

## **COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE**

**31st January 2024**

**Present:** Councillor Jabbar Riaz in the Chair

Councillors Ali, Allcott, Altaf, Amos, Collier, Cooper, Lamb, Laurenson (Vice-Chair), Piotrowski and Smith

**Also in Attendance:**

Councillor Cross

**Officers:**

Mark Baldwin, Head of Finance  
Warwick Neale, Community Services Team Manager  
Shane Flynn, Corporate Director – Finance and Resources  
Lloyd Griffiths, Corporate Director – Operations, Homes and Communities  
Tom Mountford, Head of Homes and Communities  
Alan New, Lead Commissioner - Leisure, Play, and Health & Wellbeing  
Sian Stroud, Corporate Director – Planning and Governance

### **34 Appointment of Substitutes**

Councillor Allcott for Councillor Lawrance, Councillor Smith for Councillor Desayrah.

### **35 Declarations of Interest**

The following declarations of interest were made:

Councillor Laurenson - Council Motion of 28th November 2023 - Israel / Palestine Conflict (Minute 44) – As a former active member of Worcester Palestine Friendship Group

Councillor Piotrowski – Worcester City Faith Covenant (Minute 43) - As a member of Worcestershire Interfaith Forum; and Worcester Community Trust Annual Update on Delivery of Business Plan (Minute 38) – Employer has a close working relationship with Worcester Community Trust

Councillor Collier - Worcester Play Council Review (Minute 41) – As a member of Worcester Play Council

Councillor Riaz - Council Motion of 28th November 2023 - Israel / Palestine Conflict (Minute 44) – Has given procedural advice to Worcester Palestine Friendship Group but is not an active member.

### **36 Public Participation**

Sohail Farraz spoke on the topic of the Worcester Palestine Friendship.

The Reverend Catherine Lack, Chair, Worcestershire Interfaith Forum spoke regarding the Worcester City Faith Covenant. She reiterated the importance of a faith covenant in helping to reach all communities - to emphasise how the main faith centres in Worcester, including the cathedral and the Muslim Welfare Association, have a huge reach, including hard-to-reach communities. I may also touch on how the faith communities are involved in education towards peace: the recent Holocaust Memorial Day event being a prime example. Attendance at this event was up on previous years. This contributes well to the 5 strategic aims of the City Council.

Canon Brian McGinlay, St. George's Church asked in respect of Worcester Malayali Cultural Association (WMCA): "How can this committee help WMCA in boosting public awareness of WMCA and for them to be better engaged with wider cultural activities and representation in Worcester?"

In addition, Councillor Andrew Cross spoke with the Chair's consent regarding WMCA to discuss a proposal for a tug of war training facility, which would be of great benefit to WMCA and the wider community. He asked the Committee what support (financial or other) can be offered to WMCA in the creation of a tug of war training rig at Nunnery Wood Sports Centre, which will be available for everyone to use?"

The Chair thanked all speakers and stated that all would be provided with a written response.

### 37 **Minutes**

**RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 8<sup>th</sup> November 2023 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.**

### 38 **Worcester Community Trust Annual Update on Delivery of Business Plan**

The Committee received a presentation from Jonathan Newey, Chief Executive Officer, Worcester Community Trust (WCT). He set out the Trust's achievements in delivering against the aims of its strategic plan in 2022/23 and its objectives for 2023/24. Helen Davis, WCT's Head of Skills and Training, accompanied Jonathan and contributed to the presentation.

WCT's outline business plan 2023-26, strategic progress report and financial statements were included with the agenda papers.

Jonathan and Helen answered questions from Committee Members on a wide range of issues.

**RESOLVED: That the Committee agree to note the contents of this report and in particular:**

- 1. Worcester Community Trust's presentation on review of 2022/23 and looking ahead to 2023/24 at Appendix 1;**
- 2. Worcester Community Trust's outline business plan 2023-26 and Strategic Progress Report at Appendix 2 and Appendix 3; and**
- 3. Financial Statements for the Year Ended 31 March 2023 for Worcester Community Trust at Appendix 4.**

### 39 **Quarter 3 Performance Report for 2023/24**

The Committee received a report on Quarter 3 performance for the Communities Committee. The Corporate Director – Operations, Homes and Communities presented the report and Officers responded to questions from Members on detailed aspects of the report.

