

PLACE AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

6th November 2023

Present: Councillor Robyn Norfolk in the Chair

Councillors Cleary (Vice-Chair), Cooper,
Desayrah, Geraghty, Gregson, Jagger,
Piotrowski, Round and Stanley

Apologies: Councillor Riaz

21 Appointment of Substitutes

None.

22 Declarations of Interest

None.

23 Public Participation

None.

24 Minutes

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 24th July 2023 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

25 The Worcester Play Plan - Progress Report

The Committee received a progress report on the Worcester Play Plan.

The Committee at its meeting on 24th July 2023 approved the Worcester Play Plan, including the principle of funding projects via contributions from s106 developments and the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL). The report also included a commitment from officers to submit a follow up report to the Committee on phase 1 progress to date and the identification of future pipeline projects.

The Corporate Director – Planning and Governance presented the report and drew the Committee’s attention to paragraph 4.3 of the report which related to feasibility work being carried out for a new all ages accessible and inclusive destination play venue for the city. She outlined a number of projects being researched following discussion with the disability charity SCOPE UK. Further reports on these projects will be presented to Committee in due course.

The Lead Commissioner for Leisure, Play, Health and Wellbeing proceeded to update Committee Members on progress of the short and medium term projects as outlined in sections 3 and 4 of the report.

Committee Members were informed that an annual revenue budget of c£100k was available for the maintenance and replacement of the existing assets within the Council's 44 play areas. This funding will be also be used to improve accessibility and inclusivity.

It was reported that the annual maintenance budget had not been spent since the pandemic and there was currently a backlog of repair work, however officers will be waiting for the independent Play Inspector to finalise his report. Once complete officers will use the data to compile priority locations in need of investment and will schedule work for completion during 2024.

The Corporate Director and Lead Commissioner responded to questions and points of clarification from Committee Members on various aspects of the report.

RESOLVED: That the Committee note the contents of the report and in particular the following aspects:

- 1. progress achieved to date on the short-term phase 1 projects;**
- 2. the developing plan for the delivery of the medium term priority projects; and**
- 3. the current position with regards to maintenance of the existing estate.**

26 Review of Museums Hours

The Committee considered a report on the review of museums opening hours.

The Museums Manager presented the report and informed Committee Members that the current opening hours of the two city museums have remained the same for more than 15 years. During this time the offer at each museum has changed, as have visitor patters both in the museums themselves and in the city centre.

In 2022-23 the city museums reviewed the pattern of museum visiting, city centre footfall and local business hours to monitor if current museum opening hours were still aligned to visitor need. The findings and conclusion of the review were outlined in paragraphs 2.6 and 2.7 of the report.

The proposal was that the museums hours of opening to the public be revised to better reflect visitor demand and the opportunity for growth in tourism, particularly at weekends. It was proposed that the two museums would have the opening hours as below:

Tuesday- Saturday 10.00am-4.00pm; Sunday 10.00am-3.00pm – total of 35 hours per week.

This proposal would make a small budget saving. Because the proposed changes were in line with service usage, it is not anticipated that earned income will reduce, although this would remain under review.

The Museums Manager responded to questions and points of clarification from Committee Members, in particular as to whether consideration could be given to the hours of opening Tuesday to Sunday being the same i.e. 10.00am-4.00p.m, even if for a trial period. The Museums Manager stated that it would be more expensive to open later on Sundays, but would take this point away and look at the costings.

Committee Members agreed that Sundays were important to the city and the opportunity to make it easier to visit the museums was welcomed. It was pointed out that the budget savings would be affected by opening to 4.00pm on a Sunday and the Joint Museums Committee who oversee and manage the Museums Service did not have an issue with the proposal.

The Chair proposed that the Committee may wish to alter the recommendation at 1.2 to consider delegating authority to the Chair and Vice Chair regarding the opening hours, once costs have been established.

The Corporate Director – Planning and Governance reaffirmed the wording as delegation to the Managing Director in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair.

RESOLVED: That the Committee:

1. **note the review of visitor patterns relating to the two Worcester City Council museums; and**
2. **delegate authority to the Managing Director, in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair, to determine the hours of opening on Sundays, once the costs have been established.**

27 Setting of the Budget for 2024/25 and MTPF to 2028/29

The Committee considered a report on the Budget for Place and Economic Development Committee for 2024/25 and the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTPF) to 2028/29.

The Corporate Director – Finance and Resources presented the report and highlighted the main issues. Committee Members were encouraged to contact him and/or the Head of Finance to discuss suggestions of potential service improvements and/or re-prioritisation of budgets and to request any further details or points of clarification as outlined in Appendix 1.

