

## **POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE**

**21st November 2023**

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

Councillors Agar, Bisset (Vice-Chair), Cockeram, Denham (Vice-Chair), Gregson, Hodgson, Lawrance, Lewing, Norfolk, Riaz and Round

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

### **55 Appointment of Substitutes**

Councillor Lawrance for Councillor Allcott.

### **56 Declarations of Interest**

Councillor Hodgson declared an interest in St Peter The Great County Parish Council/ Warndon Parish Council: Review of Electoral Arrangements (Minute 61) as a member of Warndon Parish Council.

### **57 Public Representations**

The Committee heard from Chris Thorp, site representative for Northwick Road allotments, who spoke about the decision taken at the last meeting to increase allotment fees. In summary, he was concerned that the decision had been taken without consultation and rather than passing on fully-loaded costs he proposed a discretionary add-on cost for water should be investigated. He sought a commitment from the Council to endeavour to reduce the cost of providing the service as these increases will have a severe impact on users. In conclusion, he urged the Committee to think again and revise these decisions and proposals.

### **58 Minutes**

**RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 16<sup>th</sup> October 2023 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.**

### **59 Minutes of Personnel and General Purposes Sub-Committee**

**RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 18<sup>th</sup> October 2023 be received.**

### **60 Future High Street Fund - Scala and Corn Exchange Programme Review**

The Committee considered a report on the findings of the review into the development of the Scala/Corn Exchange project to date, including lessons learned which can inform the future direction of the project. The review had been

undertaken in consultation with Group Leaders and Deputy Leaders through the Major Programmes Member Reference Group.

The Managing Director presented the report. By way of introduction, he made reference to the report published on 17 November by the National Audit Office (NAO), which examined whether the DLUHC's three significant levelling-up funds are likely to deliver value for money. The report can be found at <https://www.nao.org.uk/reports/levelling-up-funding-to-local-government/>

The NAO report helped to put the review into context and the Managing Director highlighted some key findings:

- Projects are experiencing delays, which has led to many needing to be adjusted or rescope.
- Projects are being delivered in the context of rising cost pressures.
- It appears unlikely that local authorities will be able to complete projects by the original deadlines.
- To secure value for money and maximise the desired benefits from these funds, DLUHC should review expectations for what outcomes can be delivered by when and support local authorities and their partners to deliver the long-term benefits for people in their local places.

The Managing Director proceeded to summarise the main points of the Committee report. Appended were an overall chronology, a chronology of the development of the budget and how this was affected by revised cost estimates as they changed over time; and key lines of enquiry, with officer commentary against these and reference to documents which support the commentary. The key lines of enquiry had been derived from the NAO Framework to Review Programmes.

The review findings and key points arising were set out in paragraph 3.9 of the report, as well as immediate actions that can be undertaken. The lessons learned will be carried forward to all future capital projects and programmes.

One specific action was to revisit the objectives of the project in the light of changes proposed. A set of overarching Council objectives for the whole FHSF programme had been approved by this Committee in June 2021. The report stated that these objectives still hold good for the programme as a whole, albeit with some minor adjustments as proposed below:

- To establish a new ~~theatre and~~ flexible cultural arts venue hub in the City Centre offering leading facilities for performance and participation ~~theatrical, music and performance facilities~~
- Stimulate economic growth with vibrant leisure facilities and renewal of city centre premises ~~city living opportunities~~
- Transform public realm and connectivity to create new event and leisure space and reconfigured market space
- Demonstrate social, economic, and environmental sustainability through high quality design
- Conserve and enhance historic assets

- Deliver a financially sustainable and viable operation supported by direct public delivery.

The review had identified several issues which it was felt should be raised as part of ongoing engagement with Government departments, and these were set out in the report.

The Corporate Director – Planning and Governance commented on the overall approach taken. The NAO Framework is a nationally approved methodology for reviewing major government programmes. Officers have been committed to transparency throughout the review and the opportunity for collective learning from previous major capital projects was also highlighted.

Officers responded to questions and comments from Committee Members.

In the ensuing discussion, Members acknowledged the amount of work which had gone into the review and concluded that it was a thorough and useful piece of work. Whilst it has been a worthwhile exercise, Members were mindful that this remains a complex project to deliver and there is still a significant amount of work to be done. The progress that has been made since July was highlighted at the last meeting and this was reiterated. There was overall support for the recommendations and proposed actions arising from the key lines of enquiry, as set out in the report, to raising some of the lessons learned with DLUHC.

**RESOLVED: That the Committee agree:**

- 1. to note that the outcome of the project review, undertaken with the oversight of the Major Programmes Member Reference Group;**
- 2. the recommendations and proposed actions arising from the key lines of enquiry;**
- 3. to instruct the Managing Director to write to DLUHC on behalf of the Council setting out issues regarding the management of grant-funded capital programmes identified in the report; and**
- 4. the adjustments to the Council's approved objectives for the Scala/Corn Exchange project as set out in the report.**

**61 St Peter The Great County Parish Council/ Warndon Parish Council: Review of Electoral Arrangements**

The Committee considered a report on the outcome of a public consultation on options for the ordinary year of election for both St Peter the Great Parish Council and Warndon Parish Council. The Corporate Director – Planning and Governance presented the report and explained that the consultation had set out 5 options:

Option 1: Extend term of office following May 2023 elections by 1 year resulting in the next Parish elections taking place in May 2028 with City Council elections.

Option 2: Reduce term of office following May 2023 elections to 1 year resulting in the next Parish elections taking place in May 2024 with City Council elections.

