

## **COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE**

**26th January 2022**

**Present:** Councillor James Stanley in the Chair

Councillors Barnes, Bayliss, Bisset, Carver,  
Denham, Ditta, Gregson, S. Hodgson,  
Johnson and Lamb

**Officers:** Mark Baldwin, Head of Finance  
Shane Flynn, Corporate Director – Finance  
and Resources  
Lloyd Griffiths, Corporate Director –  
Operations, Homes and Communities  
Warwick Neale, Head of Community  
Services  
Basia Ligas, Community Cohesion Officer

### **32 Appointment of Substitutes**

Councillor Bayliss for Councillor Bill Amos, Councillor Barnes for Councillor Collins, Councillor Ditta for Councillor Hassan, Councillor Gregson for Councillor Riaz.

### **33 Declarations of Interest**

None.

### **34 Public Participation**

None.

### **35 Minutes**

**RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2021 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.**

### **36 Setting of the Budget for 2022/23 and Medium Term Financial Plan to 2026/27**

The Committee considered the proposed budgets for Community 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 Officers responded to questions from Members.

In the ensuing discussion, the Committee debated the following new budget proposals which had been received by the Chair:

- Worcester Food Bank - £45,000 for continuation of funding for three years.
- Northwick Park - £10,000 for installation of an artificial cricket wicket.
- Comer Gardens Institute - £140,000 to convert upper floor to a community facility area.

- Gorse Hill and Elbury Mount Local Nature Reserve - £50,000 for changes to the existing entrance gates and fencing to improve security.

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

Some Members highlighted the level of financial commitment in respect of the Comer Gardens Institute proposal, and expressed the view that they could not support the request without considering a full business case. Other Members spoke in support of the proposal and its potential benefit to the local community, particularly as there is currently only one community centre on the west side of Worcester. In response, the Corporate Director – Finance and Resources advised that this will be a new capital scheme, and if approved for inclusion in the capital programme, will be subject to a detailed business case to be presented to this Committee at a future date.

The Chairman raised a further new budget proposal, which was to allocate £40,033 funding to continue the Housing and Benefits Casework Officer post at Citizens Advice Worcester for 2022-23. It was explained that the Committee had previously allocated £35,000 to Citizens Advice Worcester as part of the City Council's Community Recovery Strategy. This funding had supported and additional Benefits and Housing Caseworker. The number of caseworkers was likely to decrease from June 2022 due to uncertainty with funding from the Money Advice and Pensions Service, and Citizens Advice Worcester had therefore requested funding in order to seek to maintain their current level of casework provision in Worcester City. In the ensuing debate on this item, the Committee expressed support in principle, but asked for more detail on the request to be provided to Policy and Resources Committee for approval. The Corporate Director - Finance and Resources stated that this information can be annexed to the report on new budget proposals from the policy committees to the February Policy and Resources Committee.

**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; and**
- 4. recommend the Policy and Resources Committee to agree the following new budget proposals:**
  - **Worcester Food Bank - £45,000 for continuation of funding for three years.**
  - **Northwick Park - £10,000 for installation of an artificial cricket wicket.**
  - **Comer Gardens Institute - £140,000 to convert upper floor to a community facility area.**
  - **Gorse Hill and Elbury Mount Local Nature Reserve - £50,000 for changes to the existing entrance gates and fencing to improve security.**

- **Citizens Advice Worcester - £40,033 – to continue the Housing and Benefits Casework Officer post for 2022-23 - approval subject to further details being provided to Policy and Resources Committee on the request.**

**(Councillor Bayliss asked to be recorded as voting for the Comer Gardens Institute proposal)**

### **37 Performance Report Quarter 3**

The Committee considered a report on the Council's Quarter 3 performance for Communities for 2021/22. The Corporate Director – Operations, Homes and Communities presented the report and Officers responded to questions from Committee Members.

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

- It was highlighted that some Key Performance Indicators have no current target (Crime Incidents, Anti-Social Behaviour Incidents, Homelessness Resolution, Homelessness Prevented). In response, Officers advised that this will be picked up when proposed Scorecards for 2022/23 are considered at the March meeting of the Committee.
- Reference was made to the number of small community grants awarded, and whether funds are still available in this financial year. In response, Members were advised that the budget for medium grants has now been fully allocated, however the Council has been able to access the Contain Outbreak Management Fund to enhance the community grants provision so more funds are available.
- Officers acknowledged that the number of inspections of houses in multiple occupation has been affected by Covid restrictions. There will be pro-active work to help recover from this backlog and additional staff resources are being sought currently to help accomplish this.

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

### **38 Completion Report on the Thriving EU Migrants Community and City Project (Brexit)**

The Committee considered a report highlighting the activities undertaken as part of the 'Thriving Migrants, Communities and City' project carried out by the Council's Community Engagement Team following the successful allocation of Government funds dedicated to Brexit preparedness. The Head of Community Services presented the report and explained that the funding had been used to appoint an additional post for a fixed term of 12 months to provide community support to local citizens affected by Brexit. Despite the Covid-19 pandemic, the project officer was able to deliver a high volume of case work, with increasing complexity as the project went on. The project had enabled high quality engagement with communities in delivering the outreach vaccination programme. Strong relationships have been established with a variety of communities and it was anticipated that these will develop in time through ongoing community

projects. A number of individual cases which had been progressed successfully were highlighted.

Basia Ligas, the Community Cohesion Officer who had delivered the project, also spoke and thanked the Council for agreeing to undertake this project. She commented on the achievements and expressed the view that there is a need for continuing support for migrants locally.

Committee Members expressed their appreciation for the work done by Officers in making the scheme a success. In the ensuing discussion, it was agreed that a copy of the report should be sent to Robin Walker, MP and also that Officers should look at potential funding sources for continuation of the key outcomes of this project.

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

- 1. note the contents of the report and in particular the direct and indirect outcomes delivered through the project;**
- 2. request Officers to send a copy of the report to Robin Walker, MP; and**
- 3. request Officers to investigate potential funding opportunities for continuation of the project.**

**39 Any Other Business**

None.

**Duration of the meeting:** 7.00p.m. – 8.20p.m.

Chair at the meeting on  
16th March 2022