 13 January 2023, after the stage 1 complaint response was issued. The landlord failed to raise a new complaint and provided a response as part of its stage 2 response of 6 February. This was inappropriate because the resident did not benefit from a 2 stage internal complaints process to resolve her complaint.
104. The landlord raised a stage 2 complaint on 16 January 2023 following further contact from the MP. However, it is noted that the letter refers to the complaint dated 12 December. This appears to be a typographical error as this was also the date of the complaint the landlord responded to at stage 1. The landlord should take care to ensure that its complaint responses are accurate.
105. The landlord failed to keep adequate records of its complaints process, it delayed raising a stage 1 complaint and failed to raise a separate stage 1 complaint for the ticking noise. These failures amount to maladministration because there were failures which adversely affected the resident and it did not appropriately acknowledge or put right. The landlord has been ordered to pay the resident £150 which is consistent with the Ombudsman's remedies guidance where there was no permanent impact.

Determination (decision)

106. In accordance with paragraph 52 of the Housing Ombudsman Scheme there was severe maladministration in the landlord's response to the resident's reports of damp and mould.
107. In accordance with paragraph 52 of the Housing Ombudsman Scheme there was severe maladministration in the landlord's response to the resident's reports of a ticking noise.
108. In accordance with paragraph 52 of the Housing Ombudsman Scheme there was maladministration in the landlord's response to the resident's request for non-damp and mould repairs.
109. In accordance with paragraph 52 of the Housing Ombudsman Scheme there was maladministration in the landlord's complaint handling.
110. In accordance with paragraph 42 (a) of the Housing Ombudsman Scheme the resident's complaint about the landlord's response to her request for disabled adaptations is outside of the Ombudsman's jurisdiction.

Orders

111. Within 4 weeks of the date of the determination the landlord is ordered to:

- a. Pay the resident £3114.95 compensation, comprised of:
 - i. £364.95 for the impact of its response to the resident's reports of damp and mould on her enjoyment of her home.
 - ii. £1200 for the distress, inconvenience, time and trouble caused by the landlord's failures in its response to the resident's reports of damp and mould.
 - iii. £400 for the distress, inconvenience, time and trouble caused by the landlord's failures in its response to the resident's request for non-damp and mould related repairs.
 - iv. £1000 for the distress, inconvenience, time and trouble caused by the landlord's response to the resident's reports of a ticking noise.
 - v. £150 for the distress caused by the landlord's complaint handling failures.
- b. Arrange for the Chief Executive to apologise for the failings in the case. The resident should be given the option to receive her apology in person, over the phone or by letter. If the resident opts for a verbal apology the landlord should write to the resident to confirm the outcome of their discussion. A copy should be provided to the Ombudsman, also within 4 weeks.
- c. Offer to visit the resident to:
 - i. Discuss the outcomes of the survey reports with her.
 - ii. Satisfy itself that all repairs have been carried out to an acceptable standard.
 - iii. Agree an action plan for any outstanding works, including what will be done, when and by whom.
 - iv. Discuss how it might support and work with her to reduce condensation, damp and mould.
 - v. Discuss her request for compensation for items damaged by damp and mould, including her mattress. It should then review the evidence and write to the resident to set out its decision and reasons in line with its policies and procedures.

A detailed summary of the visit, including any action plans, should be provided to the resident in writing. A copy should be provided to the Ombudsman, also within 4 weeks.

112. In accordance with paragraph 54 (g) of the Housing Ombudsman Scheme, the landlord is ordered to carry out a senior management review of the case to identify what went wrong and what it would do differently. This should be presented to the senior leadership team and the Ombudsman within 8 weeks. It should include assessment against the spotlight reports, unless the landlord can demonstrate it has done these within the last 12 months, on:
- a. Damp and mould.
 - b. Noise complaints.
 - c. Attitudes, respect and rights.
 - d. Knowledge Information Management (KIM).
113. As part of the review the landlord should also consider developing a policy and procedure on compensation and noise complaints.
114. Within 8 weeks of the date of the determination the landlord is ordered to arrange training for relevant staff to ensure that they are equipped to respond to queries from vulnerable residents. This should include having difficult and delicate conversations with residents about matters such as mental health. The date and content of the training should be provided to the Ombudsman, also within 8 weeks.
115. Within 12 weeks of the date of the determination the landlord is ordered to arrange for relevant staff involved in this case to complete the learning modules on the Ombudsman's Landlord Learning Hub for noise complaints, KIM and attitudes, respect and rights. Confirmation that training has been completed should be provided to the Ombudsman, also within 12 weeks.

This page is intentionally left blank

Executive Committee14th January 2025**FINAL COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME 2025/2026**

Relevant Portfolio Holder	Cllr Ian Woodall – Executive Member for Finance
Portfolio Holder Consulted	Yes
Relevant Assistant Director	Debra Goodall
Report Author David Riley	Job Title: Financial Support Manager Contact email: david.riley@bromsgroveandredditch.gov.uk Contact Tel: 01527 548 418
Wards Affected	All
Ward Councillor(s) consulted	N/A
Relevant Council Priority	An effective and sustainable Council
Non-Key Decision	
If you have any questions about this report, please contact the report author in advance of the meeting.	

1. RECOMMENDATIONS**The Executive Committee RECOMMEND that:-**

- 1) The council tax reduction scheme is retained for 2025-26 tax year, subject to uprating of income bands by 1.7% in-line with increases to national benefits as set out in the table at appendix a.**

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The council is required by section 13A(2) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 (LGFA '92) to make a council tax reduction (CTR) scheme specifying the reductions in council tax that will be provided to people who are in financial need, or to classes of people who are in general in financial need.
- 2.2 When a scheme has been made the council must, for each tax year, consider whether to revise or replace its scheme. If the council intends to revise or replace the scheme, then there is a requirement to undertake a formal consultation before making a new scheme.
- 2.3 The council introduced a new income banded scheme for working age applicants with effect from 1st April 2021. The rationale for the new scheme was to ensure that it was future proofed, and it reduced the administrative burden placed on the council and more closely integrated with universal credit.

Executive Committee14th January 2025

- 2.4 In the years from 2022 onwards the council has amended the scheme to adjust the level of support in-line with available funding available; to amend income bands and tapers to adjust for the impact of inflation; and to aid administration by simplifying elements of the scheme.
- 2.5 The existing scheme includes a provision for the uprating of income bands by an inflation factor decided by the council. The scheme will usually be uprated by an inflation factor in-line with the increases to national welfare benefits.
- 2.6 The benefit and pension rates for 2026 are increasing 1.7% and it is recommended that the income bands within the council's scheme are adjusted by this amount.

3. OPERATIONAL ISSUES

- 3.1 Retaining the existing scheme and uprating the income bands will have no additional operational implications.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 Changes to the income bands will impact the amount of council tax reduction provided to claimants. The change may result in an increase in the total cost of council tax reduction.
- 4.2 The intention of uprating to income bands is to protect claimants from the impact of inflation and to ensure that inflationary increases to universal credit or wages do not remove their eligibility for CTR.
- 4.3 Uprating is essential to ensure that support is provided to residents in financial need, and that ordinary increases in national benefits and wages do not remove eligibility for support.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The council is required by paragraph 5 of Schedule 1A to the LGFA '92 to consider whether to revise or replace its CTR scheme. Where a council makes a revision or replacement there is a requirement to carry out a formal consultation which consists of three steps:
- a) consultation with major precepting authorities; and
 - b) publication of a draft scheme; and
 - c) consultation with persons who are likely to have an interest in the operation of the scheme.
- 5.2 Where a revised scheme reduces or removes a reduction the new scheme must include such transitional provision as the council sees fit.

Executive Committee14th January 2025

- 5.3 The existing scheme includes a provision to uprate income bands by the appropriate level of inflation in each tax year; therefore, changes that increase the income bands in each tax year can be carried out without consultation.
- 5.4 Changes to the scheme which reduce the income bands are not provided for within the existing scheme. Any changes that reduce the % discount provided under the scheme would constitute a revision to the scheme and would require full consultation and approval of full council.

6. OTHER - IMPLICATIONS**Relevant Council Priority**

- 6.1 The council tax reduction scheme supports residents in financial need and it is a requirement that the design of the scheme incentivises work.
- 6.2 The scheme supports the strategic purpose of Aspiration, Work and Financial Independence through the provision of a council tax reduction to people on low income and people transitioning to work.
- 6.3 Uprating of income bands will ensure that low-income residents do not lose support through general inflationary increases to their income and will ensure that the scheme continues to incentivise employment.

