

## **COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE**

**13th March 2024**

**Present:** Councillor Laurenson (Vice-Chair) in the Chair  
Councillors Amos, Collier, Cooper, Desayrah, Lamb, Lawrance, Piotrowski and Willmore

**Officers:** James Beale, Affordable Housing Delivery Manager  
Ismene Broad, Private Sector Team Manager  
Shane Flynn, Corporate Director – Finance and Resources  
Lloyd Griffiths, Corporate Director – Operations, Homes and Communities  
Kevin Moore, Head of Property and Asset Management  
Tom Mountford, Head of Homes and Communities  
Warwick Neale, Community Services Team Manager

**Apologies:** Councillor Riaz

### **46 Appointment of Substitutes**

Councillor Willmore for Councillor Ali.

### **47 Declarations of Interest**

The following declarations of interest were made:

Councillor Piotrowski – Update on the Homes For Ukraine Support Scheme and Local Authority Housing Fund (Minute 52) and Comer Gardens Institute – Capital Investment Business Case Report (Minute 50) - Employer is mentioned in both reports

Councillors Collier and Cooper – Review of Public Space Protection Orders (Minute 55) - As members of Bike Worcester.

### **48 Public Participation**

Rhiannon Clarke, a member of the Comer Gardens Hall Association, spoke in support of the Comer Gardens Institute - Capital Investment Business Case item. She explained that the Association has been active in the development of the business case and urged Committee Members to support the recommendation for its approval. She outlined the positive feedback to the proposal and the commitment of the Hall Association to create a diverse community hub to meet the needs of the local community.

Dan Brothwell, Chair of Bike Worcester, spoke with regard to the City centre PSPO and the prohibition of dangerous cycling and skateboarding in the city centre. He reiterated the point made in the Officer report that the PSPO can be enforced under other legislation. His view was that the PSPO is a barrier to active travel, and that anti-social behaviour and road danger in the city is not caused by people riding bikes. He encouraged the Committee to support the recommendation to discontinue the PSPO in relation to dangerous cycling and skateboarding.

Alex Mace spoke in support of the scrapping of the PSPO against dangerous cycling and skateboarding. In summary, his view was that the PSPO is not reasonable or justifiable as it cannot be enforced and does not set out what it is intended to achieve. There is no evidence to support maintaining it. He highlighted that stakeholders have requested the Council to consider a shared space scheme instead of the PSPO. He endorsed this approach and asked that drivers should be included in any shared space messaging.

The Chair thanked all speakers and advised that written responses will be provided.

#### 49 **Minutes**

With reference to minute 36, the correct spelling of Canon Brian McGinley's surname was highlighted. The minutes will be duly amended.

**RESOLVED: that the minutes of the meeting held on 31<sup>st</sup> January 2024 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.**

#### 50 **Comer Gardens Institute - Capital Investment Business Case Report**

The Committee considered a report on the proposal to refurbish the first floor of Comer Gardens Hall. The Head of Property and Asset Management presented the report and explained that this proposal will deliver the project to convert the first floor into a space capable of being used as a dance studio, thus enabling the ground floor to be used as a community space. The Council had previously agreed to make an adjustment to the capital programme to the value of £140k to deliver the project. The proposed scheme had been designed and costed in consultation with the Comer Gardens Hall Association.

The current estimate for the project was £168k, which exceeded the capital programme allocation, and the Association will need to fund the shortfall in full. The Association was currently investigating the availability of grants and the potential of fundraising. Planning permission would also be required.

Officers had provided guidance on the development of a properly considered Business Plan for the use of the building. A full copy of the Association's Business Plan was appended to the report.

Subject to approval, it was proposed that the Council is minded to grant a new 10-year lease of the building and its grounds, under which the Council will retain landlord's responsibility for the maintenance of the structure and roof but all other responsibilities will lie with Association as tenant.

Committee Members spoke in support of the proposal. In response to questions, the following main points were made:

- The estimated cost has risen due to construction inflation and a number of necessary alterations to the original scheme.
- The Association will have two years to find the funds to pay the remaining balance. They have a number of funding bids which are due to be submitted. If this gap cannot be bridged then the matter will be referred back to Committee for further consideration.
- A suggestion was made that this venue should be listed under the "Find It, Do It" section of the Council's website.

Committee Members expressed support for the proposals.

