

POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

21st March 2023

Present: Councillor Marjory Bisset in the Chair

Councillors Allcott, Denham (Vice-Chair), A. Ditta, S. Ditta, Gregson, Mrs L. Hodgson, S. Hodgson, Mackay, Mitchell, Norfolk, Piotrowski, Riaz and Stephen

Officers: David Blake, Managing Director
Claire Chaplin, Democratic and Civic Services Manager
Shane Flynn, Corporate Director – Finance and Resources
Lloyd Griffiths, Corporate Director – Operations, Homes and Communities
Sian Stroud, Corporate Director – Planning and Governance

106 Appointment of Substitutes

Councillor A. Ditta for Councillor Stanley, Councillor S. Ditta for Councillor Bayliss, Councillor S. Hodgson for Councillor Stafford, Councillor Norfolk for Councillor Agar, Councillor Piotrowski for Councillor Stephen.

107 Declarations of Interest

The following declarations of interest were made:

Councillor Mitchell – Minute 114 (Boxing on Council Premises) – Councillor Mitchell stated that he had held discussions with the owner of DP Boxing regarding boxing events at Perdiswell Sports Centre, but he had not taken any decisions on the matter.

Councillor A. Ditta – Minute 114 (Boxing on Council Premises) – Councillor Ditta stated that he had held a discussion with the owner of DP Boxing and had attended the opening of their gym. However, he had not taken any decisions on the matter.

Councillor Mitchell - Minute 113 (Council Referral Report – Worcester Warriors Rugby Club) - Has a hospitality box at Worcester Warriors Rugby Club.

108 Public Representations

Jonathan Shaw, the owner of DP Boxing, Sherriff Street spoke to the Committee in respect of the suspension of non-England Boxing affiliated events on Council premises. He explained the benefits of coaching boxing in the local community. His gym is affiliated to Inspire Championship Boxing and he highlighted the safety record of semi-professional boxing events promoted by ICB. He assured the Committee that safety was the top priority in his organisation and he asked the Council to lift the prohibition for ICB events.

109 Minutes

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meetings held on 7th February and 28th February 2023 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

110 Minutes of Income Management Sub-Committee

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 1st February 2023 be received.

111 Elections Act 2022 - Progress On Implementation

The Committee received a report on progress made on the requirements and measures being taken by the Registration/Returning Officer to implement the Voter ID and accessibility provisions of the Elections Act 2022. The Democratic and Civic Services Manager presented the report and summarised the main points. She responded to questions from Committee Members.

In the ensuing discussion, Members acknowledged the thoroughness of preparations for the May 2023 elections. Members made a number of requests and suggestions to help promote Voter ID and accessibility provisions. Officers noted the points made. With reference to community engagement sessions, Members can let Officers know if they think particular venues would benefit from a visit.

RESOLVED: That the Committee note the progress made to date on the requirements and measures being taken by the Registration/Returning Officer to implement the Voter ID and accessibility provisions of the Elections Act 2022.

112 Council Referral Report - Standing Up For Responsible Tax Conduct

The Committee considered a report on this matter, which had been the subject of a Notice of Motion to the Council at its meeting on 21st February 2023. The Corporate Director – Finance and Resources presented the report and provided comments on each of the proposals contained within the Motion, which were that the Council resolves to:

1. Approve the Councils for Fair Tax Declaration.
2. Lead by example and demonstrate good practice in our tax conduct, right across our activities.
3. Ensure IR35 is implemented robustly and contract workers pay a fair share of employment taxes.
4. Not use offshore vehicles for the purchase of land and property, especially where this leads to reduced payments of stamp duty.
5. Undertake due diligence to ensure that not-for-profit structures are not being used inappropriately by suppliers as an artificial device to reduce the payment of tax and business rates.
6. Demand clarity on the ultimate beneficial ownership of suppliers UK and overseas and their consolidated profit & loss position, given lack of clarity could be strong indicators of poor financial probity and weak financial standing.

