

COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

3rd November 2021

Present: Councillor James Stanley in the Chair

Councillors B. Amos, Barnes, Bisset, Carver, Denham, Ditta, Johnson, Lamb, Riaz (Vice-Chair) and Stafford

Officers: Shane Flynn, Corporate Director – Finance and Resources
Lloyd Griffiths, Corporate Director – Homes and Communities
Warwick Neale, Head of Community Services
Ann Nicholls, Detached Team Project Leader, Community Services

20 Appointment of Substitutes

Councillor Barnes for Councillor Collins, Councillor Ditta for Councillor Hassan, Councillor Stafford for Councillor Stephen Hodgson.

21 Declarations of Interest

None.

22 Public Participation

None.

23 Minutes

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 21st July 2021 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

24 Freedom Leisure - Contract Year 5 Annual Report (April 2020 to March 2021)

The Committee received the Freedom Leisure Annual Report 2020/21. Rob Tyler, Freedom Leisure Contracts Manager, was in attendance and gave a presentation. He explained the challenges faced during the 2020/21 financial year due to Covid-19 and the way in which Freedom Leisure had responded, with significant support from Worcester City Council, to provide the best service possible in the circumstances. Rob Tyler and Jeremy Rowe, Freedom Leisure Operations Director, responded to questions from Members.

In summary, the following main points were made:

- Rob Tyler explained that, whilst the overall position remains challenging, things are moving in the right direction and the biggest customer demand is likely to fall in the period January to March, so he remained confident that recovery will progress.

- Despite a national shortage of swimming teachers, the swim school has recovered strongly, although 2330 Under 16s from key priority Wards are still able to access free swimming. Over 75s are also able to swim for free, subject to a £10 annual fee.
- In response to a question about Freedom Leisure's position as a real living wage employer, it was explained that Freedom Leisure are working on the basis of the existing contract. Staffing is a priority and they are looking to close the pay gap, especially for young people, but there is a commercial challenge. Staff retention is also important for Freedom Leisure are committed to training and development.

The Chair thanked Freedom Leisure and all their staff for their work over the preceding 18 months.

RESOLVED: That the Committee note the content of the Freedom Leisure Annual Report 2020/21.

25 Freedom Leisure - Proposed Fees & Charges for 2022

The Committee considered the proposed Fees and Charges submitted by Freedom Leisure for 2022. The Corporate Director – Operations, Homes and Communities presented the report and explained the proposal from Freedom Leisure was to increase prices by an average of 3.2% across the various categories. Prices remain comparable with neighbouring authorities.

Both the Corporate Director and Rob Tyler from Freedom Leisure responded to questions from Committee Members. In the ensuing discussion, the following main points were made:

- Freedom Leisure can provide more information on the take-up of free swimming by young people. They will also consider how this can be promoted more widely.
- Reference was made to the opportunity for 15 additional free hours of tennis in the park. It was noted that this had been agreed for 2021 following consultation with the Chair and Vice-Chair, and the Corporate Director stated that Officers will undertake a similar discussion with the Chair and Vice-Chair regarding the potential for take-up in 2022.
- The eligibility of care leavers for the Advance 50 scheme was raised. Rob Tyler explained that this had not been a consideration when the contract was originally drawn up but Freedom Leisure are willing to look into whether this can be offered.
- Officers can investigate whether Covid recovery funding can be utilised to assist low income families with transport to leisure facilities.

RESOLVED: That the Committee agree to recommend to the Income Generation Sub-Committee and the Council, the approval of the proposed Fees & Charges submitted by Freedom Leisure for 2022, covering the period 1st January 2022 to 31st December 2022 inclusive, as set out in Appendix 1 to the report.

26 Hosting of the Knife Angel - The National Monument Against Violence and Aggression

The Committee considered a report on plans for Worcester to host the Knife Angel, a 27ft tall artwork made from over 100,000 knives and blades received from police forces across the UK. The Head of Community Services presented the report and explained the background. The Knife Angel had toured around the UK and hosts have been able to use the opportunity to raise awareness of the impact of violence and aggression on communities.

It was explained that Officers are working with partner agencies on where best to locate the Knife Angel, with the preferred option being on the grounds in front of Worcester Cathedral from 1st March to 31st March 2022. Whilst in situ there will be a series of workshops within the cathedral, school visits, classroom activities and interactive events at the statue.

This report sought approval for the allocation of £7,500 to ensure that the full costs of hosting the Knife Angel and delivering an associated engagement and education campaign around it, can be met. It is proposed to meet these costs from the allocation from reserves of £50,000 towards arts and cultural events approved by the Policy & Resources Committee in June 2021.

