

COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

4th February 2019

Present: Councillor James Stanley in the Chair

Councillors A. Amos, Biggs, Collins,
Denham (Vice-Chairman), Denlegh-
Maxwell, Ditta, Griffiths, Johnson, Lamb,
J. Squires and Stafford

Also in Attendance:

Councillor Knight

Officers: Alice Davey, Head of Community Services
Shane Flynn, Corporate Director – Finance
and Resources
Lloyd Griffiths, Corporate Director – Homes
and Communities
Nina Warrington, Head of Strategic
Housing

54 Appointment of Substitutes

Councillor Stafford for Councillor S. Hodgson, Councillor J. Squires for Councillor Cawthorne.

55 Declarations of Interest

The following declaration of interest was made:

Councillor Stafford - Public Space Protection Order Consultation (City Centre) (Minute 57) – As the owner of a business in the City Centre

56 Public Participation

Jonathan Sutton (Chief Executive, St. Paul's Hostel) and Mel Kirk (Manager, Maggs Day Centre) spoke as representatives of the Worcester Cares Vulnerable People and Homeless Forum in support of undertaking a Public Consultation on the PSPO.

57 Public Space Protection Order Consultation (City Centre)

The Committee considered a report on a proposal to consult on the implementation of a Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO) covering the City Centre. The Head of Community Services presented the report and summarised the main points. She responded to questions from Members.

Chief Inspector Steph Brighton and Inspector David Troth on behalf of West Mercia Police spoke and explained why the Police were in support of the proposal.

In the ensuing discussion, Committee Members expressed a range of views:

- Some Members welcomed the proposal and emphasised that at this stage it was intended to undertake a consultation exercise, which would help to gauge public opinion.

- It was acknowledged that the proposed PSPO was intended to address a wide range of issues. The rationale for it and the approach to enforcement should be clearly established and communicated.
- Some Members stated that they did not support the proposal and expressed the view that this is not a proportionate approach as the proposed PSPO will target vulnerable individuals. There should instead be more emphasis on working with partners to provide support services.

It was proposed and seconded that the recommendations as set out in the Committee report be approved.

RESOLVED: That the Committee agree:

- 1. to grant approval to undertake an eight week public consultation on the implementation of a Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO) for the City Centre (to commence on 15th February 2019) in accordance with section 72 of the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014; and**
- 2. that the results of the consultation exercise are reviewed and reported back to Communities Committee with recommendations for consideration.**

In accordance with the Council's Constitution the following Councillors requested to be recorded as voting for the recommendation:

Councillors A. Amos, Denlegh-Maxwell, Ditta, Johnson, Stafford and Stanley

58 Extension of the Single Person and Childless Couples Homeless Prevention Support Service (HoPES) and Recommissioning of New Service

The Committee considered a report on the Single Person and Childless Couples Homeless Prevention Support Service. The Head of Strategic Housing presented the report and explained that this is a countywide service which the City Council commissioned in partnership with each of the Local Housing Authorities (LHAs) across the Worcestershire in April 2016 for a period of 3 years. It had to date been wholly funded by Worcestershire County Council. It has recently been confirmed that such funding will be reduced from £300,000 to £100,000 per annum for a 2 year period so procurement of a new contract would require funding contributions from the LHAs. The report sought approval for a 6 month extension of the current contract so that a draft specification can be developed and tendered through full and proper collaboration with key partners and with full knowledge of budget availability across LHAs in Worcestershire.

Members expressed support for the proposal. Reference was made to future funding of the recommissioned service in the light of the County Council's decision. Officers advised that this should be addressed through the service specification and a further report would be presented to the Committee once this has been developed.

RESOLVED: That the Committee agree:

- 1. to approve a 6 month extension (until September 30th 2019) to the existing Worcestershire Single Person and Childless Couples Homeless Prevention Support Service Contract at a cost of £85,472 to the Council; and**
- 2. to recommend to Policy & Resources Committee for the 6 month extension of the contract outlined at para 1.1, to be funded from the Affordable Housing Bid Fund.**

59 Universal Credit Hardship Fund

The Committee considered a report on proposed arrangements to comply with the Notice of Motion agreed by the Council on 30th October 2018 regarding setting up a Universal Credit Hardship Fund. The Corporate Director – Finance and Resources presented the report and explained that it was proposed to extend the existing Exceptional Hardship Fund for Council Tax Support claimants to support Universal Credit claimants where a further Council Tax Support claim is not the main criteria for application, and that the existing approach is taken: that is by reviewing each case on its merits.

There were sufficient funds in the Exceptional Hardship Fund reserve to cover the commitments proposed, subject to the number of individual claims being in line with existing claim levels. The extension of the Hardship Fund reserve for the purposes proposed in the report would need approval of the Policy and Resources Committee.

In the ensuing discussion, reference was made to the proposed criteria in paragraph 5.2 of the report and the requirement to have applied to the DWP for an advance. It was proposed and seconded that the words "Applied to the DWP for an advance and have been refused or not awarded a sufficient advance to meet immediate needs" be replaced with the words "Must be experiencing crisis or exceptional financial pressure as a result of their transition to universal credit."

In response, Officers commented that the wording had been established to support Officers in assessing applications and it was important to be able to define any criteria applied.

Upon being put to the vote, the amendment was lost upon the Chairman's casting vote.

The Committee then considered the recommendations set out in the report. Upon being put to the vote, it was

RESOLVED: That the Committee agree to recommend to the Policy and Resources Committee that:

- 1. the purpose of the Exceptional Hardship Fund reserve be extended to:**
 - i. include claims from Universal Credit claimants for support other than Council Tax Support**

ii. provide an annual grant of £15,000 p.a. to Worcester Food Bank for the three years 2019/20 to 2021/22; and

2. delegated authority be given to the Corporate Director - Finance and Resources to authorise payments from the Exceptional Hardship Fund in accordance with the proposals in the report.

60 Any Other Business

None.

Duration of the meeting: 7.00p.m. – 9.15p.m.

Chairman at the meeting on
12th March 2019