7. Promote Fair Tax Mark certification especially for any business in which we have a significant stake and where corporation tax is due.
8. Support Fair Tax Week events in the area, and celebrate the tax contribution made by responsible businesses are proud to promote responsible tax conduct and pay their fair share of corporation tax.
9. Support calls for urgent reform of UK procurement law to enable local authorities to better penalise poor tax conduct and reward good tax conduct through their procurement policies.

In summary, the Corporate Director was satisfied that there are no statutory restrictions to supporting the Fair Tax Declaration. The Council would need to continue to follow statutory guidance and best practice and in instances where there is a potential conflict between the declaration and the guidance, the Council would be bound by its duties under statute. The Council's Procurement Policies will be reviewed to incorporate a commitment to refer to the expectations of the Motion during procurement exercises.

The Corporate Director responded to questions from Members on detailed aspects of the report. Members concluded that the Council should support the proposal to adopt the Councils for Fair Tax Declaration.

RESOLVED: That the Committee agree the proposals contained within the Motion, as set out above.

113 Council Referral Report - Worcester Warriors Rugby Club

The Committee considered a report on a Notice of Motion which had been considered by the Council at its meeting on 21st February 2023. The Managing Director presented the report and explained that, in line with the agreed Motion, he had written to James Sandford and Jim O'Toole of the Atlas Consortium. A copy of their response was attached to the report.

The Chief Executive of Wychavon Council had indicated that further discussions would be required before any course of action could be agreed with Wychavon Council. In respect of the proposal to request that Wychavon Council consider using their CPO powers, the report explained that this should be a last resort and such option was not recommended at this stage.

In conclusion, the Managing Director proposed that a meeting for Worcester City Council and Wychavon Council Members with James Sandford and Jim O'Toole should be requested, as proposed in the Motion. He proposed that Worcestershire County Council be invited too.

In the ensuing discussion, Members expressed support for the proposed way forward. In order to structure the meeting, it was requested that questions should be submitted in advance.

RESOLVED: That the Committee agree to:

- 1. Instruct the Managing Director to write to the Leader of Wychavon Council, sharing the response from James Sandford and Jim O'Toole and requesting a meeting between Worcester City Council and**

Wychavon District Council in order, in the light of the response, to discuss next steps;

- 2. Include Worcestershire County Council in the above invitation;**
- 3. Invite Jim O'Toole to make a presentation to Members prior to the next meeting on 23 May 2023;**
- 4. Invite Members from Wychavon and Worcestershire County Council to attend; and**
- 5. Invite Members from all three Councils to submit questions to the Managing Director prior to the 23 May meeting so that these can be sent to Jim O'Toole and James Sandford in advance.**

114 Boxing Events On Council Premises

The Committee considered a report on holding boxing events on Council premises. The Managing Director presented the report and explained that in April 2022, following the death of a member of the public participating in a boxing event at Tramps nightclub, Worcester, the Council's Corporate Leadership Team requested Worcestershire Regulatory Services (WRS) to undertake a health and safety investigation. This remained ongoing due to its complexity. Meanwhile, a Coroners Inquiry was scheduled for 2nd May 2023.

In the light of this tragic event, the Corporate Leadership Team had taken a unanimous view that the City Council should temporarily suspend the acceptance of any further bookings for boxing events on Council premises that were not operated by organisations affiliated to England Boxing, the national governing body for semi-professional boxing. This decision was communicated to all Political Group Leaders, who were supportive.

The Council had recently received a request from an organisation not affiliated to England Boxing to hold an event at Perdiswell Leisure Centre. The purpose of the report was to seek approval to maintain the temporary suspension on non-England Boxing affiliated events, pending the publication of the Coroner's report and the outcome of the WRS investigation, following which a further report would be presented to the Committee.

Members proceeded to discuss the report and a range of views were expressed. Some Members considered that, whilst Ultra White Collar Boxing events should not be held on Council premises, the prohibition was unfair on local amateur boxing clubs that are accredited to national bodies other than England Boxing. Other Members expressed the view that the approach taken was proportionate in the circumstances and the suspension should remain in place.

