Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Monday, 7th September, 2026

MINUTES

Present:

Councillor Nicola Lloyd (Chair), and Councillors Sharon Harvey, Joanna Kane, David Meredith, Nic Pioli, Rita Rogers and Jane Spilsbury

Also Present:

Councillor Matthew Dormer – Leader of the Council

Officers:

James Walton, Simon Parry, Judith Willis, Lyndsey Berry, Jonathan Elger and Helen Mole

Democratic Services Officers:

Sarah Woodfield

29. APOLOGIES AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Roger Bennett with Councillor Nic Pioli attending the meeting as a named substitute.

30. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND OF PARTY WHIP

There were no declarations of interest nor of party whip.

31. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 27 July 2026 were submitted for Members' consideration.

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting of Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 27 July 2026 be approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chair.

Chair

32. PUBLIC SPEAKING

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

33. RBC EQUALITY STRATEGY 2026-2028 (INCLUDING ENGAGEMENT POLICY) - PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY

The Committee considered the Council Equality Strategy 2026-28 and the accompanying Engagement Policy 2026-28. Officers explained that these documents were due to be submitted to Executive Committee and to full Council for final decision later in September 2026.

The Equality Strategy did not establish a separate programme of initiatives, but applied an equality focus to existing services, projects, partnerships, engagement and improvement work to ensure Council's decisions, services and communications are fair, accessible and responsive to the varied needs of residents.

The Strategy built on the previous equality strategy. Officers highlighted some of the achievements that the Council had achieved in relation to equalities including access to secure and affordable housing through delivery of new council homes in Church Hill, improvements to the Redditch housing allocation system to strengthen fairness and transparency, the development of the Town Hall as an accessible community hub, and investment in skills, innovation and public spaces.

The Strategy was supported by the Action Plan which brought together data on activity taking place across Council services to deliver the authority's four equality objectives. The Action Plan would enable more consistent monitoring of progress under each of the four objectives and enable the Council to demonstrate to residents how equality considerations were embedded within the authority's work.

Members were advised that equality considerations should be identified early, supported by evidence, reflected in decisions and reported transparently. Although the position regarding Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) had changed shortly before the meeting, Members stressed that the Council's equality duties and responsibilities continued irrespective of any decisions regarding LGR. The Committee was reminded that Member Training on Equality Matters was scheduled for 14 September 2026.

Members welcomed the Council's new Equality Strategy and the progress made in improving Equality Impact Assessments. A question was raised about the absence of a specific reference to the Armed Forces community and the Armed Forces Covenant. Officers explained that the strategy was not intended to list every project or group and did not supersede the Housing Assistance Policy or other policies containing specific commitments the Council had with respect to the Armed Forces. Instead, the Equality Strategy and the Engagement Policy were designed to reinforce those policies and the Equality Act 2010 framework.

The Committee endorsed the report recommendation as printed.

RECOMMENDED that

the Equality Strategy 2026-2028 (including the Engagement Policy) be approved.

34. REDDITCH TOWN CENTRE STRATEGY - PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY

The Committee considered the proposed Redditch Town Centre Strategy and the accompanying action plan. Officers explained that the strategy provided a vision and framework for the future development, management and promotion of the town centre. It was intended to guide investment, support partnership working and align activity around a shared set of priorities. The Strategy focuses on supporting a strong and diverse economy, improvements to the public realm, enhancing accessibility and safety, increasing footfall through events and activities, and encouraging investment and long-term sustainability. It was highlighted that this was a strategic document rather than a detailed delivery plan, with the initial action plan focusing mainly on the first 12-months.

The Leader of the Council was invited to speak and in doing so he stated that the Strategy was intended to make the town centre a place where people chose to spend time rather than merely pass through. He outlined current strengths of the Town Centre which included the Kingfisher Shopping Centre, the Church Green, the Palace Theatre, local heritage and the strong business community.

