

COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

22nd July 2020

Present: Councillor James Stanley in the Chair

Councillors A. Amos, Biggs, Bisset, Collins, Denham (Vice-Chairman), Ditta, Griffiths, S. Hodgson, Johnson, Lamb and Stalker

Officers: Ismene Broad, Private Sector Team Manager
Alice Davey, Head of Community Services
Lloyd Griffiths, Corporate Director – Homes and Communities

1 Appointment of Substitutes

Councillor Stalker for Councillor Cawthorne.

2 Declarations of Interest

Councillor Denham declared an interest in item 5 (Worcester Community Trust – Annual Update Report 2019/20) as a Trust volunteer and donor in a personal capacity.

3 Public Participation

None.

4 Minutes

With reference to minute 53 (Draft Worcester City Centre Public Spaces Protection Order), a question was raised about when this will be implemented. In response, the Corporate Director - Homes and Communities explained that a significant amount of officer time had been re-allocated due to the Covid-19 pandemic and therefore the public consultation exercise had been delayed. He gave a commitment to commence this by the end of August, or earlier if practicable.

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 10th March 2020 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

5 Worcester Community Trust (WCT) - Annual Update Report 2019/2020

The Committee considered the Trust's Annual Update Report for 2019/20. The Corporate Director – Homes and Communities introduced the report and explained that Council Officers and the Trust will work together to review progress made and to look to achieving sustainability. Ruth Heywood, Chief Executive Officer of the Trust, attended the meeting and gave a presentation which included information on 2019/20 Service Delivery, Business Development, Diversification and Charity Growth, Finances, Challenges, Response to Covid-19 and Support Post-Lockdown.

A number of Committee Members expressed thanks to Ruth Haywood for her presentation, and expressed appreciation for the services that the Trust provides. Ruth Haywood responded to questions from Members.

In response to a question about the contingency budget, Officers explained that it is believed this has not been utilised over the last 2 years. Officers can check and confirm.

RESOLVED: That the Committee agree to note the contents of the report and the Worcester Community Trust Annual Update Report 2019/2020.

6 Annual and Quarter 4 Performance Report for Communities

The Committee received a report on the Council's Annual and Quarter 4 performance for Communities for 2019/20. The Corporate Director – Homes and Communities explained that, due to COVID-19, and the subsequent changes to the committee schedules, the Quarter 4 reports for all committees had previously been reported to Policy and Resources Committee on the 26th May 2020.

There were no comments from Committee Members on this report.

RESOLVED: That the Committee note the Council's Annual and Quarter 4 performance for Communities for 2019/20.

7 Quarter 1 Performance Report For 2020/21

The Committee considered a report on the Council's Quarter 1 performance for Communities for 2020/21. Committee Members asked questions on various aspects of the report.

In the ensuing discussion, the following main points were made:

- The steep rise in the number of anti-social behaviour incidents was raised. In response, Officers agreed to undertake a detailed analysis of incident types recorded, and the reasons for the increase. A briefing note will be circulated to Committee Members.
- Reference was made to the Community Development and Engagement Strategy. It was highlighted that it is now intended to bring a report to the October 2020 meeting and it was proposed that the Committee agree to cease this project as it has been superseded by subsequent developments.
- Officers will look at all target dates and establish whether any need to be re-set in the light of delays due to Covid-19.

RESOLVED: That the Committee agree to:

- 1. note the Council's Quarter 1 performance for 2020/21; and**
- 2. withdraw the Community Development and Engagement Strategy from the list of projects.**

8 Update Report - Private Sector Housing Strategy (2015 - 2020) Year 5 Actions

The Committee considered a progress report on the Worcester City Private Housing Strategy (2015 – 2020). The Private Sector Team Manager presented the report and highlighted the main points.

It was explained that the Strategy has now completed its fifth and final year. An internal desk top analysis of private sector housing stock conditions will be undertaken in the coming months and this information will be used to extend the existing Strategy action plan for a further year. This will focus on recovery and addressing the short-term impacts of Covid-19.