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

- Affordable Housing Delivery – the figures do not currently include properties in urban extension sites. Officers will review this performance indicator for next year. It is an annual indicator.
- Empty Homes – An updated report on private sector housing will be presented at the next meeting and this will include reference to empty homes.
- Minimum energy efficiency standards – A question was raised about rogue landlords whose properties do not have an EPC. Members were advised that this is not a function which falls within the remit of the Council but Officers can ask Worcestershire Regulatory Services what can be done.
- The Council has previously agreed to work with SERCO to accommodate the needs of asylum seekers. This will not unduly impact on the availability of accommodation in the private rented sector. SERCO have procured 2 properties in Worcester as part of this scheme.

**RESOLVED: That the Committee note the Council’s Quarter 3 performance for 2023/24.**

### 40 **Setting of the Budget for 2024/25 and Medium Term Financial Plan to 2028/29**

The Committee considered the priorities within the budgets relating to services within the remit of the Committee for 2024/25. The Corporate Director - Finance and Resources presented the report and asked Members to consider any potential changes for the areas that fall under the remit of the Committee, including any new budget proposals. Officers responded to questions and comments from Committee Members.

Members did not identify any changes to budgets or capital programme and there were no new budget proposals. The Corporate Director – Finance and Resources advised that new proposals can also be submitted to the February Policy and Resources Committee.

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

- 1. note the proposed Budgets for the various services identified for 2024/25;**
- 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 proposed budgets as set out in the report.**

**41 Worcester Play Council Review**

The Committee considered a report on work which Officers had undertaken to review the funding arrangement between Worcester City Council and Worcester Play Council (WPC), pursuant to the decision taken at the meeting of 25<sup>th</sup> January 2023. The Lead Commissioner - Leisure, Play, and Health & Wellbeing presented the report and explained that WPC were no longer discharging two out of their three primary functions, whilst the third they no longer directly provided, but instead passported money to Perdiswell Young People's Leisure Club to deliver. WPC had provided no information or evidence to the Council, despite Officers raising their concerns about the ability of WPC to deliver their primary functions and the risk which that would present in respect of future financial support from the Council. Therefore, given the findings of the review, Officers did not intend to recommend that any budget provision is made for 2024/25 to support WPC.

Committee Members proceeded to debate the proposal. Members noted that the Council will promote and advertise the community grants programme to those parties who may have been working with WPC, so that the Council can consider directly supporting them to ensure continuity of play provision.

The Chair proposed an amendment, as follows:

"That the £10k not now allocated to Worcester Play Council is allocated from the risk reserve for youth play via a specific grant scheme to any city organisation that will offer youth provision."

This amendment was seconded and upon being put to the vote was agreed.

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

- 1. note the contents of the report and in particular the further work undertaken to review the funding arrangement between Worcester City Council and Worcester Play Council;**
- 2. note the intention for no allocation of funding to be recommended for Worcester Play Council as part of budget setting for 2024/25;**
- 3. note the importance of promoting the Worcester City Council Community Grants Programme to organisations who are providing existing play opportunities to support play provision during 2024/25; and**
- 4. recommend to Policy and Resources Committee that the £10k not now allocated to Worcester Play Council is allocated from the risk reserve for youth play via a specific grant scheme to any city organisation that will offer youth provision.**

## 42 Council of Sanctuary

The Committee considered a report pursuant to the Notice of Motion agreed by the Council in November 2023 that the Communities Committee should consider the implications of Worcester City Council becoming a Council of Sanctuary, working with others already involved in working with refugees seeking asylum in Worcester.

The Head of Homes and Communities presented the report and explained the steps which are required to attain City of Sanctuary status. In short, this will require the Council to join the City of Sanctuary network and engage with local groups, providers, people with lived experience and the network. This will then be used to develop an action plan describing how the minimum City of Sanctuary criteria will be met. Once the plan is developed, the Council can apply to become recognised as a 'Council of Sanctuary.'

