

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Tuesday, 17th February,
2026

MINUTES

Present:

Councillor Matthew Dormer (Chair), Councillor Craig Warhurst (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Claire Davies, James Fardoe, Andrew Fry and Rita Rogers

Officers:

Guy Revans, Simon Parry, Debra Goodall, Jonathan Elger and Andrew Rainbow

Democratic Services Officers:

M Sliwinski

69. APOLOGIES AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Boyd, Mathur, and Wren. The Portfolio Holder for Housing, Councillor Hartnett, had also submitted his apologies.

70. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND OF PARTY WHIP

There were no declarations of interest nor of party whip.

71. MINUTES

The minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 12th January 2026 were submitted for Members' consideration.

RESOLVED that

The minutes of the meeting of Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 12th January 2026 be approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chair.

72. PUBLIC SPEAKING

Chair

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

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

[With agreement of the Committee, agenda item 12 - Task Groups, Short Sharp Reviews and Working Groups - Update Reports – was considered at this point in the meeting (after agenda item 4 – Public Speaking)].

The Working Group and Task Group updates were provided as follows:

a) Budget Scrutiny Working Group

Councillor Warhurst reported that the Group was due to meet on Friday 20th February 2026. An interim Budget update would also be provided at this meeting. An update on the Council's Budget position was subsequently provided by the Assistant Director for Finance and Customer Services.

It was noted that the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) position as reported in the MTFP 2026/27 to 2028/29 at the Executive Committee meeting on 13th January 2026 was an overspend of £345,000 for 2026/27, an underspend of £55,000 in 2027/28, and an underspend of £85,000 in 2028/29. Members were informed that there had been a number of movements since and the updated position on MTFP as of this meeting was that of an £177,000 underspend in 2026/27, £224,000 underspend in 2027/28, and £686,000 underspend in 2028/29.

It was explained that this updated MTFP position was due to a number of factors. For this financial year, the previously budgeted gap of £1,062 million had been managed down through work around vacancy provision and, in addition, there had been changes to the Council's calculation of business rates appeals and loses in line with Government's recommended practice and changes to assumptions on Members' allowances reducing costs. An additional Council Tax growth had been built for 2027/28 as 180 properties would be added in the Borough and there were assumptions of Council Tax increases of 2.99% for 2027/28 and 2028/29. It was reported that the three-year final local government finance settlement for 2026/27 to 2028/29 had not resulted in significant movements to the Council's budget position compared to previous assumptions.

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The Assistant Director Finance and Customer Services highlighted that the key risks within the budget around the vacancy figure saving built into the budget following the establishment review, the inflation assumptions around areas such as Council's contracts, and the delivery of £250,000 of savings across service areas as the savings targets had not been delivered by all service areas. It was highlighted that capital financing available to the Council at present was also restricted at £1.1 million compared to £1.6 million submitted in capital funding bids by the service areas and Rubicon.

In addition there were challenges in terms of the impact of local government reorganisation (LGR) on the Council's revenue, sustainability constraints, and the need to deliver projects requested by elected members before the unitary local government structure is due to come into effect in April 2028.

To address these challenges, it was explained by the Assistant Director Finance and Customer Services that the review of reserves had been carried out and following this it had been proposed to create the following Reserves:

- Risk Reserve of £2.5 million
- Local Government Reorganisation Reserve of £500,000 in 2026/27 and £500,000 in 2027/28 (which would be profiled so that expenditure was matched to demand)
- Community Investment Fund of £1.6 million – to add to the current £1.1 million capital financing available and provide fund for projects.

It was noted that the Council also would work on policy for flexible use of capital receipts to utilise those for transformation projects where possible. It would also be the aim to increase the General Fund reserves slightly over the next three years.