Climate Change Implications

- 6.4 There are no specific climate change implications.

Equalities and Diversity Implications

- 6.5 When the existing income band based CTR scheme was introduced a full equalities impact assessment was completed. The uprating of income bands has no further equalities and diversity implications.

7. RISK MANAGEMENT

- 7.1 The relevant risk management considerations are summarised in the tabulation – “Risk Management CTS Scheme”.

Risk	Mitigations
Loss of support for residents in financial need.	Revision of income bands as provided for within the council’s scheme will ensure that lowincome residents are not phased out of the existing scheme

Executive Committee14th January 2025

	through general inflationary increases in their income.
Increased financial costs of CTR scheme	The scheme reduces the council tax collected by the authority. Increases in the level of incomebands can increase the amount of support provided to residents and the costs of the CTR scheme. Options for revision of the scheme will be modelled so that the costs of the scheme can be considered when increases to the income bands are agreed.

Risk Management CTS Scheme

8. APPENDICES and BACKGROUND PAPERS

Appendix A – Income Band Table

9. REPORT SIGN OFF

Department	Name and Job Title	Date
Portfolio Holder	Cllr Ian Woodall	12/12/24
Lead Director / Assistant Director	Pete Carpenter – Director of Resources / Deputy Chief Executive	12/12/24
Financial Services	Debra Goodall – Head of Finance and Customer Services	12/12/24
Legal Services		
Policy Team (if equalities implications apply)		
Climate Change Team (if climate change implications apply)		

Executive Committee14th January 2025**Appendix A**

Discount Band	Discount	Single Person	Single Person with one Child	Single Person with two or more children	Couple	Couple with one child	Couple with two or more children
Income Band 1	100%	£0.00 to £125	£0.00 to £195	£0.00 to £266	£0.00 to £179	£0.00 to £250	£0.00 to £320
Income Band 2	80%	£125.01 to £153	£195.01 to £234	£266.01 to £304	£179.01 to £206	£250.01 to £288	£320.01 to £358
Income Band 3	55%	£153.01 to £179	£234.01 to £272	£304.01 to £342	£206.01 to £234	£288.01 to £325	£358.01 to £397
Income Band 4	30%	£179.01 to £206	£272.01 to £309	£342.01 to £380	£234.01 to £260	£325.01 to £364	£397.01 to £434
Nil Award	0%	Over £206	Over £309	Over £380	Over £260	Over £364	Over £434

This page is intentionally left blank

Executive Committee14th January 2025**Council Tax Base**

Relevant Portfolio Holder	Cllr Ian Woodall – Executive Member for Finance
Portfolio Holder Consulted	Yes
Relevant Assistant Director	Debra Goodall
Report Author David Riley	Job Title: Financial Support Manager Contact email: david.riley@bromsgroveandredditch.gov.uk Contact Tel: 01527 548 418
Wards Affected	All
Ward Councillor(s) consulted	N/A
Relevant Council Priority	An effective and sustainable Council
Non-Key Decision	
If you have any questions about this report, please contact the report author in advance of the meeting.	

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Executive Committee is asked to **RECOMMEND** that:-

1) The calculation of the council tax base for the whole and parts of the area for 2025/26 be approved; and

2) In accordance with the Local Authorities (Calculation of Tax Base) (England) Regulations 2012, the figures calculated by Redditch Borough Council as its tax base for the whole area be 26,455.5 and for the parts of the area listed below be.

Parish of Feckenham	382.1
Rest of Redditch	26,073.4
Total for the Borough	26,455.5

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 The report sets out the details of the calculation of the tax base for council tax setting purposes. The calculation of the council tax base is required as part of the determination of the council tax for 2025/26.

3. OPERATIONAL ISSUES

3.1 The council tax base is calculated based on information held by the authority on 30th November 2024. The base reflects the number of

Executive Committee14th January 2025

dwellings in each valuation band on that date, and those dwellings which are subject to exemptions, discounts, and reductions.

- 3.2 The information extracted on 30th November is then adjusted for the council's anticipated changes to the number of dwellings, and changes to discounts and exemptions. This figure is then adjusted to reflect the anticipated collection rates. An allowance of 1.00% has been made for non-collection of tax.
- 3.3 The council is required to set the council tax base each year, this forms part of the process of setting the following year budget.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The calculation of the council tax base forms the basis of the calculation of council tax for the new financial year.
- 4.2 The council tax base is calculated using a prescribed formula to generate the equivalent number of band D dwellings in a district and accounts for the costs of council tax support provided to residents within the area.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The Local Authorities (Calculation of Tax Base) (England) Regulations 2012 (as amended) set out the process for the calculation of the council tax base, for the whole or any part of the area for the following financial year.
- 5.2 The tax base information is required by Worcestershire County Council, West Mercia Police and Crime Commissioner, and Hereford Fire and Rescue Service to calculate and notify the district council of their precept requirements for the forthcoming tax year.
- 5.3 The legislation requires the billing authority to calculate the tax base for any "special areas" within its boundary. There are no such areas in the Redditch District

6. OTHER - IMPLICATIONS**Relevant Council Priority**

- 6.1 The council tax reduction scheme supports residents in financial need and it is a requirement that the design of the scheme incentivises work.

Executive Committee14th January 2025

- 6.2 The scheme supports the strategic purpose of Aspiration, Work and Financial Independence through the provision of a council tax reduction to people on low income and people transitioning to work.
- 6.3 Uprating of income bands will ensure that low-income residents do not lose support through general inflationary increases to their income and will ensure that the scheme continue to incentivise employment.

Climate Change Implications

- 6.4 There are no specific climate change implications.

Equalities and Diversity Implications

- 6.5 There are no specific equalities and climate change implications.

7. RISK MANAGEMENT

- 7.1 None

8. APPENDICES and BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 8.1 None

9. REPORT SIGN OFF

Department	Name and Job Title	Date
Portfolio Holder	Cllr Ian Woodall	12/12/24
Lead Director / Assistant Director	Pete Carpenter – Director of Resources / Deputy Chief Executive	12/12/24
Financial Services	Debra Goodall – Head of Finance and Customer Services	12/12/24

This page is intentionally left blank

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE
2025

14 January

Report of the Independent Remuneration Panel – recommendations for members’ allowances for 2025-26 and the members’ allowances scheme

Relevant Portfolio Holder	Councillor J Baker Leader and Portfolio Holder for Planning, Regeneration and Governance; and Councillor I Woodall Portfolio Holder for Finance.
Portfolio Holder Consulted	Yes
Relevant Head of Service	Claire Felton
Report Author	Job Title: Darren Whitney, Electoral Services Manager Contact email: darren.whitney@bromsgroveandredditch.gov.uk Contact Tel: 01527 881650
Wards Affected	All
Ward Councillor(s) consulted	N/A
Relevant Strategic Purpose(s)	N/A
Non-Key Decision	
If you have any questions about this report, please contact the report author in advance of the meeting.	

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee is asked to consider the report and recommendations and RECOMMEND to Council

1.1 whether or not to accept all, some or none of the recommendations of the Independent Remuneration Panel for 2025-26;

1.2 having considered the Panel’s report and recommendations, whether or not changes are required to the Council’s scheme of allowances for Members arising from this.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 Each Council is required by law to have an Independent Remuneration Panel (IRP) which recommends the level of allowances for Councillors. The Panel is made up of suitably skilled members of the public who are completely independent of the Borough Council. It also makes recommendations to four other District Councils in Worcestershire. The Panel’s report is enclosed for consideration by the Executive Committee and ultimately by the Council.

**EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE
2025**14 January

- 2.2 The panel recommends basic allowances, special responsibility allowances (SRAs), travel, subsistence and dependent carer allowances.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 The IRP recommends a basic allowance of £5,826 which is a 5.58% increase from its recommendation from last year. However, since Council did not accept last years' Panel Recommendation concerning the basic allowance, if approved, it would mean a percentage increase of 19.6% (£952 per Councillor on the basic allowance).
- 3.2 If the Council makes changes to the current amounts of allowances there will be additional costs. If the Council implements all the recommendations of the IRP, using the IRP scheme, budgets will need to be increased in the region of £22,000.
- 3.3 It should be noted that the scheme recommended by the IRP only allows for one SRA per Councillor, as this is usual across the country, and does not include a payment for Executive Members without Portfolio. If the Council implements the recommendations of the IRP and includes additional SRAs and Executive Members without Portfolio the budget would need to be increased by approximately £41,000.
- 3.4 In 2024/25 Council decided to increase the basic allowance by 3% and base it's SRAs on multipliers of the previous year's basic allowance. It also changed the SRAs paid to the Chair of the Audit, Governance and Standards Committee and the Group Leader of the Opposition which were not based on multipliers of a basic allowance.
- 3.5 If Council decides to no increase in the basic allowance there will be an extra cost of approximately £3,000 on current budgets, due to a budget shortfall. This amount will depend on the Special Responsibility Allowances claimed by Members.
- 3.6 The upcoming budget will need to reflect any changes made from the recommendations in this report and the future costs will need to be covered in the medium term financial plan.
- 3.7 The allowance for the Mayor and Deputy Mayor is currently £3,690 and £1,100 respectively and is separate to the remuneration of Councillors reviewed by the IRP.

**EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE
2025**14 January

4. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The Council is required to “have regard” to the recommendations of the Panel. However, it is not obliged to agree to them. It can choose to implement them in full or in part, or not to accept them.
- 4.2 If the Council decides to review its scheme of allowances for Councillors, it is also required to take into account recommendations from the Panel before doing so.

5. STRATEGIC PURPOSES - IMPLICATIONS**Relevant Strategic Purpose**

- 5.1 None as this report deals with statutory functions.

Climate Change Implications

- 5.2 None in this report.

6. OTHER IMPLICATIONS**Equalities and Diversity Implications**

- 6.1 None in this report.

Operational Implications

- 6.2 There are no direct service or operational implications arising from this report. Once the Council has agreed the allowances for 2025-26 Officers will update and publish the Members' Allowances Scheme as appropriate.

7. RISK MANAGEMENT

- 7.1 Payments to Councillors can be a high profile issue. The main risks are reputational. However, the Council is transparent about the decisions made on allowances. The Allowances scheme and sums paid to Councillors each year are published on the Council's website.

8. APPENDICES and BACKGROUND PAPERS

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE
2025

14 January

Report and recommendations from the Independent Remuneration Panel for 2025-26.

Background papers:

Members Allowances Scheme – in the Council Constitution at part 17:

[Members' Scheme of Allowances - Redditch constitution](#)

9. REPORT SIGN OFF

Department	Name and Job Title	Date
Portfolio Holder		
Lead Director / Head of Service		
Financial Services		
Legal Services		

**Independent Remuneration Panel
for Worcestershire District Councils**

Annual Report and Recommendations for 2025/26

Redditch Borough Council

December 2024

Contents	Page
Recommendations to Council	1
1/ Introduction and Context	2
2/ Background Evidence and Research Undertaken	2
3/ Comparative spend on Allowances across Worcestershire	2
4/ Average Payment per Councillor across Worcestershire	3
5/ Consideration of Allowances for the financial year 2025/26	3
a/ Basic Allowance	3
b/ Special Responsibility Allowances	4
c/ Mileage and Expenses 2025/26	5
d/ Dependant Carers	5
e/ Allowances to Parish Councils	5
6/ The Independent Remuneration Panel	5
7/ Support and Thanks	6
Appendix 1 – Summary of Allowance Recommendations	7
Appendix 2 – Summary of Research	8

Recommendations to the Council

The Independent Remuneration Panel recommends to Redditch Borough Council the following:

1. A Basic Allowance for 2025/26 of £5,826, representing a 5.58% increase.
2. A range of Special Responsibility Allowances as set out in Appendix 1
3. That travel allowances for 2025/26 continue to be paid in accordance with the HMRC mileage allowance
4. That subsistence allowances for 2025/26 remain unchanged
5. That the Dependent Carer's Allowance remains unchanged
6. That travel and subsistence payments made by Parish Councils to councillors (where they are paid) are made in accordance with the provisions set out in this report

1. Introduction and Context

The Independent Remuneration Panel (the Panel) has been appointed by the Council in accordance with the Members' Allowances Regulations. The role of the Panel is to carry out reviews of the allowances paid to Councillors, as required by the Local Government Act 2000 and subsequent legislation.

The report sets out recommendations for the Basic Allowance (as recommended to be paid for all Councillors), the special responsibility allowances (for those councillors with additional responsibilities) and allowances for mileage, subsistence and for those with dependent carer responsibilities.

The purpose of such allowances is to enable people from all walks of life to become involved in local politics if they choose. This continues to remain an important consideration for the Panel when submitting its recommendations.

The Panel acknowledges, however, that in the current challenging financial climate there are difficult choices for the Council to make. The Council will need to 'have regard' to the recommendations of the Panel, but ultimately, it is for the Council to decide how or whether to adopt them in full or in part.

The Panel's recommendations are based on thorough research and benchmarking taking into account a range of comparative data as set out below.

2. Background Evidence and Research Undertaken

There is a range of market indicators on pay which can be used for comparison purposes. As background for the decisions taken by the Panel this year have:

- Analysed and considered the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE) statistics for 2024 which set out a mean hourly wage rate for Worcestershire of £19.88
- Benchmarked the Basic Allowance against those paid within comparable local authorities to Bromsgrove as set out in the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) 'nearest neighbours' list
- Taken account of the 2024/25 National Pay Award for the majority of Local Government employees
- Considered the Consumer Price Index information as of September 2024.

Details about these areas of research are set out in Appendix 2 to this report.

In determining a recommendation for the basic award for 2025/26, consideration has once again been given to the average number of hours spent by councillors on Council business. For 2025/26 this has again been informed by a time-recording exercise carried out by Worcester City Councillors in 2015, as updated by a similar exercise in 2022.

3. Comparative Spend on Allowances across Worcestershire 2023/24

As part of the research, consideration has been given to the Members' allowances budget for Basic and Special Responsibility Allowances in the previous year (2023/24) as a cost per head of population for each Council, and also as a proportion of net revenue budget. This is set out in the table below:

Authority, population ¹ and number of Councillors	Total spend Basic Allowances £	Total spend on SRA £	SRA as a percentage of total Basic Allowance %	Cost of total basic and SRA per head of population £	Total of basic and SRA as a percentage of Net General Revenue Fund expenditure %
Bromsgrove DC (31) 100,569	148,081	71,593	48.35	2.18	Not available yet
Malvern Hills DC (31) 79,445	154,597	72,988	47.1	2.86	2.64
Redditch Borough (29) 85,568	136,335	98,584	72.31	2.75	Not available yet
Worcester City (35) 100,265	166,153	111,124	66.88	2.76	1.68
Wychavon (43) 131,084	212,387 (awaiting update)	95,818 (awaiting update)	45.11 (awaiting update)	2.35 (awaiting update)	1.70 (awaiting update)

4. Average Payment per Councillor across Worcestershire 2023/24

In addition to the above, the following table also sets out the average payment per member of each authority of the Basic and Special Responsibility Allowances for the previous year (2023/24):

Average allowance per Member of each authority (Basic and Special Responsibility Allowances, 2023/24 figures)

Authority (number of Councillors)	Amount £
Bromsgrove District (31)	7,086.26
Malvern Hills District (31)	7,341.45
Redditch Borough (29)	8,100.66
Worcester City (35)	7,922.20
Wychavon District (43)	6,948.03 (awaiting update)

5. Consideration of allowances for the financial year 2025/26

a/ Basic Allowance

The Basic Allowance is paid to all Members of the Council to reflect:

- Their roles and responsibilities as Elected Members of the Council

¹ONS population estimates mid 2020. Totals for Basic and Special Responsibility allowances paid are as published by each authority for the 2023/24 financial year.

- Their time commitments, including the total average number of hours worked per week on Council business
- A public service discount of 40% to reflect that Councillors volunteer their time

Whilst each Council may set out role descriptions for Councillors, the Panel accepts that each Councillor will carry out that role differently, reflecting personal circumstances and local requirements.

