

## **ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE**

**25th January 2022**

**Present:** Councillor Andy Stafford in the Chair

Councillors Agar, Altaf, B. Amos, Barnes, Bisset, Cleary, Griffiths, Norfolk, Roberts and Udall

**Also in Attendance:**

Councillor Allcott

**Officers:**

Lloyd Griffiths, Corporate Director – Operations, Homes and Communities  
Shane Flynn, Corporate Director – Finance and Resources  
Phil Gilmour, Interim Head of Environmental Operations

**Apologies:**

Councillors Collins, Cronin and Laurenson

### **33 Appointment of Substitutes**

Councillor Agar for Councillor Cronin, Councillor Barnes for Councillor Collins and Councillor Bisset for Councillor Laurenson.

### **34 Declarations of Interest**

None.

### **35 Public Participation**

Patrick Allfrey spoke about various ongoing issues related to Windsor Avenue Allotment site, those of which were raised by him at the last meeting in November and had still not been resolved. He stated that Councillors were having difficulty in getting information from staff as to if and what records there are in connection with the loss of the local recreational area, the degraded water supply to the allotments, the failure to provide improved and enhanced gates to the allotments and the unacceptable reinstatement of the roadways damaged by the contractors within the allotment. He informed the Committee that FOI requests have been made and while they were all made in late November and early December the only 2 returns to date have indicated that no written paperwork was ever created by any department of the council in relation to these matters which are connected to the development at 31 Hopton Street.

The Chair thanked Mr Allfrey for his presentation and that Officers would provide him with a written response.

Paul Snookes spoke on behalf of Worcester Environmental Group in connection with a proposal for a "Wild About Worcester Way", a 12 mile wildlife corridor around the city. He informed the Committee that a consultation meeting had been scheduled for 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2022 at the Guildhall and would be sending invitations to Committee Members and would welcome their input. He informed the Committee that the group were working with Parish and City Councillors on a stretch through Warndon Villages to enhance biodiversity. A proposal had also been put forward to Councillor Allcott in respect of biodiversity enhancements for Northwick Playing Fields.

The Chair thanked Mr Snookes for his presentation and said that he looked forward to hearing more details about the proposal.

### **36 Minutes**

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2021 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

Matters arising:

#### Minute No. 22 – Public Participation

Councillor Udall referred to his comments made at the last meeting with regard to security issues at Windsor Avenue Allotment site and was disappointed that no progress had been made. He referred to a letter from Platform Housing who were offering to provide raised allotment beds, security gates and fencing, no progress had been made with this either. He asked that a report come back to the next committee regarding the security and issues of the site.

The Corporate Director – Operations, Homes and Communities in response stated that briefings had been held with all relevant parties, who were working hard to bring these issues to a resolution. He agreed that he would discuss the issues with the Chair and Vice about progress and would consider bringing a report back to committee. Councillor Udall did ask that members be involved in the process for which the Chair agreed.

### **37 Street Scene Place Working**

The Committee considered a report on Street Scene Place Working.

In July 2020, a report was brought to the Environment Committee for approval for 'Place Working' to commence in October 2020 with the city being divided into five places, including the City Centre as a Place. Teams of five operatives were initially allocated to each of the outlying Place areas, working Monday to Friday with a team of six working Monday to Sunday for the city centre.

In order to revert to the pre-October 2020 staffing levels of 18 operatives (currently 20 deployed) from April 2022, options were suggested in the January 2020 budget papers, these options were outlined in paragraph 2.5 of the report. Following a review of these options each were considered to be detrimental to the current service.

The change to Place Working has been well received and is seen as being successful so far, with general service standards improved and reduced complaint levels. The preferred option therefore is to continue with the deployment of the existing resources, directly employing an additional two operatives on a permanent basis, in the Place teams.

The Interim Head of Environmental Operations presented the report and responded to questions from Committee Members.

Members of the Committee fully supported the proposal and agreed to the recruitment of two permanent staff to the Street Scene team.

