

COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

8th November 2023

Present: Councillor Laurenson (Vice-Chair) in the Chair

Councillors Ali, Altaf, Amos, Cooper, Desayrah, Lamb, Lawrance and Piotrowski

Officers: Rosey Badham, Housing and Homelessness Service Manager
James Beale, Housing Welfare & Options Team Manager
Shane Flynn, Corporate Director – Finance and Resources
Lloyd Griffiths, Corporate Director – Operations, Homes and Communities
Tom Mountford, Head of Homes and Communities

22 Appointment of Substitutes

Councillor Norfolk for Councillor Riaz.

23 Declarations of Interest

The following declarations of interest were made:

Councillor Altaf – Review of the Worcester City Lettings Scheme (Minute 30) – As a landlord in Worcester

Councillor Desayrah – Worcester Municipal Charities (Minute 26) – As a trustee of Worcester Municipal Charities

Councillor Lawrance - Freedom Leisure - Proposed Fees and Charges for 2024 (Minute 28) – As a member of Perdiswell Leisure Centre

Councillor Piotrowski – Public Participation (Minute 25) - As a member of Worcestershire Interfaith Forum

24 Worcester Municipal Housing

The Committee received a presentation from Geraint Thomas, Vice-Chairman, Worcester Municipal Charities. He explained the purpose of the Charity, how it operates and how it manages its accommodation, including how it works with the City Council. Information about the Charity had been circulated to all Committee Members. Mr Thomas responded to questions. The Chair thanked him for his presentation.

25 Public Participation

The Committee received a presentation from the Reverend Catherine Lack, Chair, Worcestershire Interfaith Forum, who spoke in support of adopting a Faith Covenant for Worcester.

26 Minutes

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 19th July 2023 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

27 Freedom Leisure - Contract Year 7 Annual Report (April 2022 to March 2023)

The Committee received the Freedom Leisure Annual Report 2022/23. Rob Tyler, Freedom Leisure Area Manager and Lee Thomas, Freedom Leisure Regional Manager, were in attendance to give a presentation and they responded to questions from Members. Areas covered by the presentation included financial performance, energy performance, programmes to improve health and wellbeing of residents, and Freedom Leisure's Development Plan for the year ahead.

In summary, following on from the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, contract year 7 had produced further challenges related to the energy and cost of living crisis, resulting in a loss of £210,844, which included further financial support from the City Council for increased utility costs of £255,000. Meanwhile, active participation increased by 7%, overachieving target by 47,061 visits.

Rob Tyler and Lee Thomas responded to questions and comments from Committee Members. In the ensuing discussion, several points were raised which Rob Tyler agreed to take away for consideration. These included support for refugees other than Ukrainian nationals and encouraging participation by white males who are of school age.

Members welcomed the improved participation and thanked Rob Tyler and Lee Thomas for the presentation.

RESOLVED: That the Committee agree to note the content of the Freedom Leisure Annual Report 2022/23.

28 Freedom Leisure - Proposed Fees and Charges for 2024

The Committee considered a report on the proposed Freedom Leisure Fees & Charges for the 2024 calendar year. The Lead Commissioner for Leisure, Play, Health and Wellbeing presented the report and explained that the proposal was to increase prices by an average of 4.6% across the various categories of the Fees & Charges proposal document, a copy of which was appended to the report. In summary, the increases for individual categories would be as follows:

Category	Ave: % increase
Monthly Memberships	3.8%
Annual Memberships	4.7%
Swim School Memberships	3.8%
Swimming Activities	5.6%
School Swimming	6%
Clubs & Private Hire (Events)	5%
Special Swimming Sessions	5.9%
Unsupervised Activities	1.1%
Equipment Hire	No increase from 2023

Supervised Activities	3.1%
*AGP's and Athletics Facilities	5.3%
Tennis – Annual Passes	No increase from 2023
Tennis – Pay & Play	No increase from 2023
Tennis - Coaching	7%

*AGPs – Artificial Grass Pitches (at all three Leisure Centres)

It was forecast that the proposed increases will generate an additional income of c£146k to Freedom Leisure, which will therefore reduce the risk of any further request for financial support from the Council during 2024/25. The Lead Commissioner commented on various aspects of the report. Rob Tyler also commented and responded to questions to explain the rationale for the proposals.

