

Attendance

Members of the Cabinet

Cllr Steve Evans (Vice-Chair, in the Chair)
Cllr Obaida Ahmed
Cllr Paula Brookfield
Cllr Chris Burden
Cllr Craig Collingswood
Cllr Jacqui Coogan
Cllr Jasbir Jaspal
Cllr Louise Miles

Employees

Tim Johnson	Chief Executive
John Denley	Director of Public Health
Ian Fegan	Director of Communications and Visitor Experience
Alison Hinds	Director of Children's Services
James Howse	Director of Finance
Charlotte Johns	Director of Strategy and Growth
Richard Lawrence	Director of Regeneration
David Pattison	Chief Operating Officer
John Roseblade	Director of Resident Services
Becky Wilkinson	Director of Adult Social Services
Dereck Francis	Democratic Services Officer
Jacob Stokes	Democratic Services Officer

Part 1 – items open to the press and public

- | <i>Item No.</i> | <i>Title</i> |
|-----------------|---|
| 1 | Apologies for absence
Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Stephen Simkins (Chair) and Bhupinder Gakhal. |
| 2 | Declaration of interests
No declarations of interests were made. |
| 3 | Minutes of the previous meeting
Resolved:
That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 13 December 2023 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair. |

4 **Housing Revenue Account Business Plan 2024 - 2025 including Rent and Service Charges**

Councillor Steve Evans presented the report on an updated Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan 2024-2025 for recommendation to Full Council. The Business Plan aimed to balance the continuing maintenance of and investment in the existing Council housing stock, improving, and redeveloping housing estates and the provision of new homes for rent. The report also provided, as an integral part of that Business Plan, a proposed HRA budget for 2024-2025, including proposed rents and service charges to take effect from 1 April 2024, and a proposed HRA Capital Programme for the period 2024-2025 to 2028-2029 for recommendation to Full Council.

Councillor Evans reported that the proposed rent increase was based on a government formula for restricting annual rent increases on social and affordable rent properties until at least 2025. The government had made clear that councils should adhere to the formula and could go up to the maximum figure. He explained that the proposed increase would be insufficient to address all of the measures and minimum standards government had placed on the Council to deliver. It was noted that the Council's proposed rents are below the West Midlands average and the national average and a lot less than private sector renting. Councillor Evans also acknowledged that the proposed increase would put extra pressure on families and confirmed that there would be support. A hardship fund of £300,000 would be set up and the Council and Wolverhampton Homes would work with any tenants who are genuinely struggling financially due to the rent increase.

Resolved:

That Council be recommended to:

1. Adopt the Business Plan set out at Appendix 1 to the report as the approved Housing Revenue Account Business Plan including:
 - a. The revenue budget for 2024-2025 at Appendix 1 to the report.
 - b. The Capital Programme for 2024-2025 to 2028-2029 at Appendix 2 to the report that includes the following among the proposed investment plans:
 - £100 million for new homes
 - £67 million provision for estate remodelling
 - £41 million to complete the refurbishment of the Heath Town estate
 - £46 million remediation works to non-traditional properties including energy efficiency improvements
 - £141 million for programmes to high rise estates to include building safety improvements, infrastructure replacement, and external works to include energy efficiency
 - £34 million for low and medium rise infrastructure improvements
2. Approve the implementation of an increase of 7.7% to social housing rents in accordance with the Rent Standard and the Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016 and to give 28 days notice to all secure and introductory tenants of the rent increase from 1 April 2024.
3. Approve the rates for garage rents and service charges set out in Appendix 3 to the report and formally notifies tenants.
4. Approve an increase to Shared Ownership rents of 7.7%.

5. Approve allowances to Managing Agents as follows:
 - Wolverhampton Homes £47,700,000
 - Bushbury Hill Estate Management Board £2,070,000
 - Dovecotes TMO £1,280,000
6. Delegate authority to the Deputy Leader: City Housing in consultation with the Director of Resident Services to approve managing allowances to New Park Village Tenant Management Cooperative to allow for further work on costs relating to the redevelopment of the estate and management responsibilities.
7. Delegate authority to the Deputy Leader: City Housing in consultation with the Director of Resident Services to approve the equity sale of Shared Ownership properties.

That Cabinet notes:

1. From 1 April 2020 the Regulator of Social Housing has regulated social rents charged by Local Authorities as set out in the Rent Standard 2020. Local authorities are able to apply a rent increase below the maximum set out in the standard but the decision would be taken in the context of the affordability in terms of a balanced HRA business plan that ensures service delivery and investment can be maintained over the lifetime of the business plan.
2. That, in the opinion of the Director of Finance (Section 151 Officer) the current levels of reserves and provisions is appropriate and adequate for the forthcoming financial year.
3. The increasing cost pressures from policy and legislative changes; Building Safety Act (2022), Fire Safety (England) Regulations 2023, the Regulator and the Social Housing Ombudsman, and a shift from reactive to a proactive regulatory regime.
4. The HRA revenue budget includes provision of £300,000 for those tenants who may experience financial hardship due to the rent increase.

