



CORPORATE PEER CHALLENGE POSITION STATEMENT

February 2023



Bromsgrove
District Council
www.bromsgrove.gov.uk





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Introduction

Why the councils are commissioning a Corporate Peer Challenge

In December 2022, members at Bromsgrove District Council discussed a report that detailed the section 24 Statutory Recommendation (S24) given by the council's External Auditors, Grant Thornton. That report outlined that the key reason for the S24 was the non-delivery of the 2020/21 financial statements, with further detail available in the Interim Auditor's 2020/21 Annual Report.

Although an action plan to address the issues was agreed, Bromsgrove District Council's Full Council meeting passed a motion to commission a Local Government Association (LGA) Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC), with a request for a specific focus on corporate governance based on the information contained within these two reports.

Redditch Borough Council had received similar reports in November 2022 and accepted the recommendation along with the action plan to address the issues identified.

Owing to the shared nature of the councils' organisation (see below), and the issues, the two councils then agreed to jointly commission this CPC from the LGA.

The scope of this CPC

The framework for every CPC is around five general themes:

- 1. Local priorities and outcomes:** Are the council's priorities clear and informed by the local context? Is the council delivering effectively on its priorities and achieving improved outcomes for all its communities?
- 2. Organisational and place leadership:** Does the council provide effective local leadership? Are there good relationships with partner organisations and local communities?
- 3. Governance and culture:** Are there clear and robust governance arrangements? Is there a culture of respect, challenge, and scrutiny?
- 4. Financial planning and management:** Does the council have a clear understanding of its current financial position? Does the council have a strategy and a clear plan to address its financial challenges?
- 5. Capacity for improvement:** Is the organisation able to support delivery of local priorities? Does the council have the capacity to improve?

In the context of the S24 and Auditor's 2020/21 Annual Report as already mentioned (hereafter referred to collectively as 'the Reports'), this CPC will be weighted for a specific focus on the 'governance and culture' theme, to focus on understanding improvement requirements around governance systems and decision making.

It will consider the wider system of checks and balances in place for local government, including relevant council duties and legislation, in order to provide additional assurance to both councils on their position.

This will include considering, amongst other things:

- Governance and culture
 - Effective governance.
 - Governance arrangements.
 - Statutory officers.
 - Strategic risk management.
 - Organisational culture.
- Financial planning and management
 - Financial reporting.
 - Financial systems, processes, and controls.
 - Financial management information.
 - Service delivery.
 - Timely reporting.
 - Use of external auditors.
 - Financial management and administration.

The CPC will **not** investigate the circumstances which led to the S24, which is part of a separate review being undertaken by Bromsgrove District Council's Audit, Standards and Governance Committee, and which has not been requested at Redditch Borough Council.

The places and organisation

Bromsgrove District and Redditch Borough councils serve two of the districts of north Worcestershire. Both are connected to the rest of Worcestershire and to the urban conurbation of Birmingham. The organisations are committed to providing residents with effective, high-quality services that meet their needs, and to addressing the challenges that face local communities in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic and through the ongoing pressures around the cost of living.

The two councils share every possible service between them, with some also shared more widely including county-wide, having embarked on a shared services journey in 2008.

Wider shared services include services that are also shared with Wyre Forest District Council, such as North Worcestershire Economic Development and Regeneration, North Worcestershire Building Control, and North Worcestershire Water Management, and also Worcestershire Regulatory Services, which delivers licensing and environmental health services for all six Worcestershire district councils, hosted by Bromsgrove District Council.

Redditch has its own retained housing stock of 5,800 properties, and consequently retains extensive in-house Housing services. Bromsgrove undertook a stock transfer in 2004.

Redditch also has Rubicon Leisure, a local authority trading company (LATC) founded by Redditch Borough Council to support the health and happiness of residents by providing access to high quality fitness, arts, culture, and heritage facilities.

The company manages many community facilities for the council, including sport and exercise facilities, community centres, a museum, a theatre, and a country park visitor's centre.

Like many local authorities, the councils have built on changes made during the pandemic to transform the way services are delivered.



That process continues and, while adopting a more agile approach to the post-pandemic workplace, the councils are thinking differently about how they operate, how they plan for the future, and how they can be more financially sustainable - including by repurposing public buildings to accommodate a range of public and private sector organisations.

The districts

Bromsgrove

Bromsgrove District has 99,200 (2021 Census) residents. The 84 square mile district is predominantly rural, with approximately 90% of the land designated as Green Belt. There are population clusters including Alvechurch, Barnt Green, Catshill, Hagley, Rubery and Wythall, with the town of Bromsgrove being the main centre of population.

There are 45,000 homes and businesses in the district, which has an above-average number of over 60s. Approximately 17.1% of the population are under 15 and 23% are over 65 years old.

Many residents commute to Birmingham, and the district has the highest % of self-employed and business start-ups in England. It has isolated areas of deprivation, and higher median income levels.

Issues such as an ageing population, a lack of affordable housing and developing the local economy all impact on the district.



Redditch

Redditch Borough has 87,000 (2021 Census) residents. The 21 square mile borough is comprised of a more-urban North, where most of the borough's population resides, and a more-rural South. There are also population clusters outside of Redditch itself, including the villages of Astwood Bank and Feckenham.

There are 41,000 homes and businesses in the borough, which has an above-average number of young families and major employment in 'traditional' manufacturing. It has areas of significant deprivation and average median incomes.

Approximately 18.2% of the population are under 15 and 18.6% are over 65 years old.

There is a very diverse population within the borough and five areas within the top 10% most deprived in England (2019 Indices of Multiple Deprivation).

Health inequalities remain an issue for the borough, as according to the 2021 Census, 10.6% of the population have a long-term health condition or disability that limits their day-to-day activities a little, and 7.7% stated that their day-to-day activities were limited a lot. In rating their own health for the Census, 5.5% of Redditch respondents described their health as bad or very bad. Both male and female inequality in life expectancy at birth (2018-20 data) and percentage of physically active adults (2020-21 data) were in the lowest quartile nationally.

Educational attainment is also an area of concern, with the Average Attainment 8 Score (2020-21) also in the lowest quartile nationally and the second lowest in the West Midlands region.

People and population projection

The ONS produce population projections for Worcestershire and the six districts. These most recent projections were released in March 2020 and use mid-2018 population estimates as a base.

Mid - 2018 based ONS Population Projections:

| Area | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 | 2024 | 2025 |
|------|--------|--------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Brom | 98,662 | 99,599 | 100,512 | 101,447 | 102,393 | 103,281 | 104,115 | 104,937 |
| Redd | 84,989 | 85,063 | 85,118 | 85,165 | 85,199 | 85,209 | 85,197 | 85,173 |

2021 Census Population by sex:

| | Redditch figures | Redditch % | Bromsgrove figures | Bromsgrove % |
|------------------|------------------|------------|--------------------|--------------|
| Total population | 87,000 | | 99,200 | |
| Males | 43,000 | 49.4 | 48,400 | 48.9 |
| Females | 44,100 | 50.6 | 50,700 | 51.1 |

2021 Census Population Estimates - Age Groups (thousands) Area

| | Under 15 | % | 15 to 64 | % | 65+ | % | All Persons |
|-----------------------|----------|-------|----------|-------|------|-------|--------------|
| Bromsgrove | 17.0 | 17.1% | 59.5 | 60.0% | 22.8 | 23.0% | 99.2 |
| Malvern Hills | 11.4 | 14.4% | 45.8 | 57.7% | 22.2 | 28.0% | 79.4 |
| Redditch | 15.8 | 18.2% | 55.0 | 63.2% | 16.2 | 18.6% | 87.0 |
| Worcester City | 17.1 | 16.5% | 68.6 | 66.0% | 18.4 | 17.7% | 103.9 |
| Wychavon | 20.2 | 15.2% | 79.3 | 59.8% | 32.9 | 24.8% | 132.5 |
| Wyre Forest | 15.9 | 15.6% | 60.1 | 59.2% | 25.6 | 25.2% | 101.6 |
| Worcestershire | | | | | | | 603.6 |

Population Proportions by Ethnic Group for Worcestershire and the Districts, 2021 Census

| Ethnic Group | Broms | Redd |
|--|-------|-------|
| White: English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British | 90.4% | 82.4% |
| White: Irish | 1.0% | 0.6% |
| White: Gypsy or Irish Traveller | 0.1% | 0.1% |
| White: Roma | 0.0% | 0.1% |
| White: Other White | 1.6% | 6.6% |
| Mixed/multiple ethnic group: White and Black Caribbean | 1.0% | 1.5% |
| Mixed/multiple ethnic group: White and Black African | 0.1% | 0.1% |
| Mixed/multiple ethnic group: White and Asian | 0.8% | 0.6% |
| Mixed/multiple ethnic group: Other Mixed or multiple ethnic groups | 0.5% | 0.4% |
| Asian/Asian British: Indian | 1.9% | 1.2% |

| | | |
|--|-------------|--------------|
| Asian/Asian British: Pakistani | 0.4% | 3.6% |
| Asian/Asian British: Bangladeshi | 0.1% | 0.3% |
| Asian/Asian British: Chinese | 0.4% | 0.3% |
| Asian/Asian British: Other Asian | 0.4% | 0.4% |
| Black/Black British/Caribbean/African: African | 0.3% | 0.4% |
| Black/Black British/Caribbean/African: Caribbean | 0.4% | 0.6% |
| Black/Black British/Caribbean/African: Other Black | 0.1% | 0.2% |
| Other ethnic group: Arab | 0.1% | 0.1% |
| Other ethnic group: Any other ethnic group | 0.4% | 0.5% |
| BME - all non-White British | 9.6% | 17.6% |

Local priorities and outcomes

Visions and strategic purposes

The councils' strategic purposes, based on the councils' visions, are set out in each council's current Council Plan, both of which are for the period 2019-2023.

Both plans were completed before the outbreak of Covid-19. The potential shift in priorities brought about by the pandemic led both councils to create addenda to their plans in 2020, to sit alongside the current plans. That process that is detailed below.

Bromsgrove

Bromsgrove District Council's vision is "to enrich the lives and aspirations of all our residents, businesses and visitors through the provision of high quality services, ensuring that all in need receive the appropriate help and support."

The council's strategic purposes, with its communities at their heart, are:

- Run & grow a successful business.
- Work & financial independence.
- Living independent, active & healthy lives.
- Affordable & sustainable homes.
- Communities which are safe, well-maintained, and green.