The Leader highlighted that there remained persistent issues which included levels of cleanliness, poor shop fronts, large number of vacant units, landscaping, signage and the general appearance of large parts of the town centre area. The Leader noted that alongside officers he had, and would continue to, undertake regular

'walks' to check on the town centre and monitor progress. All elected members were invited to join these walks. A Member noted that long-term regeneration aims for the town centre had to be pursued alongside visible day-to-day improvements and in that regard the continued development of partnership engagement with the College, the Kingfisher Centre, Police, businesses and the County Council was welcomed.

Members asked whether views had been sought from outside Redditch and how the town could distinguish itself from nearby centres. Officers confirmed that there had been no specific consultation outside the Borough, although other town centre strategies had been reviewed. During discussion the role of Kingfisher Shopping Centre as a major covered retail destination was highlighted alongside the work of Redditch Business Improvement District (BID), the role of transport connections and the opportunity to encourage existing Kingfisher Centre footfall to visit the wider town centre. Members also referred to changing shopping habits, online retail, weaknesses in the night-time economy in the Borough and the effect of business rates, noting that the business rates were set by the central government. It was commented that increased business rates retention would allow local authorities the flexibility in tackling problems such as vacant shop units.

The Committee discussed the Council's relationship with the Kingfisher Centre and the issue of vacancies of town centre premises. It was reported that dialogue with the centre's ownership should be strengthened so the Council's and Kingfisher's plans could be aligned more closely. The Leader of the Council explained that officers were exploring the statutory and other powers available to address poorly maintained or empty premises and highlighted that parts of the town centre were within a conservation area which provided the Council with certain additional powers. The possibility of Council undertaking purchases of long-term empty units was also mentioned as a possibility. It was noted that the Council's available powers in relation to vacant premises, poor shop fronts, signage and conservation-area standards would be reviewed.

A Member queried the action attract visitors and asked about the proposed Young People's Town Centre Forum. Officers clarified that establishment of the forum remained an objective rather than a completed action. An initial workshop had been held jointly with Heart of Worcestershire (HoW) College on how young people used the town centre, what they wanted from it and how to increase employment opportunities in the town centre. Further engagement

would be developed with schools, education providers and youth organisations so that young people's views continued to inform delivery of the Strategy.

The Committee endorsed the report recommendation as printed.

RECOMMENDED that

the Redditch Town Centre Strategy and Action Plan be approved.

35. HOUSING DECANT POLICY - PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY

The Committee considered a report on the Housing Decant Policy which set out how the Council would support tenants and leaseholders where it was necessary to move them into temporary accommodation. The Policy outlined the arrangements that would apply in different circumstances, including the Council's financial and legal obligations. It also detailed the compensation available to tenants who were permanently displaced as a result of demolition or major refurbishment works, referred to under home loss and disturbance payments.

The Committee was informed that decants were currently most commonly required on a short-term basis, for example following damp and mould issues, fire or flood incidents. The Policy had been developed to provide greater detail than was previously contained within the Housing Management Policy and reflected the increased requirements arising from Awaab's Law. The updates to legislation placed stricter expectations on landlords to address hazards within properties and, where necessary, to move tenants to alternative accommodation while works were undertaken.

The Housing Decant Policy brought together the relevant housing law and sector good practice, clarified responsibilities for staff and tenants, which enabled clarification on many important details and reduced the risk of inconsistency or legal challenge. Members requested that the existing provisions on decant within the Tenancy Management Policy should be presented alongside this new Housing Decant Policy to enable Members to make comparisons between the Policies. It was agreed that this would be provided as part of the updated report going to full Council.

Members asked where households would be placed when larger family accommodation was already in high demand. Officers advised that the Council held approximately 40 dispersed

temporary accommodation units, generally with one or two bedrooms. Where necessary, a suitable void property could be prioritised temporarily before reallocation, although it was highlighted that there was a large waiting list for council housing which meant this option was not always possible. For short urgent periods, hotel or bed-and-breakfast accommodation, or more than one dispersed unit where appropriate, could be used. However, every effort was made to ensure that families, especially with young children, were not split into separate accommodation units.