**RESOLVED: That the Committee agree the following:**

- 1. to note the contents of the report, including the submission of a business plan by the Comer Gardens Hall Association at Appendix 1;**
- 2. approval of the business case for converting the first floor of the Comer Gardens Institute for an extension of the community hall;**
- 3. that the current £168k estimated cost of this work exceeds the provisional budget of £140k; and**
- 4. approval of the release of £140k allocation from the capital programme to support delivery of the project, subject to the Corporate Director (Operations, Homes and Communities) being satisfied that:**
  - I. Comer Gardens Hall Association is in funds to pay the remaining balance for the cost of these works within 2 years of the date of approval by this Committee**
  - II. The grant of all necessary regulatory consents has been secured, including planning consent**
  - III. Acceptable terms have been agreed for a new lease, including a community use agreement.**

## **51 Proposed Committee Performance Scorecard for 2024/25**

The Committee considered a report on the proposed revised approach to corporate performance reporting and the proposed content of the Committee Scorecard for 2024/25. The Corporate Director – Finance and Resources presented the report and explained that the new Office for Local Government (Oflog) is developing a new national approach to measuring council performance. It was proposed to adopt the Oflog metrics which are relevant to services provided by the Council for corporate performance reporting to committee. However, much of the data published on Oflog will be annual figures with a time lag. It was therefore proposed to produce quarterly data for these metrics where possible and report these to the Policy and Resources Committee as a Corporate Scorecard. This will replace the current Key Performance Indicators (PIs) reported

to each individual policy committee, with the exception of the Income Management Sub-Committee, which receives only PIs related to the Council's income streams. Other policy committees will continue to receive quarterly reports. The proposed Communities Committee scorecard content for 2024/25 was appended to the report.

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

- The view was expressed that policy committees should retain oversight of information about their policy areas, not just priority projects. It was proposed that the preferred option should not be supported and that the Committee should keep PIs and receive information relevant to its service areas, but review the PIs to ensure they are still relevant.
- This Committee's remit includes support for vulnerable residents, therefore the level of transparency and detail in the scorecard is valued.
- It was suggested that proposed performance reports to Policy and Resources Committee could be shared direct with the political groups and the other policy committees can focus on scorecards that relate to their particular remit. It was suggested adding an extra column to show how the Oflog indicators link to the Corporate Plan.
- It was noted that Oflog require reporting on Planning and Recycling. This Committee's priorities are different, and Members should decide what PIs are important to the service area.

In conclusion, the Corporate Director stated that there will be further reports to the policy committees in June.

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

- 1. note the proposed revised approach to corporate performance reporting; and**
- 2. request that the proposed content of the Communities Committee Scorecard for 2024/25, including PIs, be presented at the next meeting in June.**

**52 Update on the Homes for Ukraine (H4U) Support Scheme and Local Authority Housing Fund (LAHF)**

The Committee received a report on the ongoing support and activity being delivered through the Homes for Ukraine Support Scheme. The Head of Homes and Communities presented the report and highlighted the main points. He responded to questions and comments from Committee Members.

The report also set out the current position with regard to the Local Authority Housing Fund. In summary, despite significant investment of time and resources by officers, delivery of the scheme was now highly uncertain.

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

1. **note the contents of this report and in particular the ongoing support and activity being delivered through the Homes for Ukraine Support Scheme; and**
2. **note the current position in respect of delivery of the Local Authority Housing Fund as outlined in this report.**

**There was a 10 minute break following consideration of this item.**

### **53 Private Sector Housing Annual Update 2023**

The Committee received a report summarising the work undertaken by the Private Sector Housing Team during the course of 2023. This followed on from the annual report to the Committee in March 2023. The Private Sector Team Manager presented the report and highlighted the main points. Officers responded to questions and comments from Committee Members.

In the ensuing discussion, reference was made to the position on empty homes and the view was expressed that this needs to be addressed as a priority. Members were advised that this issue is included in the Private Sector Housing Strategy, which is due to be presented to the Committee later this year, after the Stock Condition Survey has been completed. This report will afford Members the opportunity to discuss priorities within the overall Strategy. However, there is no short term solution to the issue of empty homes.

An amendment was proposed as follows: "That the Committee mandates officers to include within the Private Sector Housing Strategy a formal enforcement action plan on empty homes."

The amendment was duly seconded. The Committee debated the amendment, following which it was put to the vote. The amendment was agreed on the Chair's casting vote.

In response to a question about benchmarking, Members were advised that Officers will look to establish whether any statistics are available.