The Committee's attention was drawn to paragraph 3.4 of the report which identified areas for cost reduction and/or income improvement. A summary of the changes were highlighted, together with relevant budget changes to this committee.

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

RESOLVED: That the Committee:

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.**

28 **Quarter 2 Performance Report 2023/24**

The Committee considered a report on the Council's Quarter 2 performance for Place and Economic Development for 2023/24. The Corporate Director – Finance and Resources presented the report and highlighted the main points.

Committee Members noted that the Economic Development Strategy was on hold until after the elections and the Deputy Director – Economic Development confirmed that economic support activities would continue in accordance with current plans and priorities.

The Head of Planning confirmed that the South Worcestershire Development Plan Review had been submitted to the Planning Inspectorate in September this year and officers are now engaging with the Planning Inspector via the Programme Officer.

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

29 **Infrastructure Funding through Planning**

The Committee received a report on the Infrastructure Funding through planning.

The Corporate Director – Planning and Governance presented the report and explained the background as to why the report had been brought before Committee.

The Head of Planning referred Committee Members to paragraph 2.2 of the report which set out the three tests to be applied when the local planning authority require developer contributions under Section 106 agreements.

Worcester City Council has a well-established Section 106 Programme Board which oversees the collection and spending of Section 106 developer contributions. The Committee's attention was drawn to paragraph 2.7 of the report which related to a list of schemes approved by the board in the last 12 months. The current balance held in funds raised through the developer contributions is £1,678,184 and a breakdown by area/infrastructure was provided in Appendix 1 attached to the report.

Currently the board make spending decisions on projects below £50,000 in value, spending decisions above this amount are referred to the Corporate Leadership Team for approval. It was proposed that through this report that spending decisions above £50,000 would be reported to this committee for consideration.

The Head of Planning referred Committee Members to paragraphs 2.13 and 2.14 of the report which related to the ongoing review of the Community Infrastructure Levy charging schedule, which was being prepared and would be reported to the committee in January 2024 alongside the Infrastructure Funding Statement.

In moving forward it is proposed that the board recommendations would be reported to this committee for those requests that exceed the £50,000 in value. A value higher than this would require a recommendation from this committee to the Policy and Resources Committee.

In referring to the recommendation at 1.1 of the report, the Corporate Director – Finance and Resources stated that the recommendation would need to be amended to take into account a referral to Policy and Resources as Financial Regulations require approval by them as the value exceeds £50,000. This was agreed.

The Corporate Director – Planning and Governance and the Head of Planning responded to a query related to the current status of some of the projects identified in the appendix, which stated no specific project identified to date, although there was a sum of money allocated. The Head of Planning informed Committee Members that if anyone had any questions/queries on the detail of the appendix to contact him or the Service Manager – Development Management.

RESOLVED: That the Committee note the contents of the report and agree that future requests for funding that are considered by the S106 Programme Board with a value exceeding £50,000 will be reported to the Place and Economic Development Committee for final approval and referral to the Policy and Resources Committee.

30 UKSPF Project Allocation Review

The Committee considered a report on the UKSPF project allocation review. The report provided a review of the proposed delivery of UKSPF funding for 2024/25 to ensure that the proposed activity effectively reflects the needs and requirements of the city and its residents.

The Deputy Director – Economic Development presented the report and highlighted the main points. The current allocations for supporting local business; people and skills and communities and place were outlined in paragraphs 3.1 to 3.3 of the report.

To support the review of UKSPF allocations, research had been undertaken to highlight current identified need in relation to the People and Skills and Community and Place priorities. The needs analysis had shown that the interventions originally identified remained relevant, it also identified that additional community interventions could be considered.

The preferred option recommended is that the £100k is moved from Skills into the Community Priority and that a further report is made to the committee in January with options for delivering all Skills and Community Interventions for year three of the programme.

The Deputy Director responded to a question from Committee Members in relation to the skills project proposals and provided reassurance that all of the proposals will be provided. In referring to paragraph 6.5 of the report it was asked if there were any issues related to gender pay gap and getting women back into work. The Deputy Director stated that they have been identified and addressed already as part of the portfolio.

RESOLVED: That the Committee:

- 1. note the contents of the report;**
- 2 agree to a transfer of £100,000 from the Skills 2024/25 funding allocation to the Community Priority' and**
- 3. agree to receive a further report at its next meeting, detailing delivery options for the skills and communities priorities identified.**

31 Any Other Business

None.

Duration of the meeting: 7.00p.m. to 8.52p.m.

Chair at the meeting on
29th January 2024