Following the presentation of the Budget Update, questions and comments were made as follows:

- Mitigation of the £1.062 million budget gap – It was explained by Officers that the budget gap emerging out of last year's Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) had been mitigated through work on this year's budget through proposals as set out in the presentation provided.
- Utilising reserves before the Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) – The Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Performance, Engagement and Governance

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addressed the Committee and explained that the Executive was currently reviewing the capital projects proposals for utilising some of the Council's reserves before LGR unitarisation. It was explained that the Council needed to account for and assess what funds were realistically required for LGR. The Deputy Leader added that the reserves that could be utilised by the Council before LGR were therefore lower than the Council's total reserves figure and the Council made a commitment to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) that a proportion of the authority's reserves would be handed over to a new unitary authority structure.

- Members queried when plans would be finalised for investing the Council's reserves that could be utilised prior to the unitarisation in initiatives in Redditch. It was responded that most spend decisions were not yet made and that these decisions would take place over the next few months. The Deputy Leader explained that among the initiatives to be funded would be upgrades to or creation of play areas in parts of the Borough where this provision was lacking or insufficient.
- A question was raised regarding the protracted arrangements regarding some of the specific section 106 agreements. It was responded that a review of the Council's Section 106 arrangements was currently ongoing. Officers undertook to provide a response to Members regarding the specific query raised in the meeting.

b) Performance Scrutiny Working Group

Councillor Warhurst reported that there were currently no meetings of Performance Scrutiny that were planned to take place.

c) Post-16 Education Task Group

The Chair of the Task Group, Councillor Warhurst, reported that the next meeting of the Task Group was due to take place tomorrow (18th February).

RESOLVED that

the Task Groups and Working Groups Update Reports be noted.

74. LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION (LGR) - UPDATE REPORT

An update was provided on the Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) including the reminder of the current timetable for LGR and the work that had been undertaken already in preparation for LGR and the future work arrangements.

It was recapped that five district authorities in Worcestershire: Redditch Borough, Bromsgrove District, Malvern Hills, Worcester City, and Wychavon had submitted a joint proposal to Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) titled Transforming Worcestershire advocating for the North/South two unitary option in Worcestershire. The other proposal that was submitted by Worcestershire County Council and Wyre Forest District Council was advocating a single unitary authority for Worcestershire. The Government's statutory consultation on these proposals was expected to launch shortly and following these the Government would be considering the proposals and was expected to make its decision before the summer recess in July 2026.

The Executive Director reported that following a successful system wide workshop on the 7th of January 2026 with Chief Executives, Monitoring Officers, Transformation leads and Section 151 Finance Officers from every authority in Worcestershire, the Councils had established interim governance for preparatory pre-decision activity in regard to LGR from January 2026 until receipt of a decision from MHCLG before the summer recess in July 2026. A monthly LGR Programme Board had been established with Chief Executives from the seven authorities as core members. This board will report to Members via the cross-county Leaders Board as necessary.

There were five key workstreams as part of this preparations phase and senior officers from Redditch and Bromsgrove Councils were the Senior Responsible Officers (SROs) in respect of two of the workstreams – on Programme Management and Service Delivery.

Following the presentation of the report, it was commented that part of the rationale for the Council allocating a £500,000 per year LGR reserve was to support the transformation and allow officers to charge any costs associated with LGR transformation work to the reserve created. It was further commented by Members that there would be resource issues associated that would be increasing as the LGR progressed that would need to be considered and planned for.

RESOLVED that

- 1) the progress to date in submitting an application to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) for a two-unitary model titled, 'Transforming Worcestershire', be noted.**
- 2) the governance that has been established for Local Government Reorganisation in Worcestershire and the next steps outlined in this paper be noted.**

75. QUARTER 3 HOUSING IMPROVEMENT PLAN UPDATE - PRE-SCRUTINY

A Quarter 3 update on the Housing Improvement Plan was provided for Members' consideration. A summary of progress against each of the Consumer Standards was presented within the report and some of the Consumer Standards metrics were highlighted within the presentation for this item.

The overall progress was that 15 actions within the Housing Improvement Plan had been completed within Quarter 3 of 2025/26 compared to 6 completed actions at Quarter 2. 9 of the actions completed at Quarter 3 were denoted as green-rated.