Communication and notice periods were discussed. Officers explained that in the event of emergency moves following a fire, flood or other serious hazard, a decant might need to take place immediately, and the notice periods stated in the policy could not be adhered to. However, when the move was as a result of planned major programmed works, there would be a longer notice period and a named officer would be in place to support the household. Assistance could include coordinating the move, arranging utilities and meter readings, transport, furnishings and other practical needs.

During discussion, it was explained that tenants would not be charged rent on the temporary property because rent on the substantive home would usually continue. Officers undertook to clarify the Council Tax arrangements that applied during a temporary decant but explained that households would not be expected to pay Council Tax on both properties in case of a decant.

Members requested information about the scale of decanting within Redditch. Officers estimated that there were five or six households in decant accommodation at the time of the meeting, although the number fluctuated and could be affected by seasonal property problems or problems identified during tenancy visits undertaken by housing officers. It was agreed that Members would be provided with recent annual figures showing the number of households decanted and any identifiable trend.

The legal status of decant temporary accommodation was considered. It was noted that during the decant, tenants retained their secure tenancy and rent liability for their substantive ‘decanted’ home, whilst the temporary property was occupied under a decant licence which legally did not grant security of tenure. Tenants were legally obliged to return to their substantive property once works were satisfactorily completed and, as social housing landlord, the Council could take legal action in relation to this matter. It was

noted that the Council had discretion to allow permanent moves in exceptional circumstances where this was deemed appropriate.

Members expressed concern that the Policy used complex language in relation to a subject that could be highly stressful to tenants. Officers explained that some legal terminology was unavoidable but agreed that the Council should test the wording and clarity its housing policies with tenant panels and consider plain-English tools, visual material and alternative formats, to support tenants with understanding its policies.

Members asked why the Policy was being introduced at this time and whether this anticipated any major housing redevelopment that would adversely affect council tenants. Officers confirmed that no housing demolition programmes were planned and that the Council was actively seeking to increase its housing stock through new building and property acquisition. It was explained that the Policy was required to close an existing governance gap as it was felt a specific decant policy was required to respond to increased regulatory and safety duties, for example changes to designation of category one hazards.

The Committee also discussed introductory tenants and tenants subject to an outright possession order. Introductory tenants were normally within the first 12 months of their tenancy and did not yet hold a secure tenancy. They would normally be excluded from home-loss payments, although the Council would still provide appropriate practical support when necessary. A tenant subject to an outright possession order had lost tenancy rights and would not normally be provided with decant options. Officers accepted that emergency and short-term circumstances might require a pragmatic response and agreed to review whether the policy should explain this more fully. It was agreed that Officers would review the wording concerning tenants subject to an outright possession order and consider whether further detail should be added in the Policy on emergency or short-term support.

Following consideration of the report, the Committee endorsed the report recommendations as printed.

RECOMMENDED that

1) **The Housing Decant Policy be approved.**

2) **Authority be delegated to the Assistant Director of Community and Housing Services and Assistant**

Director of Environmental and Housing Property, following consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Housing, to agree any revisions to the Housing Policies following the consultation and in line with any legislative or government guidance updates.

36. Q1 2026/27 HOUSING PERFORMANCE AND IMPROVEMENT PLAN UPDATE - PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY

The Committee considered the combined report on Housing Performance and the Housing Improvement Plan for Quarter 1 2026/27. Officers explained that the two reports were previously considered separately but had been merged as performance and improvement activity within Housing were closely connected. The new format also included additional operational measures, including voids, tenancy audits, rental income and information collected to understand tenants' needs.

Improvements in performance were reported around building safety and compliance across gas, asbestos, water, and communal electrical safety. Standard void performance was stated to be within the upper quartile nationally. Complaint-handling had continued to improve and the tenancy audits were included now to strengthen the Council's understanding of tenants' needs and tailor services accordingly.

Repairs performance continued to improve but two key Housing Property Services vacancies had affected capacity during quarters one and two of this year. It was confirmed that Property Services Manager and Business Support Manager had now been recruited to and had started in their roles. The number of outstanding fire remedial actions had continued to reduce, with a second contractor having been engaged and an additional £1 million had been provided for fire compartmentation works. The dedicated damp and mould team was approaching its first anniversary and was reported to be performing strongly, although difficulties with gaining access to some properties, particularly where multi-stage treatments were required, had affected the Council's performance in this area. However, joint working was undertaken with the Tenancy Team to ensure that access issues were being resolved.