In setting out its recommendations, the Panel considers the Basic Allowance to include Councillors' roles in Overview and Scrutiny, as any non-Executive member of the Council can contribute to this aspect of the Council's work. It is for this reason that the Panel does not recommend any Special Responsibility Allowance for members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The Panel also considers that the Basic Allowance should cover the need for Councillors to use ICT and social media support and communication systems as part of their role. However, it is accepted that specific local decisions may be made about how ICT support is provided.

As indicated in section 2 of this report, in formulating its recommendations, the Panel has once again reviewed the levels of wage rates for Worcestershire as set out in the ASHE data and the benchmark information available from the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) "nearest neighbours" authorities. Consideration has also been given to the nationally agreed pay award for local government employees for the financial year 2024/25 and the latest CPI (consumer price inflation) figure as of September 2024.

Based on all the above considerations, the Panel recommend a Basic Award of £5,826 for the financial year 2025/26. This again aligns with the increase in the average pay levels as reflected in the ASHE data whilst acknowledging the CPI increase, CIPFA data and Local Government Pay Awards. It represents a 5.58% increase on the previous year's recommendation.

The recommendation takes strong account of the ASHE data and is set at an appropriate level in the context of the local government pay award. The Panel is conscious of the current financial challenges but also mindful to avoid increasing any gap in allowances between Redditch Borough Council and its "nearest neighbours."

The research information used in the consideration of the Basic Allowance is set out in appendix 2.

b/ Special Responsibility Allowances (SRA)

Special Responsibility Allowances are paid to a small number of Councillors to reflect responsibilities undertaken by them in addition to their day-to-day roles as Elected Representatives. Such allowances are paid in addition to the Basic Allowance and calculated as a multiplier of the Basic Allowance.

Any recommended changes in such allowances would be based on proposals made to the Panel each year and reflecting, for example changes in committee structures, new responsibilities or increases/decreases in existing responsibilities.

The Panel has not received any recommended changes in Special Responsibility Allowances for 2025/26. As such the recommended values have not changed for 2025/26.

The full list of recommended SRA multipliers and values is set out in Appendix 1.

c/ Mileage and Expenses

The Panel notes that the Council has used the HMRC flat rate for payment of mileage for all types of vehicles and recommends that this continues.

d/ Dependant Carer Allowance

The Panel notes that the Council's Scheme of Members' Allowances provides that Dependant Carer Allowances are payable to cover reasonable and legitimate costs incurred in attending approved duties and recommends that this provision continues.

e/ Allowances to Parish Councils

The Independent Remuneration Panel for Worcestershire District Councils acts as the Remuneration Panel for the Parish Councils in each District. This year the Panel has not been asked to make recommendations on any matters by the Parish of Feckenham.

6. The Independent Remuneration Panel

This Council's Independent Remuneration Panel is set up on a joint basis with four of the other five District Councils in Worcestershire. Separate Annual Reports have been prepared for each Council. The members of the Panel are:

Tim Hunt (Chair) – Tim is a qualified journalist with more than 25 years' experience in media and communications. He spent seven years covering community and local authority news in Worcestershire and Warwickshire, including four as editor of two local newspapers, before going on to work in corporate communications and events. Tim now runs his own PR agency.

Susan Moxon (Vice Chair) - Susan has worked in the Education sector for over 20 years, working in schools in Warwickshire and Birmingham and then with the Department for Education, where she worked in the 6th form funding team, analysing data from incoming enquiries, mainly from schools and colleges regarding the calculation of their funding statements. She has acted as an independent observer at Teacher Disciplinary Hearings ensuring that the panel members followed procedures and were unbiased in their decision making. Previously she was an Exams Support Officer providing advice to schools and colleges in Hereford, Worcester and Gloucester about entering students for external exams and assessments, her particular area of expertise. She is currently Clerk to the Governing Bodies at two First Schools in Worcestershire and to two local charities. She organises meetings, manages the accounts and is the main point of contact with applicants, local providers and the Charity Commission.

Reuben Bergman – Reuben is a Fellow of the CIPD with significant senior HR leadership experience across a range of public sector organisations in both England and Wales. He currently runs a HR Consultancy Business in Worcestershire providing advice and support on managing change, employment law, HR policy development, mediation, management coaching and employee relations. Reuben has led successful equal pay reviews in three separate local authorities and is known for his successful work in managing change and developing effective employee relations. He is a qualified coach, mediator and a Shared Service architect.

Xenia Goudefroy – Xenia is a Management Accountant with experience in the financial controlling and forecasting for a range of companies in the private sector. She holds an

Advanced Diploma in Management Accounting and has completed a Master's degree in Business Administration at University Vila Velha and in International Management at the Steinbeis University Berlin. As a focus topic of her thesis she has developed the order-to-cash process for new business models. Since she moved to the UK in 2017 in her free time she has been volunteering to help people in need and is also working as a volunteer at the Worcester fish-pass to help preserve the natural habitat of migrating species. She is fluent in three languages and enjoys learning new skills.

Caroline Murphy – Caroline has over 20 years' experience of working in public and voluntary sector organisations, including three West Midlands Local Authorities and the Civil Service. She was a senior Education Manager at Wolverhampton City Council until 2011. She has a wealth of experience at building partnerships. Caroline now works as freelance adviser supporting individuals and organisations with strategic management. Caroline is also an active Governor of a Special School and Vocational College in Wolverhampton and a trained Mediator.

7. Support and Thanks

The Panel has been advised and assisted by:

Claire Chaplin and Margaret Johnson from Worcester City Council
Darren Whitney and Jane Oyenuga from Bromsgrove & Redditch Councils
Mel Harris from Wychavon District Council
Bronwen Tompkins from Malvern Hills District Council

The Panel wishes to acknowledge its gratitude to these officers who have provided advice and guidance in a professional and dedicated manner.

Tim Hunt, Chair of Independent Remuneration Panel

Appendix 1

Independent Remuneration Panel for District Councils in Worcestershire

Summary of Basic Award and SRA recommendations

Role	Rec'd Multiplier 2024/25 (IRP)	Current Multiplier (Council Agreed)*	Rec'd Allowance 2024/25 (IRP) £	Current Allowance 2024/25 (Council Agreed) £	Rec'd Multiplier 2025/26 (IRP)	Rec'd Allowance 2025/26 (IRP) £
Basic Allowance:	1	1	5,518	4,874	1	5,826
Special Responsibility Allowances:						
Leader	3	3	16,554	14,196 plus 7,098 as portfolio holder	3	17,478
Deputy Leader	1.75	1.75	9,656.50	8,281 plus 7,098 as Exec Member with portfolio	1.75	10,195
Executive Members (Portfolio Holders)	1.5	1.5	8,277	7,098	1.5	8,739
Executive Members without portfolio	****	1	****	4,732	****	****
Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee	1.5	1.5	8,277	7,098	1.5	8,739
Chair of Overview & Scrutiny Task Groups	0.25	0.25	1,379.50	1,183	0.25	1,456.50
Chair of Audit, Standards and Governance Committee	0.25	+See below	1,379.50	3,500	0.25	1,456.50
Chair of Planning Committee	1	1	5,518	4,732	1	5,826
Chair of Licensing Committee	0.75	0.75	4,138.50	3,549	0.75	4,369.50
Political Group Leaders	0.25	+See below	1,379.50	4,500	0.25	1,456.50

*To calculate SRA, Council used multiplier on their own basic allowance from 2023/24 (£4,732)

+ Council decided on its own figure without a multiplier for this item

Independent Remuneration Panel for District Councils in Worcestershire

Summary of Research

a/ Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) “Nearest Neighbour” authorities’ tool.

No two Councils or sets of Councillors are the same. Developed to aid local authorities in comparative and benchmarking exercises, the CIPFA Nearest Neighbours Model adopts a scientific approach to measuring the similarity between authorities. Using the data, Redditch’s “nearest neighbours” are:

- Tamworth
- Cannock Chase
- Rossendale
- Rushmoor
- Nuneaton & Bedworth
- Worcester

Information on the level of Basic and Special Responsibility Allowances was obtained to benchmark the levels of allowances recommended to the Council. The average basic award across all the “nearest neighbour” authorities was £6,232 as at December 2024.

b/ Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE) Data on Pay

[Earnings and hours worked, place of work by local authority: ASHE Table 7 - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](https://ons.gov.uk/earnings-and-hours/earnings-and-hours-worked-place-of-work-by-local-authority-ashe-table-7)

Published by the Office for National Statistics, the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE) shows detailed information at District level about rates of pay. For benchmarking purposes, the Panel uses the levels for hourly rates of pay excluding overtime (£19.88 as at December 2024).