The council's priorities for 2019-2023, with a green thread throughout, are:

- Economic development & regeneration
- Skills for the future
- Improving health and wellbeing
- A balanced housing market
- Reducing crime & disorder

Those priorities are supported by:

- Financial stability
- High quality services
- Sustainability
- People
- Partnerships
- Performance



Redditch

Redditch Borough Council's vision is "to enrich the lives and aspirations of our residents, businesses and visitors through the provision of efficiently run and high quality services, ensuring that all in need receive the appropriate help, support and opportunities."

The council's strategic purposes are:

- Run & grow a successful business.
- Finding somewhere to live.
- Aspiration, work & financial independence.
- Living independent, active & healthy lives.
- Communities which are safe, well-maintained, and green.

A green thread runs throughout the council's purposes and priorities:

- Community Priorities
 - Economic Development & Regeneration
 - Supporting businesses to start and grow within the borough.
 - Regenerating the town and district centres.
 - Housing Growth
 - Supporting the delivery of appropriate housing for the borough.
 - Skills
 - Supporting young people to gain the skills they need.
 - Working with businesses to develop skills for the future.
 - Improved Health & Wellbeing
 - Working with partners, including Rubicon Leisure, to increase activity levels in the borough.
 - Community Safety & Anti-Social Behaviour
 - Working with partners to reduce crime and target the causes of anti-social behaviour across the borough.
- Organisational priorities
 - Financial stability
 - Produce and deliver sustainable financial plans.
 - Improved commerciality: maximising every opportunity to generate income, including review of fees and charges.
 - Undertake effective contract management.
 - Manage our assets to get the best outcomes for our residents.
 - Make financially viable strategic acquisitions and investments.
 - Sustainability
 - Review alternative delivery models.
 - Exploit digital technologies, enabling more automation of services.
 - Review services to understand how we can adapt to climate change.
 - High Quality Services
 - Enable greater digital access to our services; allowing customers to do things online when they want to, 24/7.
 - Conduct regular engagement with our communities.
 - Ensure that all in need get the appropriate help and support.

Run & grow
a successful
business



Finding
somewhere
to live



Aspiration,
work &
financial
independence



Living
independent,
active &
healthy lives



Communities
which are
safe, well-
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& green



The Covid-19 'Recovery and Restoration' plan addenda

Whilst essential council services were maintained during the pandemic there were major changes in the way officers conducted the business of the council and in how councillors carried out their duties. Local and national economies were hit by the unprecedented suspension of trading, with most local businesses being unable to operate as normal.

With these major impacts in mind, 'Recovery and Restoration' plans were developed in October 2020 and presented to members at both councils at their respective Executive and Cabinet meetings.

Each plan was structured around the five strategic purposes within the current council plans, whilst also highlighting some of the corporate priorities which focussed on the internal business of the councils, alongside a set of key recovery actions.

At this time a county wide, multi-agency economic recovery plan was also produced, which the councils' recovery and restoration plans were aligned to.

During this time it was also recognised that the existing council plans had been approved prior to the Covid-19 pandemic. In recognition of the impact of the pandemic on local communities and public services, the content of the council plans was reviewed during a series of member/senior officer workshops, to assess whether the content remained appropriate and fit for purpose in a post-Covid world.

No changes to the councils' strategic purposes or priorities were proposed during these workshops, however it was agreed that the 'green thread', which had previously been included in the council plans in relation to tackling climate change, would become a specific priority. This corresponded with feedback that was received from the public who had responded to the councils' community surveys, in which residents had reported that recycling and waste collection as well as energy efficient homes were key priorities.

Consequently, Council Plan Addendum documents were developed for each council, to sit alongside the previously agreed council plans. The addendum documents were used to define the 'green thread' as a priority and to ensure that any other issues were articulated and aligned to the councils' existing priorities. The addenda are still in place and will remain aligned to the existing council plans until those documents are reviewed in late 2023.

The key priorities identified in both councils' addenda are:

- Economic Development and Regeneration.
- Housing Growth.
- Work and Financial Independence.
- Improved Health and Wellbeing.
- Community Safety and Anti-Social Behaviour.
- Green Thread.
- Financial Stability.
- Organisational Sustainability.
- High Quality Services.





The delivery of the actions within the recovery and restoration plans continued throughout the pandemic phases, with officers regularly updating them until their completion in mid-2022, when the plans were closed by members. See below for more information about outcomes during Covid-19.

Document references

Via [CPC website](#): Council plans; Strategic Measures BDC RBC, Restoration and Recovery Plans BDC RBC

How our communities shape us, and equality and diversity

Engagement with communities has helped to shape the strategic direction of both councils and the content of the council plans.

Annual community surveys are undertaken, and the results feed into the decision-making processes and any strategic reviews through being reported to CMT, fourth-tier managers, and Leaders/Portfolio Holders meetings (see the Corporate Management Team, Decision-making structure, and Collaboration sections below).

The surveys are open to any resident. Each council also contacts members of its dedicated Community Panel directly about them, and other key corporate consultations or engagement activities. Community Panel members are residents who have expressed an interest in being involved in council decision making. The councils each currently have over 400 Community Panel members.

An annual Equality Report is produced for each council to assess performance on equalities, which takes a steer from the objectives outlined in each council's Equalities Strategy.

Document references

Via [CPC website](#): Equalities Strategies; Equalities Reports

Future plans

Regeneration activities

Both councils are engaged in several regeneration schemes in their areas, predominantly in town centres, with significant external funding secured (see Outcomes, below).

Redditch

- Transformation of Redditch Town Hall into new multi-agency Community Hub, able to include a new library (via capital receipts).
- Redevelopment of the area currently occupied by Redditch Library, if it moves (via Towns Fund).
- Redevelopment of Redditch train station and the public open space surrounding it (Worcestershire County Council scheme).
- Redevelopment of Redditch' former police station site into a Digital Manufacturing and Innovation Centre (via Towns Fund).
- Public realm enhancement scheme (spring 2024, via Towns Fund).
- Regeneration schemes for Matchborough and Winyates District Centres (in development).
- Major upgrade to the large BMX facility in Arrow Valley County Park (AVCP).



Bromsgrove

- Redevelopment of town centre land on the site of the former Market Hall, adjacent to Waitrose (via Levelling Up Fund).
- Redevelopment of former library and fire station site in town centre (Windsor Street), demolition scheduled for 2023 (via Levelling Up Fund).
- Residential development scheme being developed for land on the site of the former Dolphin leisure centre.
- Public realm enhancement scheme planned for several key areas.
- Bromsgrove 2040 vision to be considered by members soon.
- Bromsgrove Centres Strategy agreed for district centres.



Local Plan implementation

Both councils' development plans (adopted January 2017) contained allocations for approximately 11,000 dwellings. The vast majority have now had permission granted, with some large expansion sites now being constructed.

Of those 11,000 dwellings, 3,400 were provided on land taken out of the green belt in Bromsgrove for the housing needs of Redditch.

Similarly significant elements of the employment allocations on the plans are also now being implemented on site.

The Bromsgrove Local plan has progressed through two stages of consultation with a preferred option currently being developed. The preferred option will need to respond to an identified housing need of approximately 383 dwellings a year.

The Redditch Local plan review is at the very early stages. There is unlikely to be any new substantial dwellings required for Redditch due to the significant allocations contained in the current plans.

Document references

Via [CPC website](#): Bromsgrove and Redditch Local Plans, Bromsgrove Centres Strategy 2023-2026

Sustainable transport activities

In Redditch, a Department for Transport (DfT) sanctioned e-scooter trial continues, and a local cycling and walking infrastructure plan is being prepared working with Worcestershire County Council (WCC). The council is also working with partners on the provision of more electric car charging points.

In Bromsgrove, funding is being sought for a local cycling and walking infrastructure plan, and a strategic transport assessment including traffic modelling is being prepared to support the Bromsgrove development plan.

Both councils fund community transport schemes to meet the needs of residents with mobility needs and support their independent living.

Transport challenges in Bromsgrove remain, with high levels of actual and perceived congestion regularly featuring in many discussions. The A38 which runs through Bromsgrove is part of the DfT's Major Route Network and as such a major scheme of works is being implemented, supported by DfT funding.



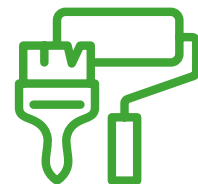
Further work is being progressed, working with WCC and National Highways, to fully assess the implications of any further developments on the town and to look for additional opportunities to enhance public transport and walking and cycling opportunities.

Outcomes

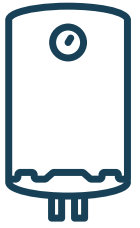
Here are some outcomes that have recently been delivered by the councils, including operational service performance from the previous year and more.

Redditch

- Secured £15.6 million from the Towns Fund (via the Redditch Town Deal Board, on which the council is lead partner as the local planning authority) for major regeneration projects.
- Awarded £2.5 million from the UK shared prosperity fund for a range of projects.
- Completed a boundary review that will change the electoral makeup of the borough from May 2024.
- Emptied 1.9m domestic bins.
- Made 70,000 garden waste collections.
- Answered 62,000 queries on bins and cleansing.
- Spent £392,000 on schemes to prevent, and support people facing, homelessness.
- Determined 275 planning applications.
- Given 4,500 people telephone advice on benefits and 34,000 people online advice on their Council Tax.
- Advised 17,000 people online on the government's '£150 Council Tax rebate'.
- Updated 23,000 people's financial circumstances for benefits.
- Helped 9,000 people access the local housing register, Redditch Homes.
- Received change of use planning permission for a new cemetery for future burial provision, at land off Ipsley Church Lane.
- Implemented safe accommodation provision, in line with the Domestic Abuse Act 2021.
- Ran 40 consultation surveys, including over 400 community panellists.
- Expanded attendance at exercise classes for the elderly and vulnerable, including community transport there and back, from an original four people to 29 people, using Public Health funding. Feedback included that "it has helped my well-being, I enjoy the company, feel better for going, also wanted to thank Dial-A-Ride drivers who are all very kind and helpful."
- Provided 23,000 Dial-A-Ride trips.
- Gave 5,000 Shopmobility services.
- Translated public info for 27 people in need, including into Ukrainian and Urdu.
- Supported 345 people through local health programmes.
- Welcomed 370 parents to Starting Well programmes.
- Ran over 270 events for families and children.
- Provided lots of fun events in the school holidays and more, plus celebrations for the Queen's Platinum Jubilee and Commonwealth Games Baton Relay.
- Supported tenants of Community House to start relocating ahead of asset disposal.
- Invested in refurbished fixtures and facilities at council assets Pitcheroak Golf Club, Arrow Valley Visitor Centre, historic Forge Mill Needle Museum, the Bartleet Fountain, Plymouth Road Chapel, and others.



