

POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

26th July 2022

Present: Councillor Marjory Bisset in the Chair

Councillors Agar, Denham (Vice-Chair), A. Ditta, Gregson, Mrs L. Hodgson, Mackay, Mitchell, Riaz, Stafford, Stanley (Vice-Chair) and Stephen

Officers: David Blake, Managing Director
Mark Baldwin, Head of Finance
Shane Flynn, Corporate Director – Finance and Resources
Sian Stroud, Corporate Director – Planning and Governance

23 Appointment of Substitutes

Councillor Allah Ditta for Councillor Bayliss.

24 Declarations of Interest

The following declaration of interest was made:

Councillor Gregson - The Arches, Worcester: Variation to Lease to 54-56 Foregate Street (Minute 35) – As Chair of the Arches Project Board.

25 Public Representations

The Committee heard representations from Pauline Burgess, who spoke in relation to the City Council's bid to the Levelling-Up Fund to improve the Racecourse Grandstand and associated facilities. She spoke about the deaths of horses at Worcester Racecourse and the cruelty of whipping race horses. She expressed the view that the Council should not use the Fund for the benefit of horse racing, but that it should be diverted elsewhere and invested in progressive, local initiatives.

The Chair thanked her for coming to speak to the Committee. She acknowledged that some people feel strongly about the issues raised and explained that the decision to proceed with the Levelling-Up Fund bid has already been taken, though the vote was not unanimous. It is not yet known whether the bid will be successful.

26 Minutes

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 4th July 2022 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

27 Minutes of Income Generation Sub-Committee

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 15th June 2022 be received.

28 Quarter 1 Financial Monitoring Report 2022/23

The Committee reviewed the financial monitoring details including budget variances and performance indicators for the 1st quarter ended 30 June 2022. The Head of Finance presented the report and explained that the forecast year-end performance to meet the balanced budget will only be achieved through a transfer from the Business Rates Risk Reserve. He summarised the reasons for the key budget variances. The report also highlighted proposed write-offs of £122k for Quarter 1.

Officers responded to questions from Members. In the ensuing discussion, reference was made to the list of capital projects and a question was asked about how these are prioritised and monitored. The Managing Director explained that the Corporate Leadership Team maintains an overview. A progress report can be brought to a future meeting of this Committee.

RESOLVED: That the Committee agree to:

- 1. note the report; and**
- 2. approve the write-offs of Council Tax and Business Rates for the quarter.**

29 Quarter 1 Performance Report for 2022/23

The Committee considered the quarter 1 performance report for the Policy and Resources Committee. The Corporate Director – Finance and Resources presented the report and Officers responded to questions from Members.

In response to a question about the whether there is a need to accelerate the City Centre Transport Strategy, the Managing Director advised that there should be a timetable update soon and when this is available a briefing note can be provided to all Members.

RESOLVED: That the Committee agree to note the Council's quarter 1 performance for 2022/23.

30 Use of Managing Director's Urgency Powers

The Committee received a report on two matters on respect of which the Managing Director had used Urgency Powers set out within the Council's Constitution to make a decision. The Corporate Director – Finance and Resources presented the report and summarised both matters.

The Committee had agreed in May 2022 to establish a "Cost of Living" Task & Finish Group and one proposal from the Group was to extend the provision of free school meals (FSM) to school children and college students throughout the summer holiday period. The County Council was committed to funding FSM for the first two weeks of the summer holidays but there was no planned provision in the city for the remainder. Worcestershire Children's First had indicated that their online system could be used to issue any additional vouchers funded by the City Council or other partners. There would, therefore, be no additional administration costs for the Council.

Heart of Worcester College had indicated that they have 140 students who currently benefit from free school meal provision via their own funded support scheme.

Altogether, it was estimated that up to 3,400 vouchers will be required for a period of 4 weeks and one day to cover the remainder of the holiday period. At £15 per week this would amount to approximately £215,000 cost to the Council. This could be funded from the Hardship Fund and the proposal was discussed with the Joint Leader of the Council and the Chair and Vice-Chair of Policy and Resources at meetings held on 11 and 12 July.