Officers summarised that of the Housing Improvement Plan actions, 30 had now been completed, 48 were on track for completion within timescales and 6 were behind schedule.

A Member referred to concerns raised by the Budget Scrutiny Working Group about performance in Housing, having reviewed the most recent quarterly corporate performance and financial monitoring reports. The Member explained that Housing performance appeared to be an area of concern in those reports, including in relation to measures such as households with children in temporary accommodation, complaint response times, repairs, vacancies, income collection, and legal costs within Housing.

Officers responded that in terms of the number of households with children that were in temporary accommodation, the figure for Redditch was 26 households which compared with other districts in Worcestershire as follows: 45 in Bromsgrove, 37 in Worcester City, 23 in Wychavon and 47 in Wyre Forest. The only outlier was Malvern Hills where the number was 6. It was stated that it was rare for the Council to have families with children in bed and breakfast accommodation and in Redditch there were no families with children who had remained in bed-and-breakfast accommodation for more than six weeks, which was a positive outcome. In terms of homelessness prevention, the Council also performed well regionally in terms of homelessness prevention and meeting the relief duty.

The reported increase in legal expenditure relating to tenants approaching solicitors over housing conditions was discussed. As the relevant performance and financial reports were not before the housing officers, Members considered that detailed responses should be prepared after the report and questions raised at Budget Scrutiny had been reviewed by officers. It was agreed that Housing officers would liaise with the officers responsible for the corporate performance and financial monitoring reports and provide responses to the housing questions raised by the Budget Scrutiny Working Group, including the reported legal costs.

Members questioned the timing and effect of staffing restructures. Officers explained that tenancy management, rent collection and homelessness service reviews had taken place during 2025 and were implemented in January 2026. Only one post had been removed and additional posts had been created, including a new tenancy-sustainment team. Recruitment difficulties arose where staff left following regrading and where the Council's pay position was temporarily less competitive than that of housing associations. It was noted that some vacancies, for example in Homelessness, remained difficult to fill and the use of career-graded posts depended on having experienced staff available to supervise.

Further, Housing Property Services experienced some turnover among skilled trades and used agency staff where necessary.

The Committee considered repairs and voids. Members highlighted a reported average of 164 days for capital voids against a target of 56 days. Officers explained that voids were classified as 'capital' where two or more major components of a house/apartment required replacement, for example kitchens, bathrooms, roofs, windows or doors. It was stated that performance from the original contractor had been unsatisfactory in this area, so the Council had appointed a second contractor and had also been implementing an improvement plan. It was highlighted that performance was better, by contrast, in day-to-day voids, which were being completed in approximately 29 days on average, and was described as an upper-quartile performance in the social housing sector. Members returned to capital voids which represented homes unavailable to housing applicants and thus required action to ensure more housing was freed up.

The drop in performance relating to the percentage of emergency damp and mould hazards made safe within 24 hours was also highlighted, with performance having fallen from 100 per cent in quarter four 2025/26 to 71 per cent in quarter one 2026/27. Officers stated that reported cases were triaged to assess severity and that serious category-one hazards could trigger a decant. The principal cause of missed timescales in this area was the inability to gain access despite the issue having been reported. The service had sufficient operational capacity but relied on tenants allowing access. It was highlighted that tenancy officers worked with households to understand the causes of tenants refusing access and to resolve any barriers. Members requested that they be provided with more detailed breakdown of causes underlying a drop in performance, what improvement action is being taken, and how performance would be measured.