For benchmarking purposes, this is multiplied by 11 hours to give a weekly rate, then multiplied by 44.4 weeks to allow for holidays and then discounted by 40% to reflect the element of volunteering that each Councillor undertakes in the role.

The 11-hour multiplier is felt to reflect the average number of hours spent on Council business by frontline Councillors as reported in a previous survey of Worcester City Councillors in 2015 and updated in 2022. As a benchmark indicator this would produce a figure of £5,826 per annum which amounts to an increase of £308.

c/ CPI (Consumer Price Inflation)

In arriving at its recommendations, the Panel has taken into account the latest reported CPI figure as published by the Office for National Statistics. This was 2.60% in September 2024. The uprating of the 2025/26 recommended basic award by the CPI figure would give a revised Basic Award of £5,661 which amounts to an increase of £143.

d/ Local Government Pay Award

The Panel was mindful of the current local government pay award offer of £1,290 for employees earning up to £51,515, or the full-time equivalent (FTE), which represented a pay increase of 5.49% for the lowest earning employees. Uprating of the 2025/26 recommended basic award by the same percentage would give a revised Basic Award of £5821, which amounts to an increase of £303.

This page is intentionally left blank



Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Monday, 25th November,
2024

MINUTES

Present:

Councillor Matthew Dormer (Chair), Councillor Craig Warhurst (Vice-Chair) and Councillors William Boyd, Andrew Fry, Joanna Kane, Sachin Mathur, David Munro, Rita Rogers and Paul Wren

Also Present:

Councillor Jen Snape – Portfolio Holder for Climate Change

Officers:

Sue Hanley, Judith Willis and Matthew Eccles

Democratic Services Officers:

Mat Sliwinski

47. APOLOGIES AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES

There were no apologies for absence.

48. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND OF PARTY WHIP

There were no declarations of interest nor of party whip.

49. MINUTES

The minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 14th October 2024 were submitted for Members' consideration.

RESOLVED that

the Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 14th October 2024 be approved as a true record and signed by the Chair.

50. PUBLIC SPEAKING

There were no public speakers registered to speak at this meeting.

Chair

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Monday, 25th November, 2024

51. CARBON REDUCTION STRATEGY AND IMPLEMENTATION PLAN ANNUAL REVIEW - PRE-SCRUTINY

The Climate Change Manager presented the Carbon Reduction Strategy and Implementation Plan Annual Review for the consideration of Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Members were reminded that the Carbon Reduction Strategy had been introduced two years' previously. At the time that the strategy was introduced, Members had agreed that progress should be monitored on an annual basis and that a new strategy should be presented every three years. The next new strategy was due to be created for 2025-26.

During the presentation, the recent actions and updates from the review of the Carbon Reduction Implementation Plan were covered in detail with information highlighted including:

- Use of low carbon fleet fuel options – It was noted that Environmental Services use of fuel meant that currently one fourth of fuel used by the Council's fleet was hydrogenated vegetable oil (HVO), Using HVO could save up to 90 per cent of the lifetime carbon emissions as compared to traditional diesel. Environmental Services were preparing to increase the frequency of HVO only tanker deliveries to 1 in every 2. It was asked what the financial implication of increasing HVO frequency given fluctuations in HVO costs. It was undertaken that relevant officers would be contacted to obtain the cost-benefit analysis for this.
- Improve energy efficiency of current housing stock – It was reported that these improvements were being made through use of Government funding, including most recently through Sustainable Warmth Competition Local Authority Delivery Phase 3 (LAD3) funding which the Council had been successful in obtaining.
- Crematorium works – Plans are in place to further improve the BEMS at the Crematorium and Abbey Stadium to improve the efficiency of the heat recovery system in place between the Crematorium and Abbey Stadium. Additionally, there are further plans to upgrade the lighting system to an LED system in the building.
- EV charging - EV charging across Council-owned car parks would be supported by the £2.1 million partnership with Zest to deliver EV charging infrastructure across the borough over

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Monday, 25th November, 2024

the next 15 – 20 years. First charging points were due to be installed in Redditch in January 2025.

- Reducing impact of staff travel on the environment through use of video conferencing – It was noted that the Council had seen an increase in staff mileage claims over the last three financial years and further investigation was needed to understand why this was the case. It was noted that staff mileage claims did not cover home to office journeys.
- Recruitment for a Graduate Climate Change Officer – The recruitment for this role was ongoing. This role would support the development of the next iteration of RBC's carbon reduction strategy and continuation of work with services across the Council to reduce their own carbon emissions.
- New strategy, to be developed in 2025, would be produced to monitor progress through to 2030, which was the target year for the Council to reach 50 per cent carbon emissions reduction.

Following the presentation, questions were raised regarding aspects of the report. It was asked what the Council could do to help businesses use solar panels technology. There were comments that it was preferable for solar panels to be utilised on roofs rather than on the ground as there were concerns around safety and unproductive use of otherwise arable land where solar battery farms were in place.

Officers explained that the Council was undertaking a small project with businesses at the Moons Moat North Industrial Estate to help prepare decarbonisation plans for some of the organisations on that site. As part of this, the project was looking at clean power, including solar, and the Council was assisting businesses at the site with showing clean energy options available and to consider what each of the businesses involved could adapt in their organisation.

Some Members highlighted that recycling rates were very poor in some parts of the Borough and asked what more the Council could do to raise awareness of recycling, particularly in communal bins. It was responded that recycling was not set as a specific target in the current Carbon Reduction Strategy but would be included in the next iteration. Work was being done by Environmental Services, particularly by refuse fleet teams to encourage recycling.

In terms of advising the community about recycling, a lot of work had been done in Batchley, around Lock Close and Cardy Close to

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Monday, 25th November, 2024

remodel the way refuse collections were done in those areas. Officers undertook to contact the Assistant Director of Environmental and Housing Property Services with regard to lessons from work undertaken in those areas and whether these were having positive effect on recycling rates and could be rolled out to other parts of the Borough. It was noted that a number of years ago, Councillors had undertaken a task group review of waste collection including recycling. Members asked that the final report of that task group be circulated.

A question was asked as to whether the Council considered putting solar panels on the roofs of council car parks, to drive energy generation from those sites. It was noted that this question would be forwarded to the officers who were managing the contract with Zest to see whether this had been considered as an option.

Members asked about timescales and list of locations for the installation of electric charging points. It was responded that the start date for installation of the first charging points was January 2025 with locations chosen to be subject to viability studies before it was determined whether a given car park would be used. Members requested that they be provided with a list of car parks where EV charging points would be installed in the first tranche of the scheme starting in January 2025.

It was noted that staff mileage claims had been increasing despite the move to agile working. A point was raised about the potential negative effect of agile working in that council office buildings were underutilised while utilities still had to be supplied across all buildings. In response, it was stated that the Council's Property Services team was working to ensure that council buildings were used to maximum effectiveness with reduced staff on sites. It was highlighted that efforts had been made to rent out space to other organisations in council buildings, particularly the Town Hall, which would result in more productive use of the buildings. It was also noted with regard to the Agile Working that the customer and service needs remained the overriding consideration behind that strategy.

RECOMMENDED that

The Council endorse the findings of this annual review of the Carbon Reduction Strategy (Appendix 2)

52. HEALTH INEQUALITIES - REVIEW OF PREVIOUS DISCUSSIONS BY REDDITCH COUNCILLORS

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Monday, 25th November, 2024

A report on the previous decisions of Overview and Scrutiny with respect to Health Inequalities Task Group was presented to Members. It was noted that in September 2022, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed to establish a Task Group titled 'Health Inequalities within the BME Community in Redditch'. This Task Group was never launched, however, as other items around fly tipping and bulky waste were prioritised at the time.

The options that were open to Members with regard to this Health Inequalities review were outlined. It was highlighted that the responsibility over health and social care were the remit of Worcestershire County Council (WCC), therefore, the role of any task group established over this matter by the Borough Council would be advisory in nature, and although the Task Group had the power, via the Executive Committee (following prior endorsement by Overview and Scrutiny Committee), to make recommendations to external bodies, those bodies were not legally obliged to consider those recommendations.