Option 3: Make no changes, resulting in the next Parish elections taking place in 2027 on their own and every four years after.

Option 4: Hold an election in 2027 and then have another election in 2028 and thenceforward every four years (in line with the Worcester City Council cycle)

Option 5: Hold an election in 2027 and then not have another election until 2032 and thenceforward every four years (in line with the Worcester City Council cycle)

A total of 27 consultation responses were received through the online survey. In addition, both Parish Councils had made representations. St Peters Parish Council had confirmed their preference is Option 1 and Warndon Parish Council had confirmed their preference is Option 2.

The Corporate Director advised that, if Members were minded to recommend Option 1 as the preferred option, either Parish Council may resolve to call an election next year in the event that any of their Councillors choose to retire in May 2024.

In response to a question as to whether different arrangements could be adopted for each of the two Parish Councils, the Corporate Director advised that the relevant legislation was open to interpretation on this point. Whilst it might be acceptable, this approach was not recommended as it would potentially be confusing and not in the interests of good administration.

Committee Members discussed the various options and a majority of Members spoke in favour of option 2, which would align the cycle for both Parishes with the City Council. After debate, Members proceeded to vote and expressed unanimous support for Option 2.

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

- 1. that pursuant to section 53 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007, the Council resolves to change the ordinary year of election for St Peter the Great County Parish Council and Warndon Parish Council so that it falls on the ordinary day of election in 2024 and every four years thereafter; and**
- 2. that authority be delegated to the Corporate Director - Planning and Governance to make and publicise the requisite legal order and take any other necessary steps to implement the Council's resolution.**

## **62 Quarter 2 Financial Monitoring Report 2023/24**

The Committee reviewed the financial monitoring details including budget variances and performance indicators for the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter ended 30 September 2023. The Head of Finance presented the report and highlighted the main points. He summarised the reasons for the key budget variances from Quarter 1 to Quarter 2. The report also highlighted proposed write-offs for Quarter 2, which amounted to £61k.

Officers responded to questions and comments from Members.

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

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

**63 Corporate Risk Management Report - Quarter 2, 2023/24**

The Committee considered a report on action taken and progress made against corporate risks for quarter 2, the period of July – September 2023. The Corporate Director - Finance and Resources presented the report and highlighted the main points. In summary, following a review, 8 risks had been removed as they represented duplication and could be addressed via other entries on the register. One risk, relating to lone working, had been re-instated and 3 risks had been amended. Finally, 3 risks had been rated as unacceptable (red) and requiring treatment.

Officers responded to questions from Committee Members. In the ensuing discussion the following main points were made:

CRK-008 - Civil Emergency: a request was made to amend the scope of this risk, to include all weather extremes, not just flooding. The Corporate Director agreed to make this change.

CRK-007 - Business Rates Local Retention: the Corporate Director stated that the risk of a large employer leaving the city remains but the impact on business rates is not the most significant implication and this risk can be adjusted to address issues such as impact on jobs and social wellbeing.

**RESOLVED: That the Committee agree to note the updated assessment of corporate risks at the end of quarter 2 and the revised Corporate Risk Register.****64 Quarter 2 Performance Report for 2023/24**

The Committee considered the quarter 2 performance report for the Policy and Resources Committee. The Corporate Director – Finance and Resources presented the report and highlighted the main points.

He explained that the City Centre Transport Strategy is shown as Green as the Strategy has now been produced. However monitoring progress on implementation will be ongoing, and for this purpose the item will be moved to the scorecard for Place and Economic Development Committee.

With regard to the Energy Saving Capital Investment Project, the Corporate Director highlighted that it was proposed that the project completion date is amended to 31<sup>st</sup> December 2024.

Officers responded to questions from Members. In the ensuing discussion, Members commented positively the progress which has been made in reducing the number of days to process new Housing Benefit claims.

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

**65 Setting of the Budget for 2024/25 and MTFP to 2028/29**

The Committee considered a report on the Budget for Policy and Resources Committee for 2024/25 and the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP). The Head of Finance presented the report and explained that the report set out the proposed budget changes relevant to this Committee. The Savings Plan had been initiated to address the budget gap and a number of areas had been identified for cost reduction and/or income improvement.

The report made reference to the Capital Programme agreed in February 2023 and the Committee were asked to consider whether the current projects are still appropriate.

There were no questions or comments from Committee Members.

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

- 1. the Budgets for the various services identified for 2023/24; and**
- 2. 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.**

**66 Use of Managing Director's Urgency Powers**

The Committee considered a report on the Council's participation in the business rates pool. The Corporate Director – Finance and Resources presented the report and explained that the deadline for confirming arrangements for 2024/25 was 10<sup>th</sup> October 2023. This pre-dated the first available meeting of the Committee that could approve the proposals. The proposal was discussed at the Leaders/Corporate Leadership Team meeting on 2<sup>nd</sup> October, where it was determined to continue the Council's participation and urgency powers were used, in accordance with the Constitution, to enable a formal commitment and to delegate responsibility to officers to finalise the agreement in discussion with other participating councils.

Committee Members expressed support for the actions taken.

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

- 1. note the use of urgency powers to agree to participate in the Worcestershire business Rates Pool for 2024/25 only; and**
- 2. delegate to the Corporate Director – Finance and Resources authority to finalise the arrangements for the pool in consultation with the Chair and the Vice-Chairs of the Policy and Resources Committee.**

**67 Any Other Business**

None.

**Duration of the meeting:** 7.00p.m. – 8.53p.m.

Chair at the meeting on  
19th December 2023

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