The report explained that a dedicated resource will be required to coordinate and support this area of work. The Council currently employed a Project Support Officer for the Homes for Ukraine Scheme. As a result of this scheme now being well-established and demand on project support reducing, it was proposed to utilise this resource and extend the post to act as Project Support Officer for the Council of Sanctuary application. It was recommended to commit funding from a combination of the Homes for Ukraine grant and Dispersal Accommodation grant. The total project cost to over 3 years was £86,515.

Officers responded to questions from Committee Members. In the ensuing discussion, the majority of Members welcomed the proposals set out in the report and expressed support for proceeding as recommended.

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

- 1. endorse the City of Sanctuary Charter (attached as Appendix 1 to the report) through the Council signing up as a Supporting Organisation by joining the City of Sanctuary Network and commits to work towards recognition as a 'Council of Sanctuary'; and**
- 2. commit the allocation of £86,515 from the Homes for Ukraine and Dispersal Accommodation grant over the course of three years as detailed in section 7.1 of the report in order to work towards recognition of Worcester City Council as a Council of Sanctuary.**

(Councillor Amos asked to be recorded as voting against).

## 43 Worcester City Faith Covenant

The Committee considered a report on the implications and potential of Worcester City Council adopting a Faith Covenant. The Head of Homes and Communities presented the report and stated that representatives from Worcestershire Inter Faith Forum had invited the Council to consider this matter. The Reverend Catherine Lack had attended both this meeting and the previous one to express support for the proposal.

The report explained the commitments which the Faith Covenant entails and what its adoption can achieve. It was recommended that a steering group be established to engage with community faith leaders and the Worcestershire Inter Faith Forum to define the vision, scope and content of a Worcester City Faith Covenant. Once this has been done, it was proposed that delegated authority be given to the Corporate Director - Operations, Homes and Communities, in consultation with Chair and Vice-Chair, to agree the adoption of a Worcester City Faith Covenant.

Committee Members expressed support for the proposals set out in the report.

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

- 1. note the contents of the report and commitment and value of a Faith Covenant for Worcester;**
- 2. instruct officers to engage with community faith leaders and the Worcestershire Inter Faith Forum to establish a steering group to identify and define the vision, scope and content of a Worcester City Faith Covenant; and**
- 3. delegate to the Corporate Director - Operations, Homes and Communities, in consultation with Chair and Vice-Chair of Communities Committee, the adoption of a Worcester City Faith Covenant.**

**44 Council Motion of 28th November 2023 - Israel / Palestine Conflict**

The Committee received a report from the Corporate Director – Operations, Homes and Communities on the whether the Council should actively support the work of Worcester Palestine Friendship. The report was presented in pursuance of a Notice of Motion which had been agreed at the Council meeting on 28<sup>th</sup> November 2023.

The report explained that there are broadly three ways in which the Council could consider supporting the work of the Group, all underpinned by use of Council resources:

- Funding
- Communication and Promotion
- Community Engagement

The Corporate Director advised that the above avenues of support should only be considered if Members are completely satisfied that the Worcester Palestine Friendship Group does not partake in activism which is incompatible with the Council's objectives. Furthermore, Members were asked to consider the reputational risk it may be exposing itself to, if it were to support the work of this or any other group which promotes a particular political cause. Members were advised that the Council should ensure it is not supporting one group to the detriment of others.

In the ensuing discussion, it was proposed and seconded that the Council should pursue two of the three ways identified in the report for supporting the work of the Worcester Palestine Friendship Group, namely making them aware of funding sources and helping with and communication and promotion via the Council's website.

There was also a proposal that the Committee should consider amending the report by redacting one of the paragraphs. In response, Members were advised that this is a public report which has been formally published, and the content cannot be changed.

Upon being put to the vote, the proposal was agreed.

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

- 1. note the contents of the report, and in particular the Motion approved at Council on 28<sup>th</sup> November 2023; and**
- 2. request Officers to make the Worcester Palestine Friendship Group aware of the availability of grant funding, support them if necessary to apply for funding, and use the Council's website to encourage support for Palestine.**

**45 Any Other Business**

None.

**Duration of the meeting:** 7.00p.m. – 10.09p.m.

Chair at the meeting on  
13th March 2024

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