Following the presentation, Members debated the subject and raised the following points:

- There was consensus that this topic should be widened regardless of whether the Committee would be minded to set up a task group review. It was noted that it was more fruitful to focus any investigation on the geography, identifying areas of deprivation across the whole Borough and to focus on identifying demographics suffering from health inequalities rather than ethnicity as stated in the original topic proposal submitted in September 2022. It was noted that data was available to identify which areas of Redditch had high levels of health inequality through County Council's Public Health and Office of National Statistics (ONS) statistics.
- Some Members highlighted that although health inequalities constituted a serious issue across Redditch, the Council's powers in this area were limited as health was a function over which the County Council exercised control.
- The Council's Representative on the Worcestershire County Council's Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC) addressed Members and commented that at the meeting of HOSC on 12th November 2024 issues in relation to public health were discussed. The matters presented at that meeting were county-wide but there was data specific to

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Monday, 25th November, 2024

Redditch which underscored the concern over health inequality in Redditch.

- The Representative commented that female life expectancy in Redditch was one of the lowest in Worcestershire and significantly lower than the national average, whilst female life expectancy in Bromsgrove, Malvern Hills, and Wychavon was significantly higher than the national average. Male life expectancy in Redditch was close to the national average, highlighting a discrepancy between male and female health in Redditch.
- Analysis of Lower Layer Super Output Areas (LSOAs), which were geographical areas comprising between 400 to 1,200 households (1,000 to 3,000 persons) and grouped together for statistical reasons, showed that two-thirds of LSOAs with highest number of recorded emergency hospital admissions in Worcestershire were located within Redditch Borough, with LSOA areas in parts of Batchley Brook, Smallwood and Church Hill, Winyates (around Ipsley Middle School) being the areas with highest numbers of emergency admissions. Moreover, these LSOAs had proportions of people in bad or very bad health that far exceeded Worcestershire and England averages.
- The Council's Representative on the Worcestershire County Council's Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC) noted that County Council's Public Health had begun investigating the possibilities of delivering intensive small area community development in areas (LSOAs) suffering from high health inequality, including those in Redditch. This would begin with exploration of key causes of poor health outcomes in those areas and would involve work with a number of agencies. The Representative reported that a successful small area community development scheme had recently been delivered in the Westlands area of Droitwich. It was highlighted that WCC's Public Health was looking for assistance of elected members for these schemes.
- Some Members highlighted that the County Council was responsible for public health budget, and Borough Councillors ultimately had no decision-making role in how that budget was spent. The role of Borough Councillors was therefore to raise and highlight specific concerns that required funding intervention to the County Council.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Monday, 25th November, 2024

- It was noted that there was a role of Borough Councillors in terms of advising the WCC's Public Health team about local groups in each of those areas and how any funding that might become available for health interventions might be best spent in those areas. A concern was raised in this regard by some Members about potential inequalities in funding provided by the County Council to Redditch as compared to other areas within the county.
- The Chief Executive Officer addressed the Committee and stated that a meeting with the Director of Public Health at Worcestershire County Council had been arranged to discuss health inequality issues and poor health outcomes in parts of Redditch. It was noted that Members' observations and concerns raised at tonight's meeting with respect to health inequalities, and Members' concerns around potential inequalities of funding for health within Worcestershire would be raised by the Chief Executive Officer at that meeting. It was also highlighted that the subject of health inequalities would be discussed at the next meeting of Redditch District Collaborative.
- It was noted in relation to the Redditch District Collaborative (RDC) that recently the sub-group of lead partners had been meeting as part of this forum rather than the group as a whole. A Member expressed concern about this and queried if there was Member representation on the RDC. It was explained that normal practice for district collaboratives was for there to be no direct elected member representation. At Redditch, it was the Redditch Partnership Manager who represented the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive Officer at meetings of RDC. It was clarified further that through RDC, issues in relation to health matters in Redditch were fed back directly to the County Council. A Member queried whether there should be more regular feedback to the Borough Councillors and it was agreed for Officers to provide a response to this to the Member outside the meeting.
- It was requested that details and notes from the next meeting of Redditch District Collaborative be shared with Members.
- It was agreed as an action, in light of the meeting to take place between the Chief Executive Officer and the Director of Public Health at County Council, that the Director of Public Health be asked to provide a briefing note on health inequalities in Redditch.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Monday, 25th November, 2024

- The Committee agreed that any further discussion on the item of health inequalities in Redditch would take place after Members had received the briefing note.

RESOLVED that

That a briefing note on health inequalities in Redditch be provided, following consultation with Worcestershire County Council's Public Health team

53. EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MINUTES AND SCRUTINY OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE'S WORK PROGRAMME - SELECTING ITEMS FOR SCRUTINY

It was requested that the following items from the Executive Committee Work Programme be added as items for pre-scrutiny at meetings of Overview and Scrutiny:

- Food Waste Business Case and Associated Waste Related Issues
- Shareholders' Committee Annual Report.

RESOLVED that

the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme be updated with items from the Executive Committee Work Programme as per the pre-amble above.

54. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

The Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme was submitted for Members' consideration.

RESOLVED that

the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme be updated to include the items, as from the latest Executive Work Programme for pre-scrutiny, as agreed by Members (and detailed at Minute No. 53).

55. TASK GROUPS, SHORT SHARP REVIEWS AND WORKING GROUPS - UPDATE REPORTS

Updates on Task Groups and Working Groups were provided as follows:

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Monday, 25th November, 2024

a) Budget Scrutiny Working Group – Chair, Councillor Warhurst

It was reported that due to apologies submitted by the Chair, the last meeting of Budget Scrutiny, on 21st November, was chaired by Councillor Dormer. Items discussed the budget including fees and charges (tranche 1 prior to consultation) and the revenue and performance monitoring report for quarter two 2024-25.

b) Performance Scrutiny Working Group – Chair, Councillor Warhurst

Councillor Warhurst reported that two meetings took place to date, on 16th July and 16th October. It was reported that following discussion at those meetings, Officers were due to provide answers to queries raised by the Working Group, regarding the PowerBI performance dashboard and the upkeep of verges, at the next Working Group meeting.

c) Fly Tipping and Bulky Waste Task Group – Chair, Councillor Dormer

Councillor Dormer reported that a Group held a meeting on 6th November. Officers were tasked with researching information relating to the provision of covert cameras to monitor fly tipping and data on costs of fly tipping and income of the bulky waste service in Redditch and across the other district authorities in Worcestershire.

The data requested had now been provided and the Task Group were analysing the data and seeking clarification on a number of points. The date of the next meeting would be agreed in due course.

d) Post-16 Education Task Group – Chair, Councillor Warhurst

Councillor Warhurst reported that at the first meeting of the Group, on 23rd October, the approach to this review was agreed, including the stakeholders which the Group wished to interview as part of the investigation. The next meeting was scheduled for 2nd December 2024.

RESOLVED that

the Task Groups, Short Sharp Reviews and Working Groups Update Reports be noted.

56. EXTERNAL SCRUTINY BODIES - UPDATE REPORTS

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Monday, 25th November, 2024

Updates on the meetings of External Scrutiny Bodies were provided as follows:

- a) West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) Overview and Scrutiny Committee – Council Representative, Councillor Kane

Councillor Kane reported that two meetings of this body took place since she last provided an update. Councillor Kane provided a written report on the meeting that took place on 21st October 2024, which was included in the agenda papers for this meeting.

A further meeting of WMCA Overview and Scrutiny Committee took place earlier today (25th November) and it was reported that the only item on the agenda was homelessness / rough sleeping. It was reported that WMCA had a working culture to ensure that homelessness and rough sleeping were considered and 'designed out' in every policy that WMCA produced. It was further reported that WMCA anticipated an increase in rough sleeping across West Midlands next year due to a combination of factors that included an anticipated rise in evictions. Councillor Kane also highlighted that WMCA as a combined authority was represented at central government level and was an important regional partner for Redditch Council.

- b) West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) Transport Delivery Overview and Scrutiny – Council Representative, Councillor Munro

Councillor Munro stated that there was nothing to report on this body that was of relevance to Redditch Borough Council.

- c) Worcestershire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC) – Council Representative, Councillor Munro.

An update regarding recent meeting of this body had been provided during discussion under agenda item 6. (Minute No. 52) – Health Inequalities – Review of Previous Discussions by Redditch Councillors.