- Procured multiple large council housing works contracts under an extensive procurement programme, including aids and adaptations to better enable vulnerable tenants to live independently.
- Secured funding to develop an Asset Based Community Development approach and model to enhance youth work provision.
- Formed a new multi-agency Prevention and Enforcement Group for nuisance and anti-social behaviour. The group of council housing officers, specialist legal counsel, and the police co-ordinate case management, action plans, and responses to referred issues. Work is also underway to integrate physical and mental health services into the process.
- Replaced 700 old boilers in council properties with new, efficient boilers.
- Upgraded LED lighting, fire safety, and waste and recycling facilities in communal areas of many council flats.
- Reduced council property void turnaround times from 53 days to 23, to benefit people on the housing register and reduce rent losses.
- Achieved 100% gas safety audit compliance on council properties (as of December 2022).
- Insulated 33 more homes for better energy efficiency, using government funding.
- Oversaw the start of construction of 19 new council homes, the first new-build properties brought into the council's housing stock since the 1990s.
- Adopted a Leisure and Culture Strategy, an overarching 10-year strategy to deliver outcomes against strategic priorities comprised of Parks and Open spaces, Arts and Culture, and Playing Pitch strategies.
- Won a Royal Town Planning Institute 'play innovation' award for improvements to AVCP, in line with Local Plan.
- Won £85,000 from the Levelling Up fund for a new orchard, play equipment and wayfinding trail at AVCP (Green Flag award to be sought for AVCP in 2024).
- Added a new café and toilets to Morton Stanley Park.
- Won £855,000 from Arts Council England for a 'creative people and places' project in Redditch.

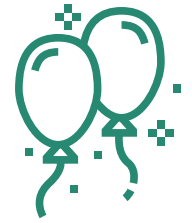


Bromsgrove

- Secured £14.5m in Levelling Up funding for major regeneration projects.
- Awarded £2.8m from the UK shared prosperity fund for a range of projects.
- Emptied 2.3m domestic bins.
- Made 800,000 garden waste collections.
- Took away 437 businesses' recycling and over 1000 businesses' waste.
- Emptied 2,000 properties' cesspits and septic tanks.
- Answered 62,000 queries on bins and cleansing.
- Spent £332,000 on schemes to prevent, and support people facing, homelessness.
- Determined over 700 planning applications.
- Enabled 25,000 people to view or comment on planning applications.
- Given 3,000 people telephone advice on benefits and 23,000 people online advice on their Council Tax.
- Advised 9,000 people online on the government's '£150 Council Tax rebate'.
- Updated 20,000 people's financial circumstances for benefits.



- Ran 10 consultation surveys, including over 400 community panellists.
- Supported 438 patients referred to Social Prescribers.
- Supported 230 people through local health programmes.
- Welcomed 426 parents to Starting Well programmes.
- Ran over 300 events for families and children.
- Provided lots of fun events in the school holidays and more, plus celebrations for the Queen's Platinum Jubilee and Commonwealth Games Baton Relay.
- Awarded grants to 12 local community groups.
- Began construction on 61 new low-carbon homes on the site of Bromsgrove District Council's former head offices on Burcot Lane, including 18 affordable housing, 37 private rented, and six for sale.
- Introduced card payments at parking machines, a paperless carbon-neutral parking permit system, and improved LED lighting and better surfacing.



For both councils and countywide

- Developed climate change strategies to reduce the councils' carbon output and influence their communities to do the same, towards the national 2050 'net zero' target.
- Won £35,000 from Arts Council England to bring forwards a Cultural Compact for North East Worcestershire.
- Produced a new Worcestershire Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy and a Worcestershire Housing Strategy in partnership with Worcestershire local authorities and stakeholders, to be considered in June 2023.
- Developed a countywide housing pathway for prison leavers.
- Conducted local arrangements marking the death of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.
- Began green energy, energy efficiency, and decarbonisation works at Redditch Town Hall, Bromsgrove Parkside, and Bromsgrove's arts venue Artrix, including using large awards from the Public Sector Decarbonisation Fund for better insulation, air source heat pumps, LED lighting and more.
- Struck tenant leases with other agencies to come into council properties, including the NHS and Seetecpluss, with several more in the pipeline for the near future particularly at the evolving community hub project at Redditch Town Hall.
- Received industry recognition for successful migration of the councils' land registry / Local Land Charges service to HM Land Registry under the Infrastructure Act 2015.
- Developed and delivered a 'Respect' programme of community safety sessions in school classrooms and therapeutic mentoring to young people at risk of becoming victims or perpetrators of crime.
- Won three new contracts and retained a key group contract for the councils' NEW Lifeline telecare service, a fully digital service on the ESPO framework and independently verified as helping residents live independent, active, and healthy lives in line with the councils' strategic priorities.
- Secured funding to develop an Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) approach with a model of working with the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS).
- Secured funding to enhance youth work provision.



- Implemented a 'redeployable' CCTV camera scheme enabling temporary camera deployment and saw CCTV services externally certified under the Surveillance Camera Commissioner's Code of Practice.
- Awarded the councils' biggest contract, the £5m 'minor civil engineering works' contract.
- Paid over £196k (in Redditch) and £138k (in Bromsgrove) to people in need via the government's cost of living-related Household Support Fund.



Document references

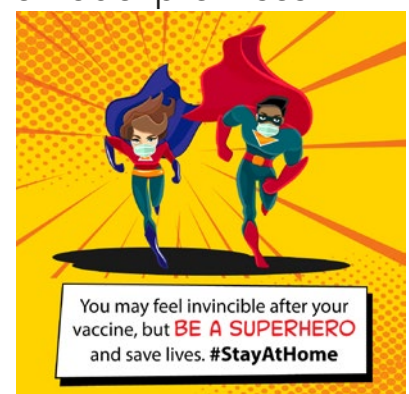
Via [CPC website](#): Leisure Strategies

Outcomes during Covid-19

As mentioned above, the pandemic had a significant impact on services delivered to residents. The councils swiftly implemented urgent crisis response and business continuity plans and played a pivotal role in leading both areas through an unprecedented national public health emergency.

The vast majority of services mostly continued throughout the pandemic, with changes, but broadly this meant:

- Immediate implementation of an enhanced Covid-19 governance structure, including a change to virtual committee meetings (and back to in-person again, with safety measures in step with the then-evolving restrictions).
- A series of vital short-term initiatives to protect the most vulnerable residents through local partnerships, and to protect staff continuing to work under difficult conditions.
- Large-scale operational changes so services could continue to be delivered to people safely.
- An immediate switch from office-based to remote working for most staff, changing fundamental working conditions in a very short space of time - a change that started the councils' continuing move to 'agile' working as policy (see Culture and elsewhere, below), and the major works to remodel premises.
- Significant new and enhanced partnership working (see 'Partnership working during Covid-19', below) including for incident management and health protection.
- Redeploying some staff into acutely critical areas to ensure service delivery in the face of significant sickness absence, particularly during the so-called 'pingdemic'.
- Managing much-needed financial help through to residents and businesses via a series of new schemes to get government and council funding out quickly to residents and businesses, through mandatory and discretionary business grants, Test and Trace self-isolation payments, and others - including building new audit and reconciliation processes to Government requirements and creating new local schemes for residents and businesses who fell outside the mandatory government grant schemes. See below for more detail.
- Running major new communications campaigns, supporting government guidelines and vaccinations, including a partnership with media outlets.
- Employing a team of 'Covid Advisors' to support businesses and the community with safety and compliance, including operational support for testing sites.



- Supporting the NHS and community response, including helping the NHS with test and trace and to set up testing centres and the area's mass vaccination facility on council property.
- Working to ensure that nobody had to sleep rough during the challenging lockdown periods, which restricted 'normal' access to temporary accommodation, which in Bromsgrove was done in partnership with housing provider bdht.

To support the councils at that time the government provided £1.255m to Bromsgrove and £1.45m to Redditch in 2020/21, plus £1.152m and £0.36m in support for lost sales fees and charges.

Covid grants paid

The table below sets out the extent of the significant additional business grants that the councils distributed during 2020/21.

Note that the mandatory grants are excluded from the councils' comprehensive income and expenditure statements (CIES) as they were set and funded by the Government, with no council discretion.

By Bromsgrove

| | Number | Value |
|--|---------------|---------------|
| Small Business Grant Fund | 1379 | £13,790,000 |
| Retail Hospitality and Leisure 2a | 159 | £1,590,000 |
| Retail Hospitality and Leisure 2b | 174 | £4,350,000 |
| Local Authority Discretionary Grant Fund | 77 | £1,012,500 |
| Additional Restrictions Grant | 224 | £1,599,066.27 |
| Christmas Support for Wet Led Pubs | 33 | £33,000 |
| Closed Business Lockdown Payment | 558 | £2,627,000 |
| LRSB (Closed) | 151 | £110,585.58 |
| LRSB (Closed) Addendum | 560 | £877,946 |
| LRSB (Closed) Addendum 5 th Jan onwards | 566 | £2,723,106 |
| LRSB (open) | 136 | £185,338.74 |
| LRSB (sector) | 1 | £2,714.25 |

In addition, the amounts paid out under Test and Trace by Bromsgrove District Council were £38,500 for 77 main scheme awards and £34,000 for 68 discretionary awards.

By Redditch

| | Number | Value |
|--|---------------|--------------|
| Small Business Grant Fund | 927 | £9,270,000 |
| Retail Hospitality and Leisure 2a | 82 | £820,00 |
| Retail Hospitality and Leisure 2b | 156 | £3,900,000 |
| Local Authority Discretionary Grant Fund | 68 | £724,000 |
| Additional Restrictions Grant | 147 | £1,100,233 |
| Christmas Support for Wet Led Pubs | 26 | £26,000 |

| | Number | Value |
|--|--------|-------------|
| Closed Business Lockdown Payment | 331 | £1,672,000 |
| LRSO (Closed) | 73 | £36,301.16 |
| LRSO (Closed) Addendum | 338 | £570,172 |
| LRSO (Closed) Addendum 5 th Jan onwards | 342 | £1,770,735 |
| LRSO (open) | 78 | £103,204.09 |

The amounts paid out under Test and Trace by Redditch Borough Council were £82,000 for 164 main scheme awards and £46,000 for 92 discretionary awards.

The organisation and leadership

The organisation is structured to achieve and deliver the councils' strategic priorities, and has a single shared management team that is responsible for overall performance.

Corporate Management Team

The Corporate Management Team (CMT) consists of seven Heads of Service, as well as two directors and a Chief Executive Officer.