Committee Members expressed support for the proposals.

RESOLVED: That the Committee agree to:

- 1. recommend the proposed Freedom Leisure Fees and Charges for the 2024 calendar year at Appendix 1, to Income Management Sub-Committee on 15th November for approval; and**
- 2. note that subject to approval by Income Management Sub-Committee on 15th November 2023, the proposed Fees and Charges will then be recommended to Council on 28th November 2023 for full and final approval.**

There was a 10 minute adjournment following consideration of this item.

29 Setting of the Budget for 2024/25 and Medium Term Financial Plan to 2028/29

The Committee considered a report on the Budget for Communities Committee for 2024/25 and the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP). The Corporate Director – Finance and Resources presented the report and highlighted the main issues. He encouraged all Members to get in touch with him to discuss suggestions of potential service improvements and/or re-prioritisation of budgets

Officers responded to questions and comments from Committee Members. In the ensuing discussion, it was noted that a report on the review of PSPOs will be brought to the next meeting of the Committee in January 2024.

There were no recommendations to change emphasis for the services' income and expenditure allocations.

RESOLVED: That the Committee agree to:

- 1. note the Budgets for the various services identified for 2024/25; and**
- 2. note the progress made in delivering the projects included in the City Plan and City Delivery Fund that are relevant to this Committee and confirms the programme of work resourced.**

30 **Review of the Worcester City Lettings Scheme**

The Committee considered a report on the Worcester City Lettings Scheme. The Housing and Homelessness Service Manager presented the report and explained that there had been a significant reduction in the number of properties available through the scheme in recent years. The private rental market had changed considerably since the scheme was first launched, and this had impacted on the attractiveness of the scheme to private landlords. The current scheme operated at a significant financial loss due to the reduction in the number of properties being let through the scheme versus the cost of the staffing resource to operate it.

Following a review by Officers, it was proposed that the scheme be discontinued and that staff resource in other areas of the service. The report summarised how this option would be implemented and the benefits that would accrue.

Officers responded to questions and comments from Committee Members.

RESOLVED: That the Committee:

- 1. approve the discontinuation of the Worcester City Lettings Scheme; and**
- 2. agree to note the arrangements set out within the report that will ensure tenants of remaining Worcester City Lettings property are fully supported.**

31 **6 Month Update Report - Worcester City Housing Enabling Strategy 2023-2026**

The Committee received a report from the Head of Homes and Communities on the Worcester City Housing Enabling Strategy and Delivery Plan, which had been adopted in March 2023. The report provided an update on the delivery of the Strategy against the 8 goals as well as proposed areas of focus over the forthcoming 6 months, at which point there will be a further update report.

Officers responded to questions and comments from Committee Members. In the ensuing discussion, Members were advised more information can be provided following the meeting about the number and location of empty homes in Worcester. Officers can also provide more information on affordable homes on the Shrub Hill Development. It was noted that the delivery of affordable homes is part of the performance scorecard for Place and Economic Development Committee. The Chair of that Committee suggested this indicator could be reported to Communities Committee as well.

RESOLVED: That the Committee note the contents of this report, and that a further report will be presented in June 2024.

32 **Quarter 2 Performance Report for 2023/24**

The Committee considered the quarter 2 performance report for Communities Committee. The Corporate Director – Operations, Homes and Communities presented the report and highlighted the main points. He responded to questions from Committee Members.

In response to a question about the number and location of Houses in Multiple Occupation, the Corporate Director stated that a briefing note can be provided.

In response to a comment about whereabouts on the agenda the Performance Report should appear, Members were advised that this will be discussed with the Chair and Vice-Chair as part of the agenda planning process.

RESOLVED: That the Committee agree to note the Council's quarter 2 performance for 2023/24.

33 Any Other Business

None.

Duration of the meeting: 7.00p.m. – 9.56p.m.

Chair at the meeting on
31st January 2024