RESOLVED that

the External Scrutiny Bodies updates be noted.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Monday, 25th November, 2024

The Meeting commenced at 6.30 pm
and closed at 7.53 pm

This page is intentionally left blank

REDDITCH BOROUGH COUNCIL

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

14 January

2025

HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT RENT SETTING 2025/26

Relevant Portfolio Holder	Councillor Bill Hartnett, Portfolio Holder for Housing
Portfolio Holder Consulted	Yes
Relevant Head of Service	Peter Carpenter, Director of Resources. Contact email: Peter.carpenter@bromsgroveandredditch.gov.uk
Wards Affected	All Wards
Ward Councillor Consulted	N/A
Key Decision	
If you have any questions about this report, please contact the author of the report in advance of the meeting.	
This report contains exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972, as amended.	

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee is asked to **RECOMMEND** to Council that:

- a) the actual average rent increase for 2025/26 be set as 2.7%.
- b) Garage rent increase by 2.7%.
- c) The Service Charge Policy at Appendix 1 be approved.
- d) The Service Charges set out in Appendix 2 be approved.

2. BACKGROUND

To present Members with the proposed dwelling rent, garages and service charges increases for 2025/26.

3. OPERATIONAL ISSUES

- 3.1 The Council needs to approve the rents in a timely manner to allow officer time to notify the tenants of the annual rent. Tenants must have 28 calendar days' notice of any change to their rent charge.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The rent increase above is in line with the Government guideline on rent increase as described below.

In September each year the annual Consumer Price Index figure is set which is used to establish the limit on annual rent increases for social housing. The continuation of the annual guideline rent increase cap of

REDDITCH BOROUGH COUNCIL

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

14 January

2025

September CPI plus 1% will translate into a rent increase in 2025/26 of 2.7% (based on September CPI of 1.7%).

The annual rent increase is very important for the long term sustainability of the HRA. The current HRA Business Plan, approved in 22-23, assumed a rent increase of 3% in 2025/26. However the recommendation for the rent increase in 2025/26 in line with Government guidelines is 2.7%. A lower rent increase will usually translate into a reduction in income to the HRA in 2025/26 and future years. On the other hand, the reduction in projected RTB sales for 2025/26 has helped to reduce the impact of a lower rent increase in comparison to what was assumed in the 22-23 HRA Business plan.

Additionally, the annual rent increase will help to fund the cost pressures to the HRA that arise from the regular changes to statutory and regulatory framework that Social Housing Providers have to comply with.

This report will set rent for 5,539 properties of which 5,443 are charged at social rent and 96 at affordable rent. The average rent (48 week basis) for 2025/26 charged will be £106.16 and £165.35 for social and affordable rent properties respectively.

- 4.2 The Council has some dwellings with actual social rent charge below Target Rent (Formula Rent) levels. In line with the Government's rent standard for social rents, when these void properties are re-let, the rent will be set at the re-calculated target rent for a new tenant.
- 4.3 As members are aware the system of housing revenue account subsidy ceased on the 31st of March 2012 and was replaced with a devolved system of council housing finance called self-financing. The proposal in the form of a financial settlement meant a redistribution of the 'national' housing debt. This resulted in the Council borrowing £98.9 million from the Public Works Loan Board.
- 4.4 Self-financing placed a limit (Debt Cap) on borrowing for housing purposes at the closing position for 2011/12 at £122.2 million, however, the debt cap has now been removed and officers are currently reviewing implications of this change on councils future social housing growth strategy.
- 4.5 A new Direction from the Secretary of State to the Regulator of Social Housing in relation to social housing rent policy is imminent and this will focus on the introduction of a new rent policy from 1 April 2026. A consultation document was published on 30 October 2024 and is seeking the views of Local Authorities on a rent policy that will remain in place for at least 5 years from 1 April 2026 to 31 March 2031 and the continuation of the existing rent standard that permits social and affordable rents to increase annually by CPI plus 1%

REDDITCH BOROUGH COUNCIL**EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

14 January

2025

2025/26

4.6 For 2025/26, the actual average rent increase will be 2.7%. The average rent on a 52 week basis will be £98.94 or £107.18 on a 48 week basis. This compares to the average for 2024/25 on a 52 week basis of £96.34 and £104.37 on a 48 week basis.

4.7 **Service Charges**

4.8 Historically service charges for tenants and leaseholders were approved as part of the annual fees and charges report. However, these charges should be considered alongside this annual rent setting report. To support this a Service Charge Policy has been drafted. This sets out our approach towards the charging of and consultation with tenants and leaseholders and in line with statutory and regulatory requirements. This is attached as Appendix one and the Committee is asked to adopt this Policy,

4.9 Any implementation of service charges proposed may be phased over the forthcoming budget years. For 2025/26 it is proposed to review and rebase all the service charges previously contained within fees and charges and with a focus on cleaning and caretaking. As well as concessionary TV licences and Temporary Accommodation. This is contained in Appendix 2.

4.10 As any further service charges are ready for full implementation, a report will be brought forward to this Committee for consideration.

5. **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 Section 21 of the Welfare and Reform Act 2016 required 'In relation to each relevant year, registered providers of social housing must secure that the amount of rent payable in respect of that relevant year by a tenant of their social housing in England is at least 1% less than the amount of rent that was payable by the tenant in respect of the preceding 12 months.' This has now come to an end, and on 4 October 2017, DCLG announced that "increases to social housing rents will be limited to CPI plus 1% for 5 years from 2020."

6. **OTHER IMPLICATIONS**

Customer/Equalities and Diversity Implications

6.1 The rent increase will be applied by the same percentage regardless of property size. The equality and diversity implications of the changes will be evaluated and considered as part of the decision making process.

REDDITCH BOROUGH COUNCIL**EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE****14 January****2025**

7 RISK MANAGEMENT

- 7.1 There is a risk to that rents are not approved in sufficient time to allow for notification of tenants of the increase. This will be monitored throughout the process.

8. APPENDICES AND BACKGROUND PAPERS

Appendix 1 – Draft Service Charge Policy

Appendix 2 - Proposed Service Charges

Appendix 3 - Service Charges (Exempt item)

AUTHOR OF REPORT

Name: Peter Carpenter

Email: peter.carpenter@bromsgroveandredditch.gov.uk

Tel: 01527 64252

Appendix 1



HOUSING SERVICE

CHARGING POLICY

Version control:

Created By	Housing Tenancy & Advisory Manager			
Date Approved				
Date Published				
Maintained By				
Review Date	January 2027			
Version Number	Modified By	Modifications Made	Date	Status
1	Helen Oakes	DRAFT	11/24	DRAFT
2	Helen Oakes	DRAFT	1/25	DRAFT

1. **INTRODUCTION**

This policy sets out Redditch Borough Councils (The Councils) approach towards the charging of and consultation with its tenant and leaseholder residents in the Borough, in line with statutory and regulatory requirements, while producing high levels of satisfaction with the chargeable services they receive.

1.1 **AIMS AND OBJECTIVES**

2.1 To provide good quality and value for money chargeable services, and accurate, transparent and fair charging processes to our residents in the Redditch Borough.

2.2 Our aims are to ensure that:

- Our approach is fair, open and transparent.
- We procure services that are value for money
- We are effective, efficient and accurate in setting and recovering our costs
- Our policies, procedures and information are high quality, clear and understood by all using them.
- We meet our contractual, regulatory and legal requirements

3.0 **RESPONSIBILITIES**

3.1 Overall responsibility for service charging strategy and operations sits with the 4th Tier Housing Managers, who are responsible for proposing, aligning and influencing strategic aims and objectives & executive decisions into operations within the housing and housing property service.

3.2 The provision of accurate service charge data for calculation is the responsibility of the Housing Property Services Team, and the Councils Property Services and Environmental Services and Finance Teams.

3.2 The calculation of service costs, scheduling into leases and tenancies and administration of charges are the responsibility of the Housing Income Charges Team.

3.3 The recovery of service charge revenue for tenants is the responsibility of the Housing Income Team, and leaseholder revenue, including Section 20 income is the Charges Team.

3.4 Leaseholders and tenants are responsible for paying service charges to cover several expenses incurred because of managing and maintaining communal areas in and around the development.

3.5 Leaseholders are also responsible for paying their share of building insurance and maintenance costs. Tenants have these costs included in their rent.