The councils' Chief Executive Officer is Kevin Dicks, and there are two directors, Executive Director and Deputy Chief Executive Sue Hanley and Interim Director of Finance and Section 151 officer Peter Carpenter

- Chief Executive Officer, Kevin Dicks
 - Head of Worcestershire Regulatory Services, Simon Wilkes
 - Head of Transformation, Organisational Development and Digital Services, Deb Poole
- o Executive Director and Deputy Chief Executive, Sue Hanley
 - Head of Planning, Regeneration and Leisure Services, Ruth Bamford
 - Head of Community and Housing Services, Judith Willis
 - Head of Environment and Housing Property Services, Guy Revans
- o Interim Director of Finance and Section 151 Officer, Peter Carpenter
 - Head of Finance and Customer Services and Deputy Section 151 Officer, Michelle Howell
 - Head of Legal, Democratic and Property Services and Monitoring Officer, Claire Felton

Kevin, Sue, and Peter make up the councils' Senior Management Team (SMT) and lead on the council's strategic purposes, corporate workstreams, and external partnerships alongside management/leadership of the heads of service they hold responsibility for.

Chief Executive Officer

As CEO, Kevin is head of paid services and responsible for leading the organisation as a whole, and for supporting the councils' executive committees to deliver all their strategic purposes. He is also responsible for the council's economic development and regeneration strategic purpose, 'Run and grow a successful business'.

Kevin's departments are Business Transformation, Strategic Partnerships, Communications, and PA/Directorate support including civic responsibilities. Kevin also leads vital organisational work on cyber security.

Externally, Kevin leads on the Worcestershire Housing Strategy Board and on the Redditch District Collaborative as co-chair. He also sits on the following groups:

- Worcestershire Health and Well Being Board
- Bromsgrove Partnership

- Redditch Towns Deal Board
- Bromsgrove Levelling Up Fund Programme Board
- West Midlands Combined Authority - Non-constituent members / Leaders and Chief Executives
- Worcestershire Leaders Board
- Worcestershire District Leaders Board
- Worcestershire Chief Executives
- Worcestershire Partnership Executive Group
- Worcestershire One Public Estate Programme Board
- Redditch Business Leaders

Executive Director and Deputy Chief Executive

As Executive Director and Deputy Chief Executive, Sue Hanley is responsible for two of the strategic purposes: 'Communities which are safe, well maintained and green' and 'Affordable and sustainable homes/Finding somewhere to live'.

Sue's departments are Planning, Regeneration and Leisure, Community and Housing, and Environment and Housing Property. She leads on the following corporate workstreams:

- Agile Programme Delivery
- Cultural Change Programme
- Health, Safety & Welfare Committee
- Civil Contingencies & Emergency Planning
- Trade Union Strategic Forum
- Rubicon Leisure Board (as executive director)

Externally, Sue sits on the following groups:

- North Worcestershire Community Safety Partnership (Chair)
- Safer Communities Board (Vice Chair)
- Crime Reduction Board
- Cross Cutting Strategy Group
- LRF/SCG/TCG (Sub for Wyre Forest CEO when required on Chief Officer Group)
- Health Protection Group

Interim Director of Finance and Section 151 Officer

As Interim Director of Finance and Section 151 Officer, Peter's role on SMT is more inward facing than Kevin's or Sue's.

Peter's departments are Finance and Customer Services and Legal, Democratic and Property Services.

He is primarily focused on:

- Leading the financial recovery process.
- Financial sustainability of the councils and their companies.
- Financial interactions with partners.
- Streamlining of processes and systems to ensure compliance and efficiencies, including a corporate workstream on improving back-office protocols.
- Delivery of financial and performance reporting for service delivery.
- Efficient use of resources for the delivery of council objectives (people, property, finance).
- Inward development of fourth tier officers to step up to CMT level.
- Supporting Worcestershire Regulatory Services.



Headcount

The councils have a combined headcount of 855 staff and 765.46 full time equivalents (FTE).

Bromsgrove's headcount is 470 (439.66 FTE) and Redditch's is 385 (325.81 FTE).

Document references

Via [CPC website](#): RBC BDC Single management Structure July 2022

Local partnerships

Partnership working is a specific area of focus for the councils, led by the Chief Executive. Both councils bring together organisations from all sectors as community leaders and key members of their local strategic partnerships (LSPs), the Bromsgrove Partnership and the Redditch Partnership, as well as the emerging local 'Collaboratives'.

The councils' local partnerships are necessarily evolving and developing situations, to deal with changes across their communities and organisational functions - not least those that emerged from the impact of Covid-19.

Existing strong working relationships and the flexible nature of the partnerships helps ensure that as things change, work remains joined up, duplication is avoided, and ultimately partnerships and collaboratives evolve and become even stronger going forward.

LSPs and emerging collaboratives

The LSPs each act as a single body that brings together organisations from the public, private, business, community, and voluntary sectors to improve the quality of life for people in their area.

Each provides a forum capable of collaborative leadership and co-ordination to enable the sharing of information, resources, and effort to better understand and meet the needs and aspirations of local communities.

The LSPs enable local organisations to come together and address issues that are important to people living, working, and visiting in the areas. An outline of the LSPs is below.

Furthermore, there have been significant changes to the NHS structure over the last few years, specifically the Integrated Care System (ICS) which requires partners to work collectively together to support local communities. At a local level, this comes in the form of local Collaboratives - the Redditch District Collaborative (RDC) and the Bromsgrove and District Collaborative. Both councils are directly involved, helping to drive forward the changes. The Chief Executive co-chairs the Redditch District Collaborative.



Bromsgrove Partnership and Bromsgrove Collaborative

The Bromsgrove Partnership vision is: "We will make Bromsgrove District the place to live, do business and to visit."

Bromsgrove Partnership operates as a Strategic Board with Theme Groups. In the last few months, it has been agreed that the Bromsgrove Partnership Board will take on the remit of the local Collaborative. As such the membership and terms of reference are under review. The current board membership is:

- Act on Energy
- Age UK Bromsgrove, Redditch, and Wyre Forest
- Bromsgrove and Redditch Network (BARN)



- Bromsgrove District Council
- Bromsgrove District Housing Trust (bdht)
- Bromsgrove and District Primary Care Network (PCN)
- Citizens Advice Bromsgrove and Redditch
- Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)
- Heart of Worcestershire (HoW) College
- NewStarts
- Parish councils in Bromsgrove area (CALC – County Association of Local Councils)
- West Mercia Police
- WCC (including Public Health and Adult Social Care)
- Young Solutions

Many more partners are engaged at Theme Group level. Those groups include the Community Wellbeing Theme Group, the Ageing Well Group, the Economic Development Theme Group, the Better Environment Theme Group, and the Children and Youth Provider Group.

The Bromsgrove Partnership Board has recently taken on an advisory role to Bromsgrove District Council in relation to the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. The Partnership Board is providing oversight and recommendations to help inform decisions, in line with government guidance. The Bromsgrove Partnership Board set up a UKSPF Partnership Task Group which in turn reports to the board.

In order to progress the Collaborative work, discussions to agree its priorities are taking place. Further work will be needed to adjust the current way of working to support the delivery of the Collaborative, and that is very much work in progress.



Redditch Partnership and Redditch District Collaborative

The vision of Redditch Partnership is:

“Redditch will be successful and vibrant with communities that have access to good job opportunities, good education, and good health and are communities that people will be proud to live and work in.”



Energies are currently focused on the Redditch District Collaborative (RDC), which was established approximately 18 months ago with the full support of council officers, notably the Chief Executive.

Despite the pandemic, RDC has made good progress and has agreed guiding principles and governance arrangements, which are continuing to develop. There is an RDC Plenary Group, co-chaired by the Chief Executive and one of the Primary Care Networks’ Clinical Leads. There is also an RDC Core Group and RDC Task and Finish Groups (in line with RDC priorities) all involving council officers.

Below is a list of organisations engaged at Plenary Group level, which is subject to continuous review:

- Age UK Bromsgrove Redditch and Wyre Forest
- Bromsgrove and Redditch Network (BARN)
- Herefordshire and Worcestershire Health and Care NHS Trust
- Kingfisher Primary Care Network (PCN)
- Nightingales Primary Care Network (PCN)
- Worcestershire Acute Hospitals Trust

- Worcestershire Association of Carers (WAC)
- Worcestershire Children First
- WCC (including Public Health and Adult Social Care)
- Sandycroft
- The Old Needleworks
- VCSE Alliance Strategic Lead



Many others are represented at Task Group level, and across the Redditch Partnership too. There is currently work being undertaken to identify what is already in place across the RDC and Redditch Partnership to ensure it is joined up and one supports the other, so changes are expected across both. The aim will be to ensure, whatever the end result in terms of local structures, it works as effectively as possible to facilitate partnership working, ultimately for the benefit of local communities.

Joint partnership working across Bromsgrove and Redditch

Although each Partnership is separate, there are times where it makes sense to come together, for example in the Covid-19 Incident Management Team (IMT) as detailed below. A joint newsletter/bulletin is issued, which is generally monthly but during the height of the pandemic response became as frequent as daily. The bulletins give the partners information to help ensure that they, and their service users, local residents, are aware of all the help and support that's available in the partnership.



Recently, a joint Bromsgrove and Redditch Cost of Living Partnership Group was set up after discussions at the Bromsgrove Partnership Board.

Chaired by the Chief Executive, it is made up of a range of partners across both areas with a joint action plan to support local residents through the cost of living. This has also led to special 'cost of living' partnership bulletins. The group continues to look at what else can be done to support people through the cost of living crisis.

County Level Partnership and Collaborative Working

The councils are also fully involved at the wider county level, represented by the Chief Executive, relevant councillors, and other officers.

The councils stay abreast of the structure/groups, membership, terms of reference at county level partnership groups too, to ensure partners are appropriately plugged in at the right places and levels.

Partnership working during COVID-19

Strong partnership relationships helped during the pandemic, when working together to support local communities became more important than ever, and it needed to happen at speed.

The councils' local combined Public Health IMT was led by the Deputy Chief Executive and involved partners that were already engaged via the LSPs. Escalation of issues, where required, was to the Health Protection Board/LRF/SCG/TCG, with key actions being highlighted.

The LSPs themselves also quickly adapted to suit the partners' new needs in the pandemic and maintained valuable partnership working throughout.

Significant community engagement work was undertaken, including a vaccine hesitancy survey.

In addition, some specific and temporary partnerships also quickly arose, such as 'Here to Help' by WCC, 'Support Bromsgrove' and 'Support Redditch'. The councils supported these partnerships which plugged into existing local partnerships and helped meet local community needs.

The IMTs were stood down in 2022 when they were no longer needed, however support work continues with the council's representation on Health Protection Group/ Collaboratives/Outreach Vaccination Programme, etc.

The councils and governance

Decision-making structure

Bromsgrove District Council and Redditch Borough Council both have a Leader and Cabinet model of decision making.