On the overdue repairs and maintenance jobs, it was reported that since the Regulatory Judgment, the number of overdue jobs had reduced from circa 3,000 to 1,047 at the end of Quarter 3.

In terms of overdue fire safety remedial actions, it was explained by Officers that there would be a proposal within the budget to provide additional funding to finance fire door/compartimentation works and accelerate the programme.

In terms of engagement with the tenants, new communications strategy was currently being drafted and a draft engagement policy was being worked on and was expected to be presented before the Overview and Scrutiny and Executive Committees in June 2026. This year's Tenant Satisfaction Survey was reported to have achieved 887 responses which was a 35 per cent increase on last year's response rate. It was expected that the Civica Cx Tenants Portal would go live in April 2026.

To strengthen staff resourcing, following a review, a Senior Complaints Officer had been recruited, starting in December 2025,

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and the post of a Complaints Officer would be recruited to in Q4 2025/26.

For anti-social behaviour (ASB), there was one outstanding item relating to the implementation of an ASB module on the Housing Management Software, which was to provide greater consistency and performance in monitoring of cases.

A Member commented that the report appeared to indicate that issues with software systems for housing management and for repairs and maintenance were among the main reasons preventing the Council from addressing the backlog in repairs and issues around tenants portal and housing management.

The Assistant Director Environmental and Housing Property Services clarified that the Civica Housing Management System was operating correctly and the use of the system by the Council had evolved as Officers learned and utilised more modules on the system. In contrast, there had been issues experienced with the Total Mobile repairs and maintenance system with the project being behind schedule. To address the problems experienced, the Council's Officers met with Total Mobile representatives, and a project team had been formed to work on resolving these problems.

It was highlighted that the Total Mobile project implementation suffered from issues such as initial consultant assigned to work with the Council not being able to effectively resolve the issues that the Council experienced with the system as well as previous issues with capacity in the Housing Team hampering the project. The focus remained on staff members being trained to feel confident in using the system before it would be rolled out and it was now expected that the Total Mobile system would go live in May 2026.

The number of stock condition surveys undertaken was queried as Members commented that the proportion of the housing stock having had the survey completed was reported at a higher figure in prior years. It was clarified that the Social Housing Regulator required the figure for stock condition surveys to reflect those done over the last five years only. The Council's figure had dropped because there was a drop in the number of surveys undertaken, in particular over the pandemic period. It was noted that as of present only 20 per cent of housing stock had a condition survey undertaken in the last five years with 25 per cent having no recorded condition survey. It was explained that from 2022-23 there had been an increase in the number of surveys undertaken and

there was a programme in place to improve the reported figure to 100 per cent.

The Assistant Director Environmental and Housing Property Services explained that the format of the quarterly Housing reports would change for the next quarter with a forward view of what is planned in terms of work for the next quarter and a statistical summary showing if the planned work targets had been met.

A question was asked with respect of the frequency at which the Council revaluated its housing stock property values. It was responded that there was annual valuation in place.

RESOLVED that

the Housing Improvement Plan Quarter 3 2025/26 Update, which includes actions to address areas for improvement, confirmed as part of the Regulator of Social Housing inspection process, be noted.

76. QUARTER 3 HOUSING PERFORMANCE - PRE-SCRUTINY

The Assistant Director of Environmental and Housing Property Services presented the Housing Consumer Standards Report for Quarter 3 2025/26. The report detailed the Council's performance in relation to 10 of the Regulator of Social Housing tenant satisfaction measures.

It was reported that there had been some improvement compared to Quarter 2 in respect of the Homes that Do Not Meet the Decent Homes Standards measure. The current non-decency percentage (i.e. housing stock properties which did not meet the Decent Homes Standard) was 10.95 per cent, which was a decrease from a figure of 11.90 per cent at Quarter 2.

For non-emergency and emergency repairs completed within the landlord's target timescale, it was noted that there had been a plateau in performance over Quarter 3. In terms of outstanding repairs, an example was given in terms of 40 outstanding fencing jobs. Work was ongoing to assess the shortfall in performance against the priority codes and to ensure that accurate and timely closure of jobs was completed on the system.