4.0 Rent setting

4.1 Under central government rent setting policy, rents for tenants are set based on a formula that allows the Council to meet its obligations towards its residents and maintain its housing stock. The basis for calculation of the formula is relative property value and local earnings, and number of bedrooms.

4.3 The rent is then uplifted each year in April, using the Consumer Price Index (CPI), plus 1%, up to 2024-25. However, there is some flexibility for the Council to set rents at up to 5% above the formula rent (10% for supported and sheltered housing), to take account of local factors and concerns.

4.4 Rents should include all charges associated with the occupation of a property, including building insurance, maintenance, and general housing management services

5.0 Service charge setting

5.1 In addition to rent, tenants and leaseholders, who receive chargeable services may be recharged for the costs of providing those services through service charging. Some common services that could be available to be recharged for are:

- Cleaning, clearing and caretaking of internal common areas
- Grounds maintenance and gardening
- Door entry systems and lifeline services
- Television aerials
- Communal utility supplies to cover lighting & heating for example
- Lifts
- Concierge
- Building insurance (Leaseholders only)
- Management fee to cover the costs and overheads of preparing service charge estimates and accounts to leaseholders

5.2 Service charges must reflect the services being provided and the costs reasonable and transparent.

5.3 For social rent tenants the service charges will be identified separately to the rent charge, and for tenants subject to Affordable Rents, the service charge costs are all encompassed within the rent charge but can still be described and itemised for identification of the services provided.

5.4 The Housing Service will endeavour to align the annual service charge setting process, with the annual rent setting process, and to keep charges affordable. However, if additional new charges need to be made during the budget year, appropriate notification will be made prior to implementing the charge/s, as per the terms of the Tenancy or Lease Agreement.

5.5 The Council charges for services in two ways:

5.6 **Fixed service charging (Tenants)**

5.6.1 Fixed service charging is used for setting service charges to tenants. The Council uses its data to estimate the cost of providing services to the development for the coming year. The cost is then split between the individual properties. Once the charge is set, it is fixed for the year, with the Council absorbing any variations between the estimated and actual costs during that year.

5.6.2 Changes in service charges are applied at the same time as changes in rent, which will generally be not more than once per year from 1st April.

5.6.3 Every year, no later than 14th February, tenants can expect to receive:

- A notification letter
- A schedule of services to be delivered
- A service charge information sheet

5.7 **Variable service charging (Leaseholders)**

5.7.1 Is used for setting service charges for leaseholders. An estimate is prepared in February of each year for the anticipated costs of delivering services over the next budget year (1st April to 31st March), and charges are applied from the 1st of April each year.

5.7.2 At the end of the budget year the estimated and actual costs are examined and compared. If the actual costs are higher than estimated, the leaseholder will receive additional charges to make up the shortfall. Where it is lower, there will be a refund due.

5.7.2 Every year, usually no later than 30th of September leaseholders can expect to receive

- An annual statement of expenditure on services over the budget year just passed.

5.7.3 Every year, no later than 14th February, leaseholders can expect to receive:

- A notification letter with the estimated service charges for the next budget year, set out in the required format
- A schedule of services to be delivered
- A service charge information sheet
- Rights and obligations information sheet

5.7.4 Leaseholders can inspect the accounts, receipts and other supporting documents relating to the service charge/s upon a request made within six months of receiving the summary of costs, and upon payment of a reasonable administration charge.

6.0 Service charge apportionment

- 6.1 Irrespective of equal usage of common facilities or services, the Council will generally apportion (split) the total cost of providing each service equally between each home in the development, so that each resident has an equal share of the costs. For example, if you live on the ground floor of a block of flats, you will still be apportioned an equal charge for any lift service.
- 6.2 The exception to this policy is if you live in a block of flats and have direct access to your property from external areas without accessing any internal common parts. In these cases, you would not share such costs as internal communal cleaning and lighting, for example
- 6.2 If an apportionment method is specified in the lease, which is different to the above policy, the method specified in the lease will be followed
- 3.2.4 consider the opportunity of potential new income, particularly in response to and support of new community strategies.
- 3.2.5 The annual cost of providing services, plus any applicable administration fee, will be calculated and divided between all tenants and residents on the defined development and charged / balanced over the course of the following 12 months. Any surplus accrued or deficit owing at the end of the financial year will be credited or debited into the subsequent years' service charge accordingly.

7.0 Management fees

- 7.1 Once all service charges are apportioned, a management fee of 15% is added.

8.0 Temporary Accommodation Service Charges

- 8.1 Where temporary accommodation units are provided from the Councils housing stock in blocks of flats, all applicable fixed service charging will apply, including reasonable charges for the replacement of goods and furniture, for example.

8.0 Major works & leaseholders

- 8.1 There is a separate process for charging Leaseholders for the cost of major, or recurring works using the consultation method set out in Section 20 of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1995. This applies where the cost of works for each household exceeds £250 or £100 per year for a service contract lasting more than one year.

9.0 Reserve funds

- 9.1 If you are a leaseholder living in a development, there may be a reserve fund in place that you are required to contribute to. The reserve fund aims to cover the costs of major repair or replacement of key building components, such as roofs, for example, over their estimated lifetime.
- 9.2 If a reserve fund is in place, contributions are held in a separate interest-bearing account and are accounted for each development annually, and you will be provided with an annual reserve fund statement.

10.0 Payment terms, arrears and debt recovery

- 10.1 Although various payment methods are available and will be promoted to all residents to meet their various liabilities, Direct Debit and online payments will be encouraged as the preferred methods of payment.
- 10.2 Most tenants service charges will form the gross weekly rent, and that rent is due one week in advance. Whilst recognising those tenants who claim benefits such as UC have a waiting time and the Council and the civil courts would not allow a possession case to proceed where there is an outstanding benefit claim.
- 10.3 Leaseholders, however, don't pay rent, and will be in transaction with the service twice annually with apportionment of their service charges. It is possible for leaseholders to make a payment arrangement to meet the costs of their share of service charges and Section 20 consultations, but the account must be clear by 1st March each year, unless there are exceptional circumstances, by agreement and at the discretion of the Council.
- 10.4 Rent and service charge arrears will be recovered in accordance with the Housing Revenue Management Policy for tenants.
- 10.5 Leaseholder arrears will also be managed in accordance with the Housing Revenue Management Policy, for leaseholders, and could result in forfeiture of the lease.
- 10.6 If you are experiencing difficulties with paying rent and / or charges we can provide or refer you to people that will help you. Please contact us.
- 10.7 Leaseholders have a right to ask for an independent First Tier Tribunal (Residential Property) to decide a dispute about service charges. Refer to their website.

11.0 Queries and Complaints

- 11.1 You can query your service charge or contact us at any time or visit our webpage to answer any frequently asked questions and submit an enquiry form.

11.2 Where an applicant or legal occupier is not satisfied with any matter such as standard of service, actions, or lack of actions by or conduct Council officers or its partners or contractors, then a complaint can be made. This section should be read in accordance with the Housing Services Complaints and Enquiries Standard.

11.3 Complaints can be made in writing to:

**Housing Complaints
Redditch Borough Council
Town Hall
Walter Stranz Square
Redditch
B98 8AH**

Or emailing: housingcomplaints@redditchbc.gov.uk

12.0 Performance & Reporting

12.1 Targets for key areas of this policy will be set annually to monitor performance against target. Performance will be reported in line with legislation or as directed corporately.

13.0 Equality

13.1 The Council promotes equal opportunities in the services it provides. Our aim is to implement and maintain services which ensure that no resident is treated less favourably on the grounds of gender, being or becoming a transsexual person, being married or in a civil partnership, religion, belief or lack of religion or belief, race, nationality, ethnic or national origin, colour, disability, age, being pregnant or having children or sexual orientation nor is disadvantaged by the application of a rule, condition, or requirement, which has a discriminatory effect which cannot be justified by law.

14.0 Legislation & Guidance

- Data Protection Act 2018
- Equality Act 2010
- Landlord and Tenant Acts 1985 & 87 (as amended)
- Housing Act 1988
- Housing Act 1996
- Housing Act 2004
- The Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016
- Regulator of Social Housing Rent Standard 2020
- Service Charges (Consultation requirements) Regulations 2003

15.0 Related Policy & Procedure

- Leaseholder Policy
- Housing Revenue Management Policy
- Housing Complaints Standard
- Tenancy Management Policy
- Temporary Accommodation Policy
- Write off Policy