Portfolio holders do not have individual decision-making powers; instead, decisions are taken collectively at meetings of the Cabinet (Bromsgrove) and Executive Committee

(Redditch). At both councils, there is a single Overview and Scrutiny Board (Bromsgrove) or Committee (Redditch), which hold the Cabinet and Executive Committee to account, they also review financial performance in both councils.

The Cabinet and the Executive Committee both meet once a month (see The Cabinet and Executive Committees, below). There are informal and private meetings held with portfolio holders at both councils prior to meetings of the Cabinet and Executive Committee. In Bromsgrove, these meetings are referred to as 'Leader's Group' meetings and in Redditch they are known as 'Portfolio Holder Briefings'.

In addition to full Council at both authorities, other important decision-making bodies that meet on a regular basis at both include the Audit, Standards and Governance committees, which can commission research, including that undertaken by Audit Task Groups. There are also each authority's Planning Committee, Licensing Committee (and Licensing Sub-Committees) and Electoral Matters Committee. Redditch Borough Council also has a Shareholders Committee, which is an important part of the governance structure for the council's leisure company, Rubicon Leisure Limited.

The councils both have representatives on the Worcestershire Regulatory Services (WRS) Board, which is the committee that makes most decisions in respect of the shared regulatory service for the county. Bromsgrove District Council, as the host authority for this shared service, hosts and facilitates meetings of this board.

Permanent working groups

The councils have other, permanent working groups that are not formally constituted, and which do not have decision making powers, but which review important areas on behalf of the councils and can make recommendations.

In Redditch, these groups are set up as executive advisory panels and they include the Planning Advisory Panel, which reviews planning policies, the Member Support Steering Group (leading on member development) and the Constitutional Review Working Party. Regular updates are provided on the work of these groups as verbal updates from the chairs of the respective panels at meetings of the Executive Committee.

The councils have also in recent years established working groups focusing on action that is being taken by the councils to tackle climate change. In Bromsgrove, this is referred to as the Climate Change Working Group and it meets on a quarterly basis. In Redditch, the Climate Change Cross Party Working Group takes a lead on this work, and it operates as an Executive Advisory Panel.





Neither of these groups are formally constituted and they do not have decision making powers, but they can make recommendations to the Cabinet and Executive in respect of climate change and carbon reduction matters. Meetings of these groups are held in private but there is a long-standing arrangement whereby all members, including those councillors not appointed as members of the group, are invited to attend meetings. The groups were both established after each council decided to declare a climate emergency at respective Council meetings.

Decision-making process

Guidance and templates are provided to all officers to help with producing committee reports where decisions are required.

These have changed since the councils' last comprehensive performance review. They have been improved to help officers draft reports and include detailing how to meet the requirement to show how the proposed actions support the strategic purposes, including steps to tackle climate change.

Document references

Via the [CPC website](#): Accessible Decision making process; Updated Report Template - September 2022; Accessible Report guidance - Sept 2022; Climate Change Pledges.

The Cabinet and Executive committees

Currently, at both councils, the membership of the Cabinet and Executive Committee comprises representatives of the leading political group only.

Bromsgrove

The Cabinet in Bromsgrove is comprised of six members, including the Leader of the Council. Every member of the Cabinet represents a specific portfolio, focusing on the following areas:

- Portfolio Holder for Economic Development, Regeneration and Strategic Partnerships (also Leader of the Council)
- Portfolio Holder for Environmental Services and Community Safety
- Portfolio Holder for Finance and Governance (also Deputy Leader of the Council)
- Portfolio Holder for Leisure, Culture and Climate Change
- Portfolio Holder for Planning and Regulatory Services
- Portfolio Holder for Strategic Housing and Health and Well Being



Redditch

The Executive Committee in Redditch is comprised of nine members, including the Leader of the Council. Seven members of the Executive Committee represent a specific portfolio, whilst two further members are committee members without portfolio. The portfolios focus on the following areas:

- Portfolio Holder for Climate Change
- Portfolio holder for Community Services and Regulatory Services (also Deputy Leader of the Council)
- Portfolio Holder for Environmental Services
- Portfolio Holder for Finance and Enabling
- Portfolio Holder for Housing and Procurement
- Portfolio Holder for Leisure
- Portfolio holder for Planning, Economic Development, Commercialism and Partnerships (also Leader of the Council)

Document references

Via [CPC website](#): Cabinet work programmes; Executive work programmes.

Overview and Scrutiny

At both authorities, the main Overview and Scrutiny Board/Committee commissions 'Task and Finish' policy reviews, which can focus on a range of subjects impacting on the community. Recent reviews have included investigations in respect of fuel poverty in Bromsgrove and dementia services in Redditch.

The Finance and Budget Working Group (in Bromsgrove) and the Budget Scrutiny Working Group (in Redditch) are also permanent scrutiny working groups at both councils which focus on the budget. At meetings of these groups, members pre-scrutinise budget reports due for the consideration of the Cabinet and the Executive Committee. The budget working groups can also request other reports focusing on their council's budget for consideration at meetings.

In Redditch there is also a permanent working group which takes a lead on performance scrutiny. The performance scrutiny function is fulfilled by the Overview and Scrutiny Board in Bromsgrove.

Redditch Borough Council has a separate Crime and Disorder Scrutiny Panel which scrutinises the work of the North Worcestershire Community Safety Partnership. This role is fulfilled by the Overview and Scrutiny Board in Bromsgrove.

Redditch Borough Council's constitution requires the Chair and Vice Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to be a member of a political group not forming part of the ruling administration (the same rule applies in respect of the Chair of the Crime and Disorder Scrutiny Panel). Whilst this rule does not feature in Bromsgrove District Council's constitution, the council has for a few years appointed a member from a political group that does not form part of the ruling administration as Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Board.

At both authorities, the chairs of scrutiny task groups and working groups are required to be permanent members of the Overview and Scrutiny Board and Overview and Scrutiny Committee, respectively. These chairs are required to provide regular updates at meetings of the board and committee on the work of those groups.

Document references

Via [CPC website](#): BDC & RBC Overview & Scrutiny work programmes.

Constitution Review

At both councils, there are groups that have been established to review the councils' respective constitutions and they make recommendations to council designed to improve the content of the constitutions.

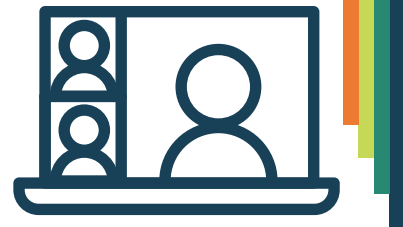
Since the last corporate peer challenge, several changes have been made to the constitutions, including agreeing new delegations to the Chief Executive to act in the event of an emergency, changes to the delegations for Planning Services in Redditch and an agreement not to hold Council meetings during the pre-election period.

Recent meetings of the groups have focused on reviewing the Schemes of Delegations further as well as on the content of the Policy Frameworks and the number of seats on and the quorum for the Bromsgrove Audit, Standards and Governance Committee. At the time of writing, recommendations on these subjects had not yet been reported to Council.



Committee Meeting Arrangements

During the Covid-19 pandemic, the councils held lots of meetings virtually, as permitted under the Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020. The regulations expired in May 2021 and since that time committee meetings have been held primarily in Parkside in Bromsgrove and at Redditch Town Hall respectively, risk assessed, and with members required to attend in person.



The councillors are required to attend formal committee meetings to participate in the debate and vote, and the councils are also required to enable the public to attend meetings in person to observe proceedings. However, the councils have arranged for the public and officers (with some exceptions) to have the option to attend meetings remotely, via Microsoft Teams. The councils have also continued to hold informal, private meetings virtually wherever possible. This has helped to reduce carbon emissions associated with meeting attendance and has also enabled meeting attendees to participate from a range of locations.

Member Development and Induction

In Redditch, as there are elections by thirds, member induction is organised for new councillors on an annual basis, except for the one year in four in which Worcestershire County Council elections take place. As Bromsgrove has all out elections every four years, the induction process is organised once every four years. At both authorities, councillors continue to be offered opportunities to attend training throughout their terms of office.

The councils both have member development groups which co-ordinate member training, induction, ICT provision and other support for elected councillors.

In May 2023, there are due to be elections at both authorities. The member development groups at both councils have agreed to share much of their training, to share costs and provide opportunities for members to learn from their peers in another authority. Joint training will include sessions focusing on planning, the Code of Conduct and standards of behaviour, data protection, safeguarding, carbon literacy and local government finances,

There will be some exceptions to this joint training, where members felt that bespoke training for their councillors would be helpful. This will include separate induction events, training in respect of overview and scrutiny where members also aim to discuss items for their respective work programmes, licensing processes, and training in respect of the roles and responsibilities of the councils' respective audit committees.

Whilst the council has now returned to holding formal meetings in person as detailed above, training has generally continued to be delivered on Microsoft Teams. This has helped members with work and other commitments to participate in training. Members at both councils have agreed that for the first couple of months after the local elections in May 2023, training should be offered face-to-face with virtual training options made available later in members' terms of office.

Elected members and committees

A note to the below information: following a recent boundary review for Redditch, there will be all out elections in Redditch in May 2024 when the number of councillors will reduce from twenty-nine to twenty-seven and the number of wards will reduce from twelve to nine, all made up of three-member wards. Wards in Redditch are currently represented by either two or three members.

| | Bromsgrove | Redditch |
|----------------------------|---|--|
| Electoral wards | 30 | 12 |
| Elected councillors | 31 18 Conservative 3 Labour 6 Independent 3 Lib Dem 1 Wythall Residents' Assoc | 29 18 Conservative 8 Labour 1 Green Independent 1 vacant seat |
| Decision making | Cabinet 6 Conservative | Executive Committee 9 Conservative |

Culture

The councils have made significant efforts on the culture of the organisation, and over the past few years have gathered much data around this from staff surveys, stress risk audits, referendums, culture cafés, culture maps and more, under a corporate workstream led by Sue Hanley.

As a result many new tools, processes, and policies have been implemented, including the redesign of appraisals and one to ones, management development opportunities, action plan templates, and a 'Managers Toolbox' to aid internal development.

The work has also led to the revision of the councils' visions to sit alongside the already-embedded strategic purposes.

The councils are currently reviewing their principles and internal values to be stronger and simpler.

This culture work touches many areas and workstreams referenced throughout this position statement, including new and updated policies due to be put in place in 2023, including on Agile Working, a People Strategy, Workforce Planning, back office protocols as led by Peter Carpenter, and more. They are all steps towards fostering a stronger organisational culture against a backdrop of change.