**RESOLVED: That the Committee agree to:**

- 1. note the contents of this report and approves the proposal to continue with the existing number of operatives undertaking Place working;**
- 2. approve the recruitment of two permanent staff to the Street Scene team (Place Working); and**
- 3. recommend to Council an additional revenue budget of £55,000 to the Environmental Operations budget for 2022/2023.**

**38 Street Scene Enhancement**

The Committee considered a report on Street Scene Enhancement.

During 2021, as part of the city centre enhancement programme, Environmental Operations deployed a service enhancement team ('hit squad') to support the Street Scene activities.

This resource has primarily been assigned to the city centre, undertaking street washing, bench cleaning, litter bin washing, dead animal removal and graffiti removal. The street washing activities have been of significant help in managing the problems and mess caused by gull droppings. In addition, the team have worked on arterial routes into the city centre; litter picking, bus shelter maintenance and leaf clearance.

The results from the deployment of the current enhancement team have been very noticeable, there have been less customer complaints and the Council has received some compliments on the condition of the city centre from visitors.

The preferred option is to continue with the deployment of the additional resources for a further year, to directly employ two operatives on one-year fixed term contracts and to continue to hire a caged vehicle for a further year.

The Interim Head of Environmental Operations presented the report and responded to questions from Committee Members.

Members of the Committee fully supported and agreed to the proposals.

**RESOLVED: That Committee agree to:**

- 1. note the contents of this report and approves the proposed extension to the deployment of the Street Scene Enhancement Team ('hit squad'); and**
- 2. recommend to Council an additional revenue budget of £80,000 to the Environmental Operations budget in 2022/2023.**

### **39 Feasibility of Public Toilet Provision at St John's Cemetery**

The Committee received a report on the feasibility of public toilet provision at St John's Cemetery.

Until 2010 the site used to provide a public toilet, but the facilities were consistently vandalised and a source of anti-social behaviour, including illicit substance abuse. As a result, they were closed and for the last few years the building has been used as a break area for staff attending the site.

The report has investigated the feasibility of reintroducing public toilet provision taking account actual demand versus capital and ongoing revenue costs of such a project.

A cost analysis has been carried out on three options, set out in paragraph 3.3 of the report, to determine both initial capital cost and ongoing revenue costs associated with each option.

With currently unknown or insignificant demand for public toilet provision and capital and revenue financial implications, Officers were not recommending that public toilet provision be reinstated. The preferred option is to signpost visitors clearly to local publicly accessible toilet provision via site signage and use of the Council's website.

During the debate some Members disagreed and said that there was a demand for the toilets to re-open and asked that the committee reconsider to seek further options. It was suggested that potentially a working group could be set up, to include Ward Members, to look at alternatives. Also, a list of venues that could be utilised would be useful.

It was generally felt that the decision of Officers could not be overturned with the evidence provided, and the Chair agreed that there was no reason why this dialogue could not continue.

#### **RESOLVED: That the Committee agree to:**

- 1. note the contents of the report; and**
- 2. endorse the proposal to raise awareness of the provision of local publicly accessible toilet facilities, via site signage and use of the Council's website in order to support people to plan their visit to the site.**

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

The Committee considered the proposed budgets for Environment Services for 2022/23. The Committee reviewed the priorities within each service and the initiatives proposed in the Income and Efficiency plan and reviewed the City Plan allocations. The Committee also considered the draft Capital Programme to 2026/27. The Corporate Director – Finance and Resources presented the report and responded to questions from Committee Members.

Members were informed that the funding on the previously approved budget items by the Committee, set out in the table at paragraph 4.4 of the report, had been approved by Policy and Resources at its meeting on 16<sup>th</sup> November 2021.

In addition to this proposal the Chair had received the following new items for consideration:

- City Centre Street Scene enhancement - £80,000 to continue with the City Delivery Fund proposal for an Enhancement Team (Driver, 1 operative and vehicle) once funding from reserves ends. This will ensure that the improvements are maintained to cover the Queen's Jubilee year;
- Biodiversity – Upskilling the Environmental Operations team to enable them to best manage biodiversity issues - £10,000 for more training for the existing team and also to develop a key individual for greater knowledge, including recognised qualifications; and
- Perdiswell landscaping - £47,000 to cover shortfall in funding against the tender received. The initial report was for a broad allocation and the scope has widened.