It is planned to commission a full stock condition survey during 2021/22. Funding of up to £40,000 will be required for this survey and will be identified as a budget pressure for 2021/22. This information will then inform the development of a new Private Sector Housing Strategy and action plan.

In the ensuing discussion, the following main points were made:

- The Stock Condition Survey will include all types of tenancy. It is based on a representative sample of each type.
- There is no requirement to tell landlords and tenants about this piece of work, but any decisions taken as a result will be shared. Extending the Strategy will not diminish the service that is offered currently, so there is no immediate impact on tenants.
- Reference was made to Members and Officers working together on the review. It was explained that the Private Sector Housing Strategy is relatively narrow . The new Homes and Communities Strategy will be more wide-reaching and it would be appropriate to involve Members in developing the latter.
- Reference was made to the Landlords’ Newsletter that has been issued recently. A request was made for something similar to be shared with tenants. Officers agreed to look at doing so.
- Officers will look at actions taken in support of the current Strategy to establish what work has been done in relation under-occupied private sector homes.

RESOLVED: That the Committee:

- 1. note the contents of this report are noted, and in particular the detailed Year 5 Progress Report at Appendix 1; and**
- 2. agree to extend the existing Private Sector Housing Strategy (2015 – 2020) at Appendix 2, up until 31st March 2021.**

9 Year 2 Update Report - Additional Resources To Improve Standards Within The Private Rented Sector

The Committee received a year 2 progress report on work undertaken improve property standards in the private sector. The Private Sector Team Manager presented the report and highlighted the main points. Officers responded to questions from Committee Members on detailed aspects of the report.

In the ensuing discussion, the Corporate Director - Homes and Communities acknowledged the importance of working with private sector tenants, empowering and engaging with them. Officers will look at how this facet can be built into the Private Sector Housing Strategy.

RESOLVED: That the Committee note the contents of this report.

10 Community Recovery Strategy

The Committee considered a report on the Worcester City Council Community Recovery Strategy including an overall summary of the proposed approach to the community recovery phase to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Corporate Director - Homes and Communities presented the report and highlighted a number of the key actions. It was recommended that the Committee approve the allocation of £25,000 of funding from government funding, to progress the strategy priorities and action plan. Decisions on how the funding is allocated will be taken in consultation with the Chair and Vice-Chair, and subsequent update reports will be provided to the Committee.

The Corporate Director responded to Committee Members on detailed aspects of the report.

In the ensuing discussion, the following main points were made:

- Members thanked Officers for their proactive and flexible approach to date, and expressed support for the proposals for taking the Strategy forward.
- The Corporate Director indicated that Officers will look to strengthen the Mental Health aspects of the Strategy.
- A request was made for a copy of the County Council Outbreak Control Plan to be sent to Members.

RESOLVED: That the Committee agree to approve:

- 1. the Worcester City Council Community Recovery Strategy at Appendix 1; and**
- 2. the allocation of £25,000 of funding from COVID-19 related Government funding, to act as an enabling budget in order to support and progress the strategy priorities and its action plan.**

11 Any Other Business

In response to a question, the Corporate Director – Homes and Communities stated that Officers will look to resume the Child Poverty Task and Finish Group. The Chair of the Group, Councillor Biggs, expressed support for the proposal.

12 Items Involving the Disclosure of Exempt information

RESOLVED: That under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of information as defined in Schedule 12A of the said Act.

13 Worcester Community Trust (WCT) - Annual Update Report 2019/2020

The Committee noted the financial information provided as part of the Worcester Community Trust Annual Update Report, which had been considered under item 5 above. The Committee noted that this section of the report contained commercially sensitive information, and was therefore exempt from publication. It was not discussed any further in the exempt part of the meeting.

Duration of the meeting: 7.00p.m. – 9.10p.m.

Chairman at the meeting on
28th October 2020