Document references

Via [CPC website](#): Culture Change report 2022

Strategic risk management

The organisation has 11 Corporate Risks, which are strategic in nature as they impact all service areas. These are:

- Non-Compliance with health and safety legislation.
- Decisions made to address financial pressures and implement new projects are not informed by robust data or evidence.
- Non-adherence with statutory inspection policy.
- Impacts from changes to partner funding arrangements.
- Management of contracts.
- Resolution of the approved budget position.
- Protection from cyber attack.
- Adequate workforce planning.
- Financial position rectification.
- Bromsgrove District Council being placed into Special Measures due to quality of planning application decisions.
- Delivery of Levelling Up, Towns Fund and UKSPF initiatives.

The position of these risks is reviewed as part of the quarterly risk reviews.

Staff engagement and internal communications

The councils have a mixture of mature and emerging internal communications, engagement mechanisms, and channels.

A live internal news feed exists for alerts, breaking news, and advice. These 'Oracle' announcements act as the councils' primary internal live communications channel. It is the first thing that loads for staff at the top of the organisation's corporate home page when opening a web browser, and users can opt in to receive email alerts. An 'Oracle email' digest of recent headlines is routinely sent out to all staff inboxes, up to daily.

The corporate home page that features the Oracle news feed is the front page of an internally-developed SharePoint platform called the 'Orb', or Oracle for Redditch and Bromsgrove. The Orb functions as a mature and feature-rich collaboration platform and 'intranet'. Generally, corporate and local teams can publish all-staff content - policies, training guides, and so on - 'on the Orb', and then use communications channels to signpost internal users to the various document libraries, system links, functions, and so on.

There are also two monthly bulletin-style publications. One is less-formal staff-centric messaging around the monthly payday, the 'Oracle newsletter'; and one is a more-formal management briefing including messaging from CMT at the start of the month, 'Team Brief'. Service managers are expected to present Team Brief to their local departments and answer, or refer up, any questions.



The organisation has long held all-staff meetings with the Chief Executive (or a deputy), for corporate updates to be given verbally and informally, and where staff have the opportunity to have any questions answered by senior managers in person. Since Covid-19, those all-staff 'Q&A' sessions are conducted via Microsoft Teams, and held more frequently, to strengthen connections between areas of the organisation as remote and agile working increased. Sessions are recorded and available internally afterwards for staff who were unable to attend the live event. The success of the format has led to its expansion. Regular all staff 'Cyber Security Q&A' sessions are also now held, supplementing the extensive work and user training being done in the organisation against the backdrop of elevated cyber security risks in the sector.



Owing to the relatively recent organisational switch to Microsoft 365 tools, and especially Teams, emerging new ways of communicating internally using those tools are set to be reviewed.

Rolling policy requirements are generally distributed to staff via a compliance suite (Netconsent) after a corporate induction programme for new starters.

Regular staff engagement projects, such as the staff survey and others, are conducted by the Policy and Human Resources and Organisational Development teams. They receive heavy promotion through internal communications channels.

Financial Planning and management

Medium Term Financial Plan overview

Bromsgrove

The council faced a difficult time coming into the 2023/24 Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) process, with a gap from previous years of £1.6m.

To ensure that as many savings as possible are implemented as quickly as possible, the council is delivering its budget this year in two tranches: a first tranche before Christmas and a second, and current, tranche following the Provisional Local Government Financial Settlement.

Throughout the process, the council has sought to balance the budget through savings whilst attempting to protect the services that are most important to the community.

Tranche 1 of the budget realised £1.6m of savings, bringing the council back to a neutral position. However the cost of living crisis, a significantly larger than expected pay award, and the impact of inflation with utilities forecast to increase by 200% resulted in a further £1.6m of cost, and the position reverting to where the council started. This was approved at Council in December.

No responses were received to the consultation section of the savings document in tranche 1. The overall approach to budget consultation will need to be rethought for future years (see Capacity for improvement, below).

Tranche 2 of the budget was presented to Cabinet and Council for approval in February and is pending.

For tranche 2, the local government settlement has resulted in a further £1.2m of support. The settlement was only for one year, and so an assumption of £1m has been made in the following years. The £1.2m level is in line with financial settlements over the past few years. In addition, further support is available through a business rates pilot scheme extended to include Herefordshire, for an additional £517k, reducing to £200k in future years. Combined, these deliver £1.7m of support in 2023/24 reducing to £1.2m in future years.

Additional pensions savings of £356k a year following final actuarial triennial valuations, and a new utilities reserve fund to fund 50% of the utilities increases after a review of earmarked reserves (more on that below), reduced the base budget by £351k a year. However, increased costs of £1.1m, £0.4m of which are leisure-related, give a resultant position of a £250k overspend in 2023/4, a £44k underspend in 2025/6, and a £431k overspend in 2025/6.

Going into the 2022/23 financial year the council had £476k of unallocated savings in its base budget. By quarter 2 of 2022/23 £424k of this total had been allocated.

The council reviewed all its earmarked reserves in December 2022. This resulted in transfers of £2.7m to the general fund, with the anticipated balance being £5.7m on 31st March, 2026. Earmarked reserves are expected to be £4.1m.

The capital programme is now concentrated on time-limited 'Levelling Up Fund' schemes, with high-cost fleet replacement deferred until more clarity on what will be required under the pending new Environment Act. The fleet is currently being refurbished.



It is anticipated that balances will be used to offset budget pressures whilst income-generating projects and investments are being made. However, the council has only just closed the 2020/21 accounts and will not have the 2021/22 accounts closed until early in the new financial year. This is a risk linked to the issuing of the S24. As per the council's Robustness Statement, there is still significant risk – although most of this risk is sector-wide.

Redditch

Like Bromsgrove, Redditch Borough Council also faced a difficult time coming into the 2023/24 MTFP process with a gap from previous years of £1m to close.

The council has also sought to balance the budget through savings whilst attempting to protect the services that are most important to the community, and will also deliver its budget in two phases, with council approvals in January and February 2023.



Tranche 1 of the budget, approved at Council in January, has realised £1.5m of savings bringing the council to a surplus of £0.6m. However, the same factors that affected Bromsgrove also resulted in a further £2.3m of cost, with the position reverting to a deficit of £1.7m.

Tranche 2 of the budget was presented to Executive and Council for approval in February. In that, the Provisional Local Government Financial Settlement resulted in a further £0.5m, for one year, with an assumption of £0.45m made for the following years. Like at Bromsgrove, this is in line with recent financial settlements. Redditch's additional business rates amount is £466k reducing to £250k in future years, for a total of £0.9m additional support in 2023/24 reducing to £0.7m in future years.

Redditch's pensions saving is an additional £221k a year following the final triennial revaluation report in November. The utilities reserve approach, having 50% of the 200% increase in utilities increases in base budgets and 50% as an earmarked reserve, reduces the base budget by £570k a year.

The council is also increasing Council Tax by an additional 1% to 2.99% for an additional £69k, and reduced salary increases to £718k following the December pay run where increments were added to the payroll for the first time.

However increased costs of £0.6m, as per the MTFP, give a resultant position of a £311k overspend in 2023/24, a £67k overspend in 2025/26, and a projected £63k underspend in 2025/26. This moves the council to financial sustainability over the 3 year period, with no reserves required to balance the budget in 2025/26 and minimal reserves required to balance the budget in 2024/25.

Going into the 2022/23 financial year the council had £595k of unallocated savings in its base budget. By quarter 2 of 2022/23 £743k had been allocated, helping overspends in other areas.

Redditch's earmarked reserves review led to transfers of £1.5m to the general fund, with the anticipated balance being £2.1m on March 31 2026 and earmarked reserves expected to be £4m.

The capital programme in Redditch is also now concentrated on time-limited 'Towns Fund' schemes, with high-cost fleet replacement deferred until more clarity on what will be required under the pending new Environment Act. The fleet is currently being refurbished.



It is anticipated that balances will be used to offset budget pressures whilst income generating projects and investments are being made. However, the council has only just closed the 2020/21 accounts and will not have the 2021/22 accounts closed until early in the new financial year. This is a risk and linked to the issuing of the S24. Again, as per the council's Robustness Statement, there is still significant risk - although most of this risk is sector-wide.

Route to full sustainability

Both councils continue to strive to be fully sustainable by 2024/5. The strategy sections of the councils' MTFP reports set out the route map to this.

In Redditch specifically, concerns that difficult decisions were not being made, raised as part of a previous S24 issued in 2019 (not the S24 notice referred to in the Reports), have been addressed. This is shown by the approvals members have made to enable balanced budgets since 2020/21. This improvement on prior years' performances placed the council in a strong position to deal with the uncertainties that were subsequently caused by Covid.

Document references

Via [CPC website](#): Bromsgrove MTFP; Redditch MTFP.

Asset strategy

The councils have recently undertaken a wholesale review of the assets register, leading to the approval and implementation of an Asset Strategy based on the requirement for property assets to be EPC compliant and fit for the delivery of services in line with the strategic purposes and priorities.

Progress on this area is reported as part of the councils' financial monitoring.

Procurement

Significant improvements to procurement compliance have recently been made, following an audit.

They include re-engineering internal systems and processes to make it systemically impossible for goods or services to be purchased from a supplier unless all relevant rules and policies were followed in procuring that supplier.

Internal campaigns and re-training on the changes are continuing, to support services to achieve full compliance with the councils' stronger requirements.

In addition, more has been done to encourage local suppliers to bid for work from the councils, with increased promotion and 'procurement surgeries' held with local suppliers to discuss the route to working with the councils, and answer any queries they may have.

Risk management

Following "No Assurance" reports on risk management in a previous audit report, both councils acted in April 2022 to embed risk management and ongoing full assurance of processes:

- The risk register was re-baselined to a then-total of 119 departmental risks, of which 16 had been red, 42 amber, and 61 green. This has since been managed down to 63 departmental risks, of which 2 are red, 27 amber, and 34 green at the time of writing.
- The boundary between 'departmental' and 'corporate' risks was redefined as: "For a risk to move from being departmental in nature to being corporate in nature, that it must have significant impact on council finances, be cross



departmental in nature and/or result in serious reputational damage. The Officer Risk Board will vet departmental risks using this definition to move them to corporate risks at their quarterly meetings.” The councils have 11 such corporate risks.

- An Officer Risk Board representing all service areas to review departmental and corporate risks was convened. It has since met quarterly to update the risk register and report back to CMT.
- Risk was made part of regular monthly CMT assurance meetings. CMT also regularly reviews Corporate Risks.
- The councils audit committees were kept regularly updated on progress and to review the risk registers. These reports have also been presented to Executive and Cabinet.

Housing Revenue Account

The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) in Redditch is the financial account that is used to manage the council’s Landlord activities. The HRA account can only be used to provide services to council housing tenants through the collection of rent and other service charges.