The rationale for each of the items was summarised in the report.

In addition to the above one off proposals the Chair had received proposals which have an ongoing revenue implication and would have a direct impact on the Council's budget to be set at Council on 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2022, if approved at Policy and Resources on 8<sup>th</sup> February. The proposals were as follows:

- Place Working – Street Scene - £50,000 the current funding from reserves ends in March 2022. To maintain the existing standards it is proposed to continue the resource levels permanently; and
- St John's Cemetery, re-opening of the toilets and staff facilities - £14,000 annual cost of cleaning and security.

Each of these proposals were the subject of a separate report on the agenda. It was noted that the St John's Cemetery item was now not to be taken forward as discussed in the previous item on the agenda.

In addition to this, the Chair had received two further proposals which were potentially of a capital nature and would need to be built into capital programmes. Members of the Committee were informed that there would be a further report on each item setting out the full design and business case and financial implications during the year. The proposals were as follows:

- Cut and collect mower - £38,000 purchase of a mower to support wild flowering in verges and grassed areas; and

- EV charging points in car parks - £200,000 to develop a programme of additional charging points at suitable locations in the Council's car parks.

The rationale for each of the items was summarised in the report.

A local Ward Member, Councillor Allcott, addressed the Committee with regard to biodiversity enhancements at Northwick Playing Fields, which was supported by Officers and Members.

Two other proposals for funding were put forward by Members, namely air pollution and the use of sensors to identify hot spots in the city and subsidising pest control. Officers confirmed that the former was currently being looked at by Worcestershire Regulatory Services and the study for this was not yet complete. The latter proposal was for subsidising pest control for Worcester City residents on low income. After some discussion it was agreed not to take this forward as further work was required and Officers agreed to liaise with the Chair and Vice Chair of Licensing and Environmental Health Committee and colleagues in Worcestershire Regulatory Services.

**RESOLVED: That the Committee agree to:**

- 1. note the proposed budgets for the various services identified for 2022/23;**
- 2. note the priorities within each service;**
- 3. note the services' Capital Programme and future projects;**
- 4. recommend the Policy and Resources Committee to agree the following new budget proposals:**
  - **City Centre Street Scene enhancement - £80,000 to continue with City Delivery Fund proposal for Enhancement Team (Driver, 1 operative and vehicle) once funding from reserves ends. This will ensure the improvements is maintained to cover the Queen's Jubilee year;**
  - **Biodiversity – Upskilling the Environmental Operations team to enable them to best manage biodiversity issues - £10,000 for more training for existing team and also to develop a key individual for greater knowledge including recognised qualifications;**
  - **Perdiswell landscaping - £47,000 to cover shortfall in funding against the tender received. Initial report was for a broad allocation and the scope has widened;**
  - **Place Working – Street Scene - £50,000 the current funding from reserves ends in March 2022. To maintain the existing standards it is proposed to continue the resource levels permanently;**
  - **Cut and collect mower - £38,000 purchase of a mower to support wild flowering in verges and greased areas; and**
  - **EV charging points in car parks - £200,000 to develop a programme of additional charging points at suitable locations in the Council's car parks.**

**41 Quarter 3 Performance Report for 2021/22**

The Committee considered the Quarter 3 performance report for the Environment Committee for 2021/22.

The Corporate Director - Finance and Resources, presented the report and highlighted the main points, in particular the Bereavement Services Review which was overdue, as the project had been delayed through operational pressures linked with COVID. The project due date has been re-set to March 2023.

**RESOLVED: That the Committee agree to note the Council's Quarter 3 performance for 2021/22.**

**42 Any Other Business**

The Chair, on behalf of the Committee, gave thanks to Phil Gilmour, Interim Head of Environmental Operations for his support and hard work that he had carried out during his time at the City Council and wished him well for the future.

**Duration of the meeting:** 7.00p.m. to 8.35p.m.

Chair at the meeting on  
15th March 2022