Measures relating to anti-social behaviour, rent arrears and the effect of vacant posts on performance within the Housing team were also discussed. Members also asked about the Strategic Housing Improvement Group. Officers confirmed that the Strategic Housing Improvement Group continued to meet, attended by senior officers and the relevant Members, in particular the Portfolio Holder for Housing. It was agreed that consideration would be given to sharing minutes and/or appropriate update information from the Strategic Housing Improvement Group with the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Further actions were agreed by Members which included a request for a more detailed narrative on each measure within the Housing Performance and Improvement Plan reports, having narrative to describe any measures where deteriorations in performance are experienced, root causes, remedial action, responsible officers, with data reconciled across performance monitoring and finance monitoring reports and the specific quarterly housing reports.

It was also agreed that Housing Officers would be invited to the Budget Scrutiny Working Group meeting when the quarter two performance monitoring report would be considered, so that of the Housing data could be explained and any inconsistencies between specific Housing and Performance Monitoring reports resolved.

The report recommendations were endorsed as printed.

RECOMMENDED that

1) **The Council's Quarter 1 2026/27 Housing Performance be noted.**

2) **The Housing Improvement Plan Quarter 1 2026/27 Update be noted.**

37. EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MINUTES

The Executive Committee minutes were submitted to enable the Committee to note the outcomes of recommendations made previously by Overview and Scrutiny.

RESOLVED that

the Executive Committee minutes be noted.

38. EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME - SELECTING ITEMS FOR SCRUTINY

The Committee reviewed the Executive Committee Work Programme and considered items that might be suitable for pre-decision scrutiny.

The following items were identified for addition to the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme:

- Pride in Place Programme Governance – 23rd November meeting

- Review of Redditch Town Centre Public Space Protection Order (PSPO) – 23rd November meeting

Members also requested progress information on the Community Investment Fund, noting that funding had previously been approved and remained in earmarked reserves.

It was reported that proposals concerning Auxerre House might have changed since the item was first placed on the work programme and requested that this be checked.

Members also referred to the previously requested invitation to the NHS Trust to scrutinise the plans to redesign the adult mental health rehabilitation services, parking enforcement (due to be considered via the Redditch Civil Parking Enforcement report currently scheduled for 23rd November meeting), and the need for continued quarterly scrutiny of the Housing Performance and Improvement Plan Update report.

RESOLVED that

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

39. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

The Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme was updated with items as per consideration under the previous agenda item.

RESOLVED that

the updated Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme be noted.

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

Updates were provided on the meetings of Working Groups and Task Groups as follows:

a) Budget Scrutiny Working Group – Chair, Councillor Kane

The Chair of the Budget Scrutiny Working Group reported on the meetings held on 19 August and 3 September 2026. At the August meeting, Members had received the further financial context the Medium Term Financial Plan scene setting report for 2027/28

behind and were concerned that some Assistant Directors did not have sufficient clarity about their budgets. Work was under way to review each service budget with the relevant Assistant Director before quarter two monitoring reporting. The Working Group also considered the Treasury Management Outturn Report and the Financial Monitoring and Outturn Report. Members found the capital programme difficult to scrutinise because it was not always clear which schemes were supported by existing cash, and which schemes were funded by borrowing or external funding, and further clarification regarding this would be provided i

At the September meeting, the overall corporate performance position was reviewed. The Chair of Budget Scrutiny that the position appeared strong apart from issues in Housing as discussed earlier in this meeting. The financial monitoring report was also scrutinised and the full year forecast revenue position for 2026/27 was for a revenue overspend of £738,000, with the largest pressure in Financial and Customer Services arising from agency staffing and VAT-related work. The Council was nevertheless reported to remain in a relatively stable financial position. Housing-related legal costs and the Community Investment Fund were discussed. The Chair of Budget Scrutiny reported that it was understood that the Community Investment Fund remained available, but no requests had been submitted to drawdown from this Fund.