The HRA covers a wide range of services to tenants and Leaseholders, including:

- Maintenance and improvements
 - Day to day repairs
 - Managing empty homes
 - Major improvements
 - Estate based and environmental improvements
 - Aids and adaptations
 - Cleaning of communal areas in flats
- Compliance activities
 - Gas servicing
 - Electrical testing
 - Fire safety
 - Lift maintenance
 - Asbestos management
- Housing management
 - Rent Collection including service charges
 - Income advice and support
 - Tenancy and Estate Management
 - Allocations
 - Right To buy
 - Garage rentals
 - Homelessness



The HRA Business Plan sets out the priorities and provides direction for the management of the council’s social housing stock over the next 30 years. A report on that is going to the council’s Executive Committee on the 27th of February 2023. It has been reviewed, at the same time as developing a new HRA Asset Management Strategy, to ensure that the investment in the council’s housing stock provides homes that have modern facilities and are safe and warm as contained within the 5-year Housing Capital Programme.

Document references
Via [CPC website](#): HRA Business Plan.

Capacity for improvement

How the councils adapt, learn, and improve

This is covered in multiple sections throughout this document, however in general the organisations feature a flexible and adaptable workforce with problem-solving skills, and skills in general, that are improved through the corporate training programme and individual learning.

Culturally, staff are encouraged to embrace change by keeping an open mind and pushing through and beyond established comfort zones. The recent rapid and successful responses to the many changes necessitated by Covid-19 have demonstrated to many in the organisation that challenges and changes are also sources of opportunity, possibility, and improvement.

Strategic leadership has produced a 'Future Operating Model' to guide themselves, service managers and teams in producing service business plans and guidance in moving forward.

The learning from Covid-19 for the organisation's future capabilities and practice

As set out above, Covid-19 restrictions presented all of the organisation's services with significant challenges that led in many cases to step changes in both operational approaches and strategy.

This has led to the development of agile working approaches as mentioned elsewhere in this document, the consideration of new operating models for services, and increased work on repurposing public buildings to accommodate a range of public and private sector organisations.

The councils quickly identified that efforts to look after staff, their key resource at any time let alone during a pandemic, were even more critical than ever. Various initiatives were implemented, including:

- Establishing a Health and Wellbeing Group led by the Deputy Chief Executive to co-ordinate actions and staff development support.
- Checking working arrangements through an all-staff survey, designed to check for any gaps where staff may not have had what they needed in terms of equipment, access, and support.
- Holding regular Chief Executive-led all-staff open-floor meetings for updates and questions-and-answer sessions.
- Carrying out a Wellbeing Survey (Stress Risk Audit) to assess how staff were feeling and how they were coping with the impacts of having to adapt to the new environment during the pandemic.

Sickness levels during Covid-19 led to a widening in the councils' approach to their pool of available HGV qualified staff for waste collection services, the clearest pinch point for those services during the pandemic.

When businesses had to be closed, Bromsgrove District Council's ability to be flexible around commercial waste collection contracts was highlighted as a strength. It enabled businesses to reduce their outgoings at a critical time.

In Redditch, when Housing Property resources had to be shifted away from non-urgent repairs under lockdown restrictions and into other priority areas that could be carried out at that time, a significant backlog of work on the council's housing stock was unavoidably created. That has been difficult for the council and its tenants and has highlighted needs for increased resource and prioritisation.

Covid-19 drove changes to the way the councils sanitise and maintain many internal and external facilities, including public recreation space and facilities.

Key capacity areas

Organisational development

Workforce planning

The councils have taken a proactive approach to workforce planning, and members have recently approved a four-year Workforce Strategy for the councils setting out a strategic and systematic approach.

An action plan for the strategy is currently being finalised after CMT feedback. It includes plans for knowledge transfer, talent management, retention and engagement, recruitment, and personal development.

The workforce strategy and plan are built on work that includes the outcomes of LGA-funded workforce planning consultancy in 2021 and 2022, when data and planning workshops were held at the councils including with LGA workforce planning consultant Welna Bowden.



During that work, the councils' top workforce issues were identified as:

1. The ability to recruit the right staff.
2. The ability to retain staff.
3. The skills of current employees.
4. The age of the workforce.
5. And in the short term, the capacity of the workforce to deliver services.

In addition, work on Critical Role Analysis (CRA) revealed that managers considered many of the councils' existing roles to require priority or urgent attention in terms of workforce planning. That CRA saw managers score each post in their department against five categories:

1. How soon the role is likely to need filling.
2. How difficult it is likely to be to find an external candidate.
3. How long it would take to prepare an internal candidate for the role.
4. How severe the business impact would be if the role was unfilled.
5. How specialised are the requirements of the role in terms of skills or knowledge.

With up to five points per category, roles scoring 15 or more were deemed to present a greater risk to the organisation, and to require priority attention. 116 roles scored 15 or more.

The lowest-scoring category in the CRA was a lack of potential internal candidates, followed by a lack of available external candidates. Managers also expected 60% of roles to be refilled like-for-like, further highlighting recruitment as a key matter.

Managers were also asked which approach they would expect to take to mitigate the risk that roles are not filled, from the council's 'four Bs' framework approach to the issue:

- **Buy** - bring in external candidates (indicated by managers to be required for 49% of roles).
- **Build** - develop internal candidates (13%).
- **Borrow** - complement skills with part-time, freelance, contract, secondment, and/or temporary workers (1%).
- **Bridge** - help people move to new roles inside or outside the organisation (0%).
- A combination of the above (34%).

The risks indicated by this information have informed the strategy and plan and remain under review.

Corporate training programme

A wide Corporate Training Programme provides staff with both refreshers and new or increased skills and abilities, including with a view to succession planning. Programmes include ILM Leadership and Management apprenticeships at Level 3 (for team leaders or supervisors) or Level 5 (for service managers), Aspiring Leaders, and Senior Leaders.

Document references

Via [CPC website](#): Workforce Strategies; Corporate Training Programme; Future operating model

Changing ways of working

By being forced to work differently almost overnight, Covid-19 catapulted the councils into new ways of working. This continues with an Agile Working workstream, led by Sue Hanley. Such is the impact this will have on the future of the organisation and how it operates, its implementation is vital.

The aim is to continue to provide flexibility in working location, developing trust, transparency, happier, productive employees, and a larger pool of talent to recruit from, as in some cases employees can work from any location.

Digital and data

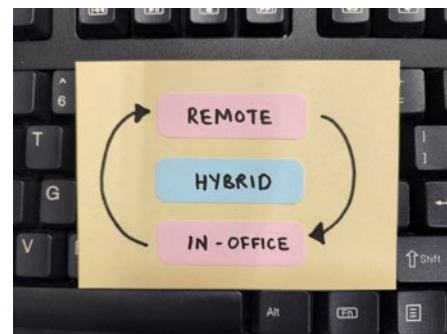
The councils are currently changing many systems and processes to eliminate identified issues or enable better and more efficient working, particularly in the Finance, Housing, and Environmental Services departments.

Noteworthy changes that have recently been implemented, or that are on track to be implemented soon, include:

- Core financial system - changed to TechnologyOne (see 'S24 statement progress' below for more information on issues related to the implementation of this change)
- Recruitment - changed to TalentLink
- Procurement compliance processes - strengthened
- Housing management - changed to Civica CX (combined housing system)
- Environmental Services management - changed to Abavus
- Automation / robotics - in development
- Website - changing to 'one account' portal

These changes have provided or will soon provide substantial improvements, not only for customers, who are a priority and will see the benefit of faster response times, more self-service options, and better opportunity for service dialogue, but also for staff, in terms of time pressures, useability, and resources.

Given substantial changes to systems and processes, training is being increased this year.



Programme management and transformation

Collaboration

A number of corporate workstreams bring representatives from service areas together to collaborate, to improve service and project delivery.

This includes:

- Support services (back office, enabling services) meeting fortnightly to collaborate on current and upcoming projects in the organisation, led by Peter Carpenter.
- Regular fourth-tier managers meetings, encouraging managers to resolve operational issues or present solutions to the more-strategic CMT. Empowering managers in this way is also part of internal succession planning.
- A regular Managers Forum providing managers, predominantly in the fourth tier, a space to meet regularly and share across workstreams, update their peers, raise issues, or ask for advice.

The councils maintain a project management framework as an internal support resource.

Business improvement

An internal team is available to support service areas deliver plans and become 'change capable'. Using change methods and techniques, the team enables managers to make sustainable improvements.

Business improvement workstreams currently include:

- Supporting Housing Services and Housing Property.
- A corporate data prioritisation project.
- Analysis of incoming demand as a foundation for decisions.

Equality and diversity

The councils employ a dedicated officer responsible for Engagement and Equalities, to ensure issues of equality, diversity and inclusion are considered wherever possible.

Climate change

Both councils have climate change as a key priority across all service areas, with a 'green thread' running throughout the council plans. In 2022 both councils committed to achieving Net Zero by 2040, ahead of the Government's target of 2050.

All service areas have taken responsibility for climate change, and this is reflected in individual service plans as well as within the Carbon Reduction Implementation Plan. The Carbon Reduction Strategy, which was informed by a residents' climate change survey, sets out key successes to date. This is alongside future key actions over the next 3 years, with every Head of Service setting ambitious targets.

Further, both councils have well established formalised member meetings that are held quarterly and chaired by their respective climate change portfolio holders. In Bromsgrove this is the Climate Change Working Panel, and in Redditch it is the Climate Change Working Group.

Both councils have also shown their commitment to climate change through the approval of budget bids in 2022 to provide additional financial resources for a new post of Climate Change Strategy Manager, which is currently being recruited to.

Progress on S24 and auditor's report

The Reports were issued on October 31, 2022. A number of actions have happened since on both governance and officer sides of the S24 work, and on the auditor's recommendations.

Minutes for all public meetings are published and available.



On the governance side at each council

At Bromsgrove

- Emergency Audit Standards and Governance Committee reviewed reports on November 9.
- Cabinet reviewed reports on November 23.
- Council debated the issue on December 7 and requested:
 - A CPC concentrating on governance, and
 - That Audit Committee carry out a Task and Finish Group Review of what caused the S24 statements to be issued, to feed into the CPC.
- Emergency Audit, Standards and Governance Committee reviewed the draft accounts on December 14.
- Audit Standards and Governance Committee reviewed progress on January 19.
- Auditors on site from January 25. Starting with the data transfer balances (when moving to the new TechnologyOne finance system), with an adjusted list of deliverables to follow. Numbers of items in suspense for final version being reduced.
- Audit Committee Task and Finish Group Membership and remit agreed, and:
 - Data packs issued to group members at January 25 Council meeting.
 - Four meetings in February (1st, 14th, 20th, 21st).
 - Final report to be agreed by March 2, to feed into CPC and the Audit, Standards and Governance Committee on March 9.
- Constitution Review Working Group agreed that the Chair of Audit, Standards and Governance should join the Budget and Performance Working Group to ensure joined up conversations could be held.