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

1. **note the contents of this report and in particular the work undertaken by the Private Sector Housing Team during the course of the past 12 months; and**
2. **note the updated Worcester City Council HMO Standards Conditions and Management Document at Appendix 1; and**
3. **mandate Officers to include within the Private Sector Housing Strategy a formal enforcement action plan on empty homes.**

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

The Committee received a report on progress that has been made within the Housing Enabling Strategy Delivery Plan. The Affordable Housing Delivery

Manager presented the report and highlighted the main points. This report summarised progress against the 8 goals of the Delivery Plan, as well as setting out the proposed areas of focus over the forthcoming 6 months. He responded to questions and comments from Committee Members.

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

- 1. note the contents of this report, and in particular the progress that has been made as outlined within the Housing Enabling Strategy Delivery Plan at Appendix 1; and**
- 2. note that a further update report will be presented to this Committee during Autumn 2024.**

**55 Review of Public Space Protection Orders**

The Committee considered a report on three Public Space Protection Orders (PSPOs) which were due to expire in 2024. The report explained the review undertaken ahead of the expiry of the PSPOs in order to inform Members in deciding on each of their futures. It also covered the complaint and service request data held by the Council and key partners relating to the PSPOs, and a summary of the public consultation exercise undertaken on each of the PSPOs.

The Community Services Team Manager presented the report and summarised the main points. He explained that, prior to its expiry, a PSPO may (subject to review and approval) be extended for a further period of not more than 3 years, if the order making authority is satisfied, on reasonable grounds, that doing so is necessary to prevent occurrence or recurrence of the activities identified in the PSPO.

The evaluation and Officer conclusions in respect of each PSPO were as follows:

**City Centre PSPO (Intentionally Feeding Gulls, Aggressive Begging, Dangerous Cycling and Skateboarding)**

It was not proposed to extend the City Centre PSPO as for each of the 3 elements not all of the criteria required to extend are met, and in addition there are alternative legal powers in place to deal with the same issues.

**Alcohol PSPO**

There is evidence of a detrimental impact on people's lives. There is no evidence to suggest the prohibition is still required at Blackpole Industrial Estate, Shap Drive, Brickfields Playing Fields and Rose Avenue as conditions of the PSPO legislation require evidence of detriment and persistence, which are not met in those areas. The recommendation was to remove these locations from the Order. There is evidence of alcohol related anti-social behaviour on Pitchcroft and the Riverside Park, and it is recommended that these areas are included.

**Dog Control PSPO**

Dog fouling, intimidation, and their control in public spaces still has a detrimental effect. The restrictions in the Order are deemed reasonable and will prevent the activity from occurring. As such it was recommended that the PSPO is extended for another 3 years. It was proposed that the fine be increased to not exceeding

level 3 on the standard scale or a fixed penalty notice of up to £100 (reduced to £60 if paid within 14 days).

Officers responded to questions and comments from Committee Members.

In the ensuing discussion, the Corporate Director explained that the outcome of the public consultation is one consideration in the review process but other matters have to be taken into account, including whether there is evidence that the matter is an issue and whether other powers are available to deal with it. He summarised the key points taken into consideration in reaching the Officer recommendations.

Committee Members noted the points made by the members of the public who spoke on the City centre PSPOS. Having taken into consideration the amount of work undertaken in conducting the review and evidence presented in the report, the majority of Committee Members were in support of the Officer recommendations.

**RESOLVED: That the Committee agree the following:**

- 1. to note the contents of the report and in particular the review undertaken into the 3 PSPOs due to expire during 2024;**
- 2. to grant an Extension & Variation Order in respect of the Alcohol PSPO covering the period 13<sup>th</sup> September 2024 – 12<sup>th</sup> September 2027, subject to the geographical changes set out within the report, and included at Appendix 5 to the report;**
- 3. to the discontinuation of all elements of the City Centre PSPO due to expire on 28th March 2024, noting the alternative legislation that exists should enforcement action be necessary; and**
- 4. to grant an Extension & Variation Order in respect of the Dog Control PSPO with no changes, covering the period 6<sup>th</sup> July 2024 – 5<sup>th</sup> July 2027, included at Appendix 5 to the report.**

**Councillor Amos asked to be recorded as voting against the decision to discontinue the City Centre PSPO (Resolution 3).**

**56 Any Other Business**

None.

**Duration of the meeting: 7.00p.m. – 10.44p.m.**

Chair at the meeting on  
5th June 2024