Most measures under maintaining building safety showed 100 per cent compliance with issues experienced in electrical test of communal areas (EI02) where the performance had fallen below

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target due to two electrical inspection certificates having yet to be received from the contractor. The Council had also experienced resource issues in the area of electrical compliance through this quarter with the Electrical Compliance Manager leaving in September 2025 and the Council being unable to recruit into this position either on a permanent or temporary basis. In the interim, corrective actions were identified through the contractor carrying out the inspections.

The complaints performance was discussed and it was noted that at Quarter 3 there had been more complaints received, largely due to seasonal issue with wetter weather resulting in more issues such as leaks. 80 per cent of complaints received over Quarter 3 related to repairs and maintenance.

In terms of Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB), it was reported that at Quarter 3, 55 new ASB cases were started and 56 cases were closed within the period. The team were managing 65 live ASB cases as of report writing. It was highlighted that there was a year-on-year rise in the number of ASB cases and it was thought that several factors contributed to this increase, such as the continued cost of living crisis and the impact of this on people's mental health and general wellbeing as well as the year-on-year improvements in the Council's recording and capturing of incidents of ASB/Nuisance and Hate Crime.

It was highlighted that with the new Neighbourhood and Tenancy Team structure coming into place and expected to be fully staffed by March 2026, a further rise in ASB cases as all local areas in the Borough would be covered by a Neighbourhood and Tenancy Officer. However, to provide more prevention support, there would also be an increase in the numbers in the Tenancy Sustainment Team which should stop many cases from escalating to enforcement.

Following the presentation of the report, there were several aspects of the report discussed by Members:

- Number of properties with gas supply capped – It was clarified that the figure of 181 at paragraph 3.10 referred to the total number of properties that had their gas supply capped as of the end of Quarter 3. This compared to 204 properties at end of Quarter 2. It was explained that in some cases this was due to the tenants themselves requesting to have their gas supply capped, but there was some concern about the number of properties where Officers had not been

admitted to undertake gas inspections and where access could not be gained the gas supply had been capped for safety reasons.

- It was reported that the properties where gas was capped for a more significant period of time were prioritised in terms of tenancy visits and details were shared with the Neighbourhood and Tenancy team to provide opportunity for tenancy visits to ensure any underlying issues could be identified and support solutions for the household provided. It was further clarified that where gas to the property was capped, the tenant remained responsible for arranging matters with their gas supplier such as ending the contract, and the tenant rather than the Council remained liable for any gas bills.
- Carbon monoxide detectors – A question was asked about the brand and model of carbon monoxide detectors being installed by the Council in its housing stock. Officers undertook to provide details of this to Members.
- A specific question was asked by a Member with regard to the condition of the steps in Abbeydale. Officers commented that there had been issues identified including with threads and depth of cover on the steps which was being investigated by the Council. A specific response would be provided to the Member concerned outside the meeting.

RESOLVED that

the Council's Quarter 3 Housing Performance for 2025/26 in respect of the Tenant Satisfaction Measures (Landlord) be noted.

77. REPAIRS AND MAINTENANCE AND DAMP AND MOULD POLICIES - PRE-SCRUTINY

The report in respect of the Repairs & Maintenance Policy and the Damp & Mould Policy was presented to Committee. It was noted that these policies, subject to consideration at this Overview and Scrutiny meeting, recommendation by Executive Committee and approval by Full Council, would cover all Council house tenants regardless of tenancy type.

It was highlighted that in the Repairs and Maintenance and Damp and Mould Policies, the Council planned to introduce a new

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timescale for completion of larger works (titled Planned Maintenance Repair) where the target time for completion would be up to 60 working days. This would be for works which could not wait to be completed as part of the investment works programme and would be dealt with on a programmed repairs basis.