It was proposed and seconded that the recommendation be amended to read as follows:

That the Committee approve the continued suspension of Ultra White Collar boxing at events on Council premises, other than amateur boxing club events which on an individual basis can demonstrate that the event complies with amateur boxing standards, until such time that the outcome of the Coroner's Inquest referred to within this report and the Worcestershire Regulatory Services investigation, can be reviewed, enabling a further report to be presented to Committee.

Upon being put to the vote, the amendment was lost. Members then proceeded to vote on the original recommendation.

RESOLVED: That the Committee approve the continued suspension of boxing events on Council premises, other than those affiliated to England Boxing, until such time that the outcome of the Coroner's Inquest referred to within this report and the Worcestershire Regulatory Services investigation, can be reviewed, enabling a further report to be presented to Committee.

115 Capital And Investment Strategies 2022/23 - 2024/25

The Committee considered a report on the Capital Strategy for 2023/24 – 2025/26 and Investment Strategy for 2023/24 – 2025/26. the Corporate Director – Finance and Resources presented the report and summarised the main points. He clarified that the table in paragraph 2.8 - Prudential Indicators: Authorised Limit and Operational Boundary for External Debt – was not correct. The correct version was set out at Table 6 in the Capital Strategy.

The Strategies were are required under statutory guidance and formed part of the Policy and Budgetary Framework. In accordance with the Constitution, changes to the Policy and Budgetary Framework are reserved to full Council to determine.

RESOLVED: That the Committee agree to recommend the Council to adopt the Capital Strategy 2023/24 – 2025/26 and Investment Strategy 2023/24 – 2025/26.

116 Proposed Committee Performance Scorecard For 2023/24

The Committee considered the proposed content of the Policy and Resources Performance Scorecard for 2023/24. The Corporate Director – Finance and Resources presented the report and highlighted the main points, including details of 2022/23 scorecard content which will be removed. The City Plan Projects and Activities will be populated once priorities have been agreed by the Corporate Leadership Team and Group Leaders.

The Corporate Director responded to questions from Committee Members.

RESOLVED: That the Committee agree the proposed content of the Policy and Resources Performance Scorecard for 2023/24.

117 Any Other Business

The Committee agreed to consider an item of any other business concerning the Worcester City Housing Enabling Strategy and Delivery Plan 2023-2026 (see minute item 118).

118 Referral Report from Communities Committee - Worcester City Housing Enabling Strategy and Delivery Plan 2023-2026

The Committee considered a report on the adoption of the Worcester City Housing Enabling Strategy and Delivery Plan. The Chair had agreed to consider this item as a matter of urgent business so that the recruitment process for the post of

Principal Strategic Housing & Enabling Officer could commence as soon as possible.

The Corporate Director – Finance and Resources presented the report and explained that, at its meeting on 15th March 2023, the Communities Committee had agreed to adopt the Worcester City Housing Enabling Strategy and Delivery Plan 2023-2026. To deliver the Strategic Goals of the Strategy, it was considered necessary to invest in a new dedicated and specialist resource to increase the capacity and expertise of the Strategic Housing Service. Therefore, it was proposed to utilise £150,000 from the Affordable Housing Reserve and Vulnerable Tenants' Reserve to recruit a new post of Principal Strategic Housing & Enabling Officer with significant experience and knowledge of housing enabling that will be dedicated to driving this agenda forward.

In accordance with the Reserves Policy, any amendments to earmarked reserves should be reported to the Policy and Resources Committee for approval.

Officers responded to questions and comments from Committee Members. It was clarified that the purpose of the post is to add pace to the Council's strategic work as there is insufficient capacity at present.

RESOLVED: That the Committee agree to approve the allocation of £150,000, to be met from the Housing for Vulnerable Tenants' Reserve, to recruit a Principal Strategic Housing & Enabling Officer to a 2-year fixed term post.

119 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.

120 Minutes (Exempt Items)

RESOLVED: That the minutes (exempt items) of the meetings held on 7th February and 28th February 2023 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

121 Minutes of Income Management Sub-Committee (Exempt Items)

RESOLVED: That the minutes (exempt items) of the meeting held on 1st February 2023 be received.

Duration of the meeting: 7.00p.m. – 9.40p.m.

Chair at the meeting on
23rd May 2023