At Redditch

- Emergency Audit Governance and Standards Committee reviewed reports on November 10 and increased committee frequency to 2-monthly to ensure challenging progress.
- Council debated the issue on November 14.
- Emergency Audit, Governance and Standards Committee reviewed draft accounts on December 15.
- Audit Governance and Standards Committee reviewed progress on January 26.
- Auditors on site from January 25 as at Bromsgrove.
- Rubicon Accounts for 2020/21 produced June 30 2022 (by agreed extension) Rubicon accounts are required under Companies Act to be produced by March 31 (which includes a 3 month agreed extension).

On the officer side for both councils

Closure

- Cash receipting issues resolved November 5/6.
- Draft accounts produced for both councils' Audit Committees in November and December. This highlighted work still required to drive down suspense items before issuing final draft accounts. Bromsgrove was fairly complete pending suspense clearance, down from £3.1m, with more gaps at Redditch.
- Key working paper produced for auditors, including description of data take-on issues found while undertaking reconciliation from old to new finance system.





- First meeting with external auditors held January 11.
- Auditors supplied initial audit deliverables January 16 in preparation for arrival on January 23; data take-on issues treated as a key given that treatments of that would be agreed as auditors' starting point.
- Updated list of deliverables is now pending, following a January 30 review meeting between auditors and Head of Finance Michelle Howell.
- Rubicon Accounts for 2021/22, which need to be delivered by March 31 2023, have a 3 month extension.

Wider issues

Finance Delivery Plan

A plan and overall deliverables have now been converted to more business as usual, with monthly assurance meeting at CMT.

Finance system health and version

Deliverables from a TechnologyOne 'health check' report, from sessions with enterprise system consultants Lánluas in November, are now moving forward.

Since the cash receipting problem was fixed in November, system support resources are now able to work on other priorities for attention, including training. They are now working to reduce a list of 17 logged system issues.

An upgrade to the latest system version is currently in regression testing, expected to be live at the end of February.

Capacity and personnel

Replacing staff remains an issue owing to labour market shortages. Hiring issues persist in finance and elsewhere, with vacancies covered by agency and temporary staff. The councils are developing strategies seek to help with this - see Organisational development, above.

Internal 'Back Office Protocols', launched December, now set out what the back office provides and what the expectations are for service managers. Finance services are a considerable part of these protocols, which are being introduced under work on organisational culture - see Culture, above.

The councils continue to engage Lánluas for external support and to drive improvements.

Progress on Interim Auditors Annual Report

Key recommendations

Key recommendations from the auditor's report have been addressed (see the Finance Recovery Plan in the CPC documents).

Where the auditor's key recommendations overlap with items in the S24 statement as above, they have not been duplicated here.

User training

As system issues are being resolved, system support resources can now start to be allocated proactively to training.

Significant retraining after year end is required, and planned, to revise what is required from officers with changes coming under both the new back-office protocols and the upgraded system version. This will include budget monitoring training from both system and finance perspectives.



Financial monitoring activities

Finance monitoring is now combined with performance reporting and provided to member committees quarterly. See Performance, above.

Unallocated savings from previous years have been cleared or reduced to a low figure.

The councils are monitoring a significant and multifactor overspend at both councils. See Medium Term Financial Plan overview, above.

Balancing budget

A two-tranche process is in progress - see Medium Term Financial Plan overview, above.

Capital and Treasury Management Strategies

These are delivered inside the 2022/23 and the 2023/24 budget (tranche two) process. 2022/23 indicators were updated in Q1 monitoring, as the cash at bank indicator needed to change.

Working Groups and project delivery

Strengthened. See Collaboration, above.

Risk Management

From a low assurance level in March 2022, an implementation plan is now being embedded, and a follow up internal audit has just been scoped to review its progress. As part of business as usual, this has been through three reporting cycles to CMT and the respective Audit Committees.

The next deliverable on this will be a review of the Audit Committee, Executive and Cabinets view of risk, following the council elections in May.

Other improvement recommendations

Other non-key recommendations have also been addressed:

Capital monitoring

Capital monitoring is being integrated. A Governance Group oversees the councils' major projects such as via the Levelling Up and Towns funds, which is the majority of the capital spend.

Workforce strategy

The councils are in the process of implementing a workforce plan (see Workforce planning, above). Retaining and recruiting staff remains a major issue for councils in Worcestershire.

CIPFA data

The councils now have access to CIPFA comparative data, although it has yet to be fully used.

Procurement

Compliance issues with the councils' clear procurement policy, for which extensive, mandatory, procurement training is carried out, are now being managed. See Procurement, above.

Document references

Via [CPC website](#): Bromsgrove / Redditch Interim Audit and S24 Recommendations; Bromsgrove / Redditch Medium Term Financial Plans & Summaries; Finance Recovery Plan; Bromsgrove / Redditch Workforce Strategies

Key plans and data

Performance management framework

In order to deliver against the purposes and priorities identified by each council, a robust and responsive approach to performance is required.

This involves focusing on both customer service and a real desire to understand and deliver what matters to the customer, and system management to improve performance using measures as the basis for taking action to do things better.

A new Data, Performance and Insight Strategy is currently under development, due to be complete early 2023.

The councils are committed to using, reviewing, and improving:

- Data about the current systems so everyone understands performance from the customer's perspective.
- Measures that let members and senior managers see performance and what might need to be changed.
- Knowledge about partner organisations and how working together can provide improved outcomes for the community.

Currently, the councils' performance mechanisms are:

Performance Reports

Performance reports review and interrogate specific measures through assurance meetings. They are combined with financial reporting for an intrinsic link to financial performance and published out of CMT through to elected members and the public on a quarterly basis.

Dashboard

The dashboard is a mechanism for elected members and the public to view performance data on strategic measures. It is currently undergoing a revamp, changing from an internally developed legacy dashboard to a new Microsoft Power BI-driven dashboard.

In its new form it will display performance metrics against the strategic measures and eventually operational data (as appropriate), a frequency of up to monthly with a one-month lag to allow for data assurance processes.

Quarterly project monitoring

CMT oversees project progress on a quarterly basis. 22 projects are currently being monitored, with 59% currently rated as green for overall status.

Here is an example of the most recent summary, January 2023 for Q3:

| All Projects (Number) | Overall Status RAG | | Time Status RAG | | Scope Status RAG | | Budget Status RAG | |
|--------------------------|-----------------------|-------|--------------------|-------|---------------------|-------|----------------------|-------|
| | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % |
| Red | 0 | 0.0% | 3 | 13.6% | 0 | 0.0% | 0 | 0.0% |
| Amber | 9 | 40.9% | 7 | 31.8% | 5 | 22.7% | 6 | 27.3% |
| Green | 13 | 59.1% | 12 | 54.5% | 17 | 77.3% | 12 | 54.5% |

| Projects | Overall Status | Time Status | Scope Status |
|------------|----------------|---|--------------|
| Red | N/A | R & M (Operational) Management Skills Winyates & Matchborough | N/A |

Workforce information

Staff survey results

The councils' latest staff survey, carried out in late 2021 by Martin Reddington Associates (MRA) through the Local Government Association, illustrated key elements underpinning workforce engagement and performance, and provided opportunities for conversations for change and improvement.

It also provided an opportunity to understand the quality of the relationship between employer and employees, by providing an overall 'Balance of the Deal' score. The lower the overall score, the more the results balanced in the employer's favour, with a score of -15 to -20 seen as good.

The councils scored -22, placing them in the upper quartile of organisations in the sector. This also represented a two-point improvement compared to their 2018 score of -20.

Whilst the results of the 2021 Staff Survey were mainly positive and showed an overall improving trend, there was no room for complacency. Many scores remained in the moderate / room for improvement range.

Areas highlighted as being of particular concern were related to individual service areas rather than being organisation-wide. For this reason, Heads of Service engaged with their managers and teams to discuss the survey outcomes, and to develop action plans to address the service-level issues raised. In so doing, Heads of Service considered the staff survey results alongside those of the Stress Risk Audit undertaken in 2021, the culture maps and culture action plans, and the outcomes of staff appraisals, one-to-ones, and team meetings.

Corporately, lessons were learned about where there was potential for issues to develop in the future and where there was room for improvement. For example, the survey raised potential tensions around staff resources, being required to do more with less, management behaviours, and wellbeing. These helped the councils focus work around the following:

- Staff wellbeing: workforce planning including management and staff development, succession planning, etc.
- Organisational culture and management behaviours: measures to help the councils to corporately monitor aspects including sickness absence, staff turnover, and the number of appraisals carried out, reported via the Dashboard each month.
- Workforce Strategy: as set out above, the councils have developed and ratified a strategy, and an Action Plan is under development to address how the councils will deliver their workforce of the future and address issues raised via the Staff Survey and earlier Stress Risk Audit.



All referenced documents

All the documents referenced in this report and listed below are available on the councils' CPC website <https://cpc.bromsgroveandredditch.gov.uk/>, including via a single .zip file.

Document list

- Annual Community Survey
- Audit Standards and Governance Committee papers
- BDC Customer Digital Strategy
- BDC Interim Auditor's Annual Report
- BDC S24 Statutory recommendations report
- Bromsgrove Centres Strategy
- Cabinet work programme - BDC
- Carbon Reduction Strategies
- Corporate Training Programme
- Council Plan addendum - BDC
- Council Plan addendum - RBC
- Council Plan - BDC
- Council Plan - RBC
- Culture change report Dec 22
- Draft Data Performance & Insight Strategy (BG) to follow
- Equality Reports BDC & RBC
- Engagement Strategy - RBC
- Engagement Strategy - BDC
- Equality Strategy RBC
- Equality Strategy BDC
- Executive Work Programme - RBC
- Finance Recovery Plan
- Leisure & Cultural Strategies
- Local Plan - BDC
- Local Plan - RBC
- Management Structure/Council organisation (same for both councils)
- Medium Term Financial Plan - BDC
- Medium Term Financial Plan - RBC
- Medium Term Financial Plan Summary
- Overview & Scrutiny Work Plan - BDC
- Overview & Scrutiny Work Plan - RBC
- Project Management Framework
- Quarterly Corporate Project Monitoring documents
- Quarterly Performance Report - all
- Restoration and Recovery Plans BDC RBC
- RBC Customer Digital Strategy
- RBC Interim Auditors Annual Report
- RBC S24 statutory recommendations
- Staff Survey information
- Workforce Strategy BDC
- Workforce Strategy RBC