At the December 2021 meeting, the Committee had approved support for schemes under the Discretionary Business Grants Fund. The proposed amounts to be allocated in each category were set out in the report to that meeting and would be varied according to take up. The report set out a summary of how the funding had been allocated at the December 2021 meeting, the final spend and the difference between the two.

RESOLVED: That the Committee agree to note the use of urgency powers to:

- 1. implement a scheme for the provision of free school meals during summer holidays 2022; and**
- 2. implement a scheme for defraying remaining discretionary business grant funding.**

31 Working Carers Policy

The Committee considered a proposed new Working Carers Policy. The Corporate Director – Planning and Governance presented the report and explained that it had been intended to present the Policy to the Personnel and General Purposes Sub-Committee at its meeting on 6th July 2022. However, as there were no other substantive items on the agenda, with the agreement of the Chair and Vice-Chair, the meeting had been cancelled and the Policy was therefore being presented to this Committee.

In summary, the Government was proposing new legislation, under which eligible employees will be able to take up to one week of unpaid leave per year. It was not yet known when this enhanced carer's leave will come into force. The Council already had a range of measures in place to support carers in the workplace, and the Joint Consultative and Safety Committee had asked the Council to consider whether to introduce a specific Carers Policy. This had taken place and it was considered a good idea to clarify how existing policies meet the requirements for employees and managers. The Joint Consultative and Safety Committee supported the Policy, giving feedback on some minor drafting changes which had been incorporated into the version attached to the report.

RESOLVED: That the Committee approve the new Working Carers Policy set out in Appendix 1 to the report.

32 Appointments to Outside Bodies

The Committee considered the appointment of a Trustee to Worcester Consolidated Municipal Charities (WMC). The Corporate Director – Planning and Governance presented the report and explained that the Council appoints four Trustees, one of whom, Mike Johnson, had resigned.

The report added that, whilst WMC had proposed that a new Trustee is appointed by the Council for the remainder of Mike Johnson’s four-year term of office, which expires on 1 May 2023, an equally appropriate option would be that the new Trustee is appointed for four years (as per the Charity’s Constitution). This is because trusteeships or directorships are personal appointments and, in law, the time that a predecessor appointee has served in the role does not “roll over” and get counted into any successor’s term of appointment.

It was proposed and seconded that Alan Tidy be appointed. Mr Tidy was a member of St. Peter’s Parish Council and had previously been a member of the Standards Committee. There were no other nominations.

RESOLVED: That the Committee agree the appointment of Alan Tidy as a Trustee to Worcester Consolidated Municipal Charities and delegate to the Corporate Director – Planning and Governance authority to confirm the term of that appointment.

33 Appointment of Armed Forces Champion

The Committee considered the appointment of a Member Champion for Armed Forces. The Corporate Director – Planning and Governance presented the report and explained that Councillor Mitchell had recently resigned from the role. The report set out the background to the role and the terms of reference for Member Champions.

In the ensuing debate, Councillor Stanley and Councillor Agar were both nominated, and the nominations were duly seconded. Both nominations were put to the vote and it was agreed and

RESOLVED: That Councillor Agar be appointed as Member Champion for Armed Forces.

34 Decisions of Other Policy Committees

The Committee considered a report from the Corporate Director – Planning and Governance on a number of matters which were considered by the Environment Committee at an online briefing on 19th July 2022. Due to the extreme weather temperature, the Committee had held an online briefing rather than meeting face-to-face. This meant that the meeting could not be deemed to be a formal committee meeting under local government legislation. However, the Committee still discussed all the items on the agenda for its July meeting.

The Chair of the Environment Committee explained that there were a number of items which the Committee voted to support. It was agreed to formally propose these to the Policy and Resources Committee for approval. He summarised each of the items, as follows:

Proposal to Introduce a Subsidised Domestic Pest Control Service for Worcester City Residents

The Committee recommended that Policy and Resources Committee agree to:

1. approve the implementation of a subsidised domestic pest control service as set out at Appendix 1, for Worcester City residents at a cost of £20,000 per annum;
2. approve funding of £41,000 to be taken from the Worcestershire Regulatory Services 2021/2022 underspend to cover the cost of the service between the period 1st September 2022 – 31st August 2024; and
3. note that future costs of delivering the service will be built into future budgets via the review of the medium-term financial plan.