In the ensuing discussion, Committee Members expressed support for hosting. Reference was made to the proposed budget of £2,000 for education and engagement and a request was made for Officers to consider whether this can be increased so as to give greater support to educational activities. There was also a discussion as to whether outside the Cathedral is the best location. Cathedral Square was suggested as an alternative. Officers agreed to consider the feedback from the discussion.

RESOLVED: That the Committee:

- 1. Note the contents of this report and in particular the work being undertaken for Worcester City to host the Knife Angel during Spring 2022, supported by a programme of activities and materials to raise awareness of the impacts of violence and aggression; and**
- 2. Agree to recommend to Policy & Resources Committee the allocation of £7,500 from the funding towards Arts & Cultural Events approved in June 2021 towards the costs associated with those activities outlined at recommendation 1 above.**

27 Setting of the Budget for 2022/23 and MTFP to 2026/27

The Committee considered a report on the Budgets for the various services for 2021/22 and progress made in delivering the projects included in the City Plan relevant to this Committee. The Corporate Director – Finance and Resources presented the report and responded to questions from Committee Members.

It was noted that the Medium Term Financial Plan indicates a budget gap which will need to be addressed.

Officers highlighted that all Members are invited to submit suggestions for potential service improvements. This can be done now so as to be able to feed proposals into the Committee's consideration of the 2022/23 budget at its meeting in January. Members were also asked to consider whether the current capital programme projects are still appropriate for each service and whether there are any further needs that require addressing.

RESOLVED: That the Committee agree to note:

- 1. the Budgets for the various services identified for 2021/22; and**
- 2. the progress made in delivering the projects included in the City Plan and City Delivery Fund that are relevant to this Committee and the programme of work resourced.**

28 Consultation on a Proposed Public Spaces Protection Order to Close Footpath WR858 (Brickfields Crossing) and WR678 (Kays Crossing)

The Committee considered a report on the outcome of the public consultation on proposals to create Public Space Protection Orders (PSPO) to prohibit the use of two footpaths in Worcester that include railway level crossings, due to anti-social behaviour. The Head of Community Services presented the report and summarised the main findings.

Based on the outcome, Officers recommended that the Council should undertake two separate public consultation exercises, gathering residents' views on the wording of the draft railway PSPOs as set out at Appendix 2 to the report, to prohibit the use of Footpath WR858 (Brickfields Crossing) and WR678 (Kays Crossing) for 3 years. The results would be reported the March 2022 meeting of the Committee.

Committee Members expressed support for proceeding with the proposed consultation exercises.

RESOLVED: That the Committee agreed to:

- 1. note the contents of this report in particular the consultation responses at Appendix 1;**
- 2. approve the undertaking of a four-week public consultation on the proposed Public Spaces Protection Order to prohibit the use of footpath WR858 (Brickfields Crossing) and WR678 (Kays Crossing) at Appendix 2; and**

3. **note that the results of the public consultation will be reported back to this Committee on 16th March 2022 to decide whether to create the Orders.**

29 Housing Assistance Policy Update

The Committee considered a proposal for an updated Housing Assistance Policy. The Corporate Director – Homes and Communities presented the report and explained the reasons for the changes, which were set out in the report.

In response to a question about how the policy supports Children with SEN and disabilities, the Corporate Director agreed to provide written clarification of the current Disabled Facilities Grant criteria with Committee Members.

Committee Members expressed support for the proposed changes.

RESOLVED: That the Committee agree to:

1. **approve the increase in the current level of Discretionary Disabled Facilities Grant top up from £10,000 to £25,000;**
2. **note the further minor amendments to the Housing Assistance Policy at section 4 and 5; and**
3. **approve delegated authority to the Head of Homes & Communities in consultation with Communities Committee Chair and Vice-Chair to make future small amendments to the policy as required.**

30 Quarter 2 Performance Report for 2021/22

The Committee considered a report on the Council's Quarter 2 performance for Communities for 2021/22. The Scorecard had been refreshed with projects completed in the last financial year replaced by new projects as previously agreed by this Committee.

A question was raised regarding comparative graphs, specifically whether the same scale can be used on all graphs for clarity. The Corporate Director – Operations, Homes and Communities agreed to take this into account for future reports.

RESOLVED: That the Committee agree to note the Council's Quarter 2 performance for 2021/22.

31 Any Other Business

None.

Duration of the meeting: 7.00p.m. – 8.55p.m.

Chair at the meeting on
26th January 2022