Following the presentation, Members discussed several matters in relation to the report and the Policies:

- Communication with the tenants regarding the Repairs and Maintenance and the Damp and Mould Policies – It was reported that these new policies would be communicated to residents through the Council's website, which would be updated once these Policies are approved, and detail would also be included in the Housing Annual Report which is sent to all tenants in printed form.
- Advice on mould and damp – It was remarked that more reliable information and education on the need to appropriately ventilate properties to prevent damp and mould was needed, including through modernising the Council's website and offering more responsive advice so that information was quickly available to the tenants.
- Need for professional information on damp and mould prevention – Members discussed the need for a better, more targeted communication from the Council around damp and mould prevention. It was commented that it was important to provide messaging and advice to challenge perceptions, such as to opinions that actions to eliminate damp/mould such as keeping heating at higher temperature and ventilating homes regularly would lead to more expensive and unaffordable energy bills.
- Officers explained that work with the third sector around provision of advice and support was important as was work of the Housing Tenancy Team to ensure tenants who needed financial support were claiming the correct benefits for example.
- Overcrowding and rehousing of tenants in cases of damp and mould issues that could not be resolved – It was explained that overcrowding did not lead in itself to damp and mould issues, however, because the property was overcrowded this could lead to other issues that in turn led to damp and mould. It was noted that provision of alternative

properties or temporary housing was dependent on the turnaround in the void properties that the Council had; however, in cases where no resolution to issues with serious damp and mould could be found and there were no void properties available, then temporary accommodation would be provided for tenants in the property affected. If the property could not be brought up to acceptable standard, the tenants affected would also be put on the appropriate priority council house waiting list banding so they could be re-housed as soon as possible.

- Members discussed the possibility of adding references to sources of financial support available to tenants who were struggling with damp and mould and were finding it difficult to afford energy heating costs to the Damp and Mould Policy as well a reference to advice on how tenants could better insulate their homes to prevent issues with damp and mould. The Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Performance, Engagement and Governance reassured the Committee that these suggestions would be reported to and considered by the Executive Committee but added that naming any specific support organisations within the Policy should be avoided.

Following the discussion, the recommendations that the Repairs and Maintenance Policy and the Damp and Mould Policy both be approved were endorsed by the Committee.

RECOMMENDED that

- 1) The Repairs and Maintenance Policy, which forms part of the Councils Housing Asset Management Strategy, be approved.**
- 2) The Damp and Mould Policy, which forms part of the Councils Housing Asset Management Strategy, be approved.**

78. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT 2025-26

The Chair presented the draft Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2025-26 for consideration by Committee Members. The final report would be presented to the Full Council meeting on 2nd March 2026.

RESOLVED that

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the draft Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2025-26 be approved.

79. EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE'S WORK PROGRAMME - SELECTING ITEMS FOR SCRUTINY

The Executive Committee Work Programme was submitted for Members' consideration. It was noted that an update on environmental enforcement from Worcestershire Regulatory Services (WRS) would be provided at the next meeting of Overview and Scrutiny (16th March) in addition to the scrutiny of the two Executive reports by WRS that were added to the Overview and Scrutiny work programme previously.

RESOLVED that

the Executive Committee's Work Programme be noted.

80. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

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

RESOLVED that

the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme be noted.

81. EXTERNAL SCRUTINY BODIES - UPDATE REPORTS

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

- a) West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) Overview and Scrutiny Committee

As Councillor Boyd submitted his apologies for this meeting, there was no update on this external scrutiny body.

- b) West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) Transport Delivery Overview and Scrutiny

Councillor Fardoe reported that he had submitted his apologies at the last meeting of the Transport Delivery Overview and Scrutiny.

- c) Worcestershire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC)

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Councillor Fry reported that there were recent postponements and cancellations to meetings of this Committee and there was currently a busy work programme with the most recent meeting taking place on 11th February 2026 at which annual review of Public Health and overview from the West Midlands Ambulance Service were considered.

Councillor Fry reported a concern with the number of vacancies on the HOSC. There were currently three vacancies on the HOSC all of which were from Worcestershire County Council elected members.

RESOLVED that

the External Scrutiny Bodies updates be noted.

The Meeting commenced at 6.30 pm
and closed at 8.07 pm