Environmental Community Grants and Environment Summit

The Committee recommended that Policy and Resources Committee agree:

1. an allocation of £20k to extend the Environmental Community Grants programme as proposed in this report; and
2. an allocation of £5k to support the Environment Summit planned for September.

Wild About Worcester Wildlife Walking Route

The Committee recommended that Policy and Resources Committee agree:

1. an allocation of up to £15k to support the Wild about Worcester project, specifically for waymarking of the route and promotion of the initiative.
2. to note that the specification for any works to be funded by the City Council will be subject to approval by the Corporate Director, Homes and Communities in consultation with the Chair and Vice-chair of this committee.

Potential for Investment in additional Photovoltaic (PV) Panels at St Martin's Gate Multi-Storey Car Park

The Committee recommend that Policy and Resources Committee agree to:

1. approve the commissioning of an Outline Business Case for the installation of further Solar Panels at St Martins Gate car park.
2. allocate up to £20K from the Environmental Sustainability budget to fund the development of the Outline Business Case and delegates the procurement of the business case and associated surveys to the Corporate Director Homes and Communities in consultation with the Chair and Vice-Chair of Environment Committee.
3. note that in due course the Committee will receive the Outline Business Case for consideration.

RESOLVED: That the Committee agree the recommendations from the Environment Committee as set out above.

35 The Arches - Worcester: Variation to Lease to 54-56 Foregate Street

The Committee considered a progress report on this project. The Corporate Director – Finance and Resources highlighted the main points.

He explained that the demolition work will uncover two arches which are currently obscured by 56 Foregate Street, enabling them to be brought into use as potentially income-generating assets. It was therefore been proposed that these two arches form phase 2 of the project, thus obviating the need to acquire and convert two further arches. This was considered acceptable under the terms of the funding agreement, but was subject to formal approval.

Meanwhile, under the terms of the Cultural Development Fund grant, all capital and revenue cost of the project must be incurred by 31 March 2023. A total of £623,085 was subject to a risk of clawback by the Arts Council in the event that the work is not completed by the end of the funding period. It was estimated that the work will take 14 months from the date of agreement to proceed, and a request had been presented to the Arts Council for an extension of the deadline to April 2024. Should this not be approved, there was a risk that project funding may be lost if the works cannot be completed in time.

The Council had been in negotiations with Arch Co. to agree the terms for demolition of 56 Foregate Street. They were entitled to receive compensation for the loss of income from 56 Foregate Street. A proposal had been received from Arch Co. and was provided in a confidential Appendix to the report. Accepting the terms of the proposal would require a variation of the lease such that the two 'uncovered' arches would, in effect, transfer from the Council's ownership to The Arch Co.'s, after five years.

The capital sum proposed in the Appendix could be met from the Arches – Worcester budget, which includes funding for demolition works of £350,000. However, this would reduce the funding available to meet the actual costs of the demolition. There would, therefore, potentially be an additional requirement for funding but estimated demolition costs have yet to be established

The Corporate Director explained that there had been a slight variation in that Arch Co. have required that a provision that the Council will not owe them any money at the date on which the contract commences.

The Committee noted the terms of the proposal and did not resolved to exclude the press and public as there was no discussion on this aspect.

Officers responded to questions from Committee Members.

In conclusion, Committee Members expressed support for the draft Heads of Terms and changes to the lease as set out in the appendix.

RESOLVED: That the Committee agree to:

- 1. approve a variation to the lease of 54, 55 and 56 Foregate Street on the terms set out in the private report in support of The Arches – Worcester project; and**

2. **delegate authority to the Corporate Director - Finance and Resources and the Corporate Director – Planning and Governance in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chairs of the Committee to conclude negotiations and enter into all necessary legal agreements to complete the proposed variations and related works.**

36 Any Other Business

None.

Duration of the meeting: 7.00p.m. – 8.45p.m.

Chair at the meeting on
6th September 2022

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