Members discussed the relationship between Overview and Scrutiny and its Working Groups and the Audit, Governance and Standards Committee. Officers explained that scrutiny examined quarterly financial and service performance, whilst the role of Audit was in considering the systems, controls and assurance supporting the figures, including the accounts closure process. Members were encouraged to attend other committees as observers where this would improve their understanding. During discussion, it was reported in relation to financial data, that quarter two financial monitoring data would include data following service budgets reviews undertaken with Assistant Directors. Officers explained that the Audit, Governance and Standards Committee could separately seek internal audit assurance on this process.

b) Performance Scrutiny Working Group – Chair, Councillor Harvey

The Performance Scrutiny Working Group had met on 29 July 2026. It considered the work of Bromsgrove and Redditch Network (BARN), an organisation which received substantial Council funding, including its role in matching volunteers to volunteering

opportunities and supporting local services. At the meeting, Members had asked questions of the organisation's representative and the representative had provided a presentation explaining BARN's work and use of funding. The Working Group also considered the neighbourhood warden scheme. Positive feedback was provided on the warden's role as an approachable link between residents and the Council, an important element in providing a visible point of contact for community safety issues. The wardens' role included early intervention, de-escalation and assistance with matters such as fly-tipping, and a lot of case studies of work by the community warden was shared at the Performance Scrutiny meeting. A second warden had recently been recruited reinforcing the service. Members praised the work of community wardens and commented that the service should remain focused on proactive community engagement.

c) Post-16 Education Task Group – Chair, Councillor Spilsbury

Since the last verbal to the Committee, there had been no further meetings of the Post-16 Education Task Group. Its next meeting was due at the end of September 2026, and representatives from Heart of Worcestershire College had been invited. The Group wished to explore proactive support for young people at risk of becoming not in education, employment or training, including possible mentoring by Members and senior officers, with the College being thought to provide an appropriate and safe route for engagement.

RESOLVED that

the updates in respect of the Budget Scrutiny Working Group, the Performance Scrutiny Working Group and the Post-16 Education Task Group be noted.

41. EXTERNAL SCRUTINY BODIES - UPDATE REPORTS

The Committee was advised in relation to the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) that its committee structure had changed from May 2026 and that the former WMCA Overview and Scrutiny Committee and WMCA Transport Delivery Overview and Scrutiny Committee no longer appeared to meet. Officers had sought clarification about the participation of elected Members from non-constituent authorities in the new structure but had not yet received a response from WMCA.

It was requested that Officers follow up the request to the West Midlands Combined Authority for clarification about the new scrutiny arrangements and the role of non-constituent authorities' members in the new WMCA scrutiny arrangements.

Following this, an update was provided from the Council's representative on the Worcestershire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC). It was reported that at the last meeting of HOSC the issue of Primary Care Prevention was considered in the context of Neighbourhood Health. The Committee was advised that clinical care accounted for less than 20 per cent of health outcomes, with wider factors such as income, housing, education, employment, healthy lifestyles and social relationships responsible for most variation in health outcomes across the population.

Worcestershire's approach to ensuring positive prevention work used three areas of work: insight and intelligence, health improvement services, and community engagement and development.

The HOSC Representative reported that at the meeting the discussion also focused particularly on Public Health community grants, where substantial funding remained unutilised and available to bid for. The HOSC Representative provided examples of Public Health funded projects within Redditch which included grant for physical activity project in Woodrow and an allotment project in Redditch designed to reduce isolation, support healthy eating, increase physical activity and help with the cost of living. Members were encouraged to promote and submit suitable applications for Public Health community grant.

The HOSC Representative also highlighted the need for support for care leavers, particularly in relation to mental health and suicide risk, and reported that despite repeated requests for information regarding the number of care leavers living in Redditch, no information had been provided to date. Members commented that considerably improved information was needed so that care leavers in Redditch could be offered tailored support community opportunities, work experience, internships and apprenticeships.

It was agreed that the Council's representative on HOSC would contact the Public Health community grants lead about potential support for care leavers and would continue to seek information on the number of care leavers living in Redditch. Contact details for the local, Redditch, Public Health adviser would be circulated to Members.

The HOSC representative also reported on the progress that had been made across the County in several public health outcomes such as reductions in smoking during pregnancy, increased activity among older residents and a reduction of more than seven per cent in preventable mortality, which was said to compare favourably with the national position.

RESOLVED that

the External Scrutiny Bodies updates be noted.

The Meeting commenced at 6.30 pm
and closed at 8.53 pm