5 **Council Tax Base and Business Rates (NDR) Net Rate Yield 2024-2025 and Update on the Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement**

Councillor Louise Miles presented the report that set the Wolverhampton Collection Fund 2024-2025 which the Council manages on behalf of local precepting bodies and central government. It was proposed that the council tax base for 2024-2025 be set at 66,645.60 Band D equivalent properties and the Net Rate Yield for business rates for 2024-2025 be set at £78.6 million. Proposals to extend the Council's local scheme for Business Rates Discretion Relief with effect from 1 April 2024 were also recommended for approval. The report also provided an update on the Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement announced on 18 December 2023. Councillor Louise Miles delivered an assessment of the settlement and concluded by saying that the immediate response to the settlement was to again ask the government on behalf of Wolverhampton's residents, to introduce fairer longer term funding for councils and for their residents.

Resolved:

1. That the Collection Fund Council Tax Base for 2024-2025 be set at 66,645.60 Band D equivalents.

2. That the Collection Fund Business Rates, also referred to as Non-Domestic Rates (NDR), Net Rate Yield for 2024-2025 be set at £78.6 million.
3. That authority be delegated to the Cabinet Member for Resources, in consultation with the interim Director of Finance, to approve amendments to:
 - a. The final Business Rates Net Rate Yield as required as a result of changes to the NNDR 1 form (National Non-Domestic Rates return) by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities or data revisions and changes in projections.
 - b. The Council Tax Base as a result of any data revisions and changes in projections.
4. That the following extensions to the local Business Rates Discretionary Relief Policy be approved:
 - a. In respect of charitable and voluntary organisations for one year from 1 April 2024.
 - b. In respect of Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Business Rates relief scheme for one year from 1 April 2024.
 - c. In respect of transitional relief for the period from 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2026.
 - d. In respect of supporting small businesses for the period from 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2026.
 - e. In respect of Improvement Relief for the period from 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2029.
5. That applications for discretionary rate relief should be made within the financial year for which relief is being sought effective from 1 April 2024. Authority be delegated to the interim Director of Finance in consultation with the Head of Revenues and Benefits to award relief in exceptional circumstances for applications received after this time.
6. That authority be delegated to the interim Director of Finance in consultation with the Head of Revenues and Benefits to award relief in individual cases which satisfy the criteria for the categories of discretionary rate relief in accordance with Section 47 Local Government Finance Act 1988.
7. That the outcome of the 2024-2025 Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement be noted.

6 **Collection Fund Estimated Outturn 2023-2024**

Councillor Louise Miles presented the report on the estimated outturn for the Council Tax and Business Rates also referred to as Non Domestic Rates (NDR) transactions on the Collection Fund in 2023-2024. Delegated authority was sought to confirm any final changes to the forecast outturn and to confirm and arrange final payments to the precepting authorities, West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner and West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority.

Resolved:

1. That it be approved that the estimated outturn for Council Tax in 2023-2024 is a cumulative surplus of approximately £546,000 which includes the carry forward of the in-year 2020-2021 deficit, which the Government confirmed could be spread over three years from 2021- 2022 to 2023-2024.

2. That it be approved that the estimated outturn for Business Rates, also referred to as Non-Domestic Rates, in 2023-2024 is a cumulative surplus of approximately £3.3 million with an estimated deficit in 2023-2024 totalling approximately £354,000.
3. That authority be delegated to the Cabinet Member for Resources, in consultation with the interim Director of Finance, to confirm any final changes to the forecast outturn reflecting any further information received ahead of the statutory deadline of 31 January 2024.
4. That authority be delegated to the interim Director of Finance to confirm and arrange the final payments to the precepting authorities.

7 **Response to Dudley, Sandwell and Telford & Wrekin Local Plan Consultations and South Staffordshire Duty to Cooperate letter**

Councillor Steve Evans presented the report on the implications of and principles for responses to consultations on the Sandwell, Dudley, Telford and Wrekin Local Plans. He highlighted that the responses recognised the local councils had done everything they could to meet all development needs within their area through their Local Plans. Sadley, Wolverhampton would not be in a position to support them through the allocation of land within the emerging Wolverhampton Local Plan. The report also set out the principles of a response to South Staffordshire Council's (SSC's) Duty to Co-operate letter. Councillor Evans noted that SSC's draft Local Plan included a number of significant housing and employment development allocations on land currently within the green belt on the edge of the city and on the border of other local authorities. The proposals to build on land that borders other local authorities would undoubtedly put pressure on neighbouring local authorities for infrastructure such as roads, schools, doctors surgeries.

Resolved:

1. That the City of Wolverhampton Council response to the Sandwell Local Plan Draft Plan consultation be approved on the basis of the approach set out in paragraphs 3.4 to 3.7 of the report.
2. That the City of Wolverhampton Council response to the Dudley Local Plan Draft Plan consultation be approved on the basis of the approach set out in paragraphs 4.4 to 4.7 of the report.
3. That the City of Wolverhampton Council response to the Telford & Wrekin Local Plan Draft Plan consultation be approved on the basis of the approach set out in paragraphs 5.8 to 5.10 of the report.
4. That the City of Wolverhampton Council response to the South Staffordshire Council Duty to Cooperate Letter be approved on the basis of the approach set out in paragraph 6.4 of the report.

8 **Annual Health and Safety Report - 2023**

Councillor Paula Brookfield presented the report on proposed revisions to the Council's Corporate Health and Safety Policy and the Annual Health and Safety Management Report 2023. The main changes in this year's report was the updated structure within the organisation for managing health and safety, with recruitment of additional staff into vacancies. This had broadened the Health and Safety team's ability to respond to service area requests for support and advice and had led to a

more proactive and planned service. Councillor Brookfield thanked Tim Munro, Head of Service Health and Safety and his team for their continuing efforts to maintain health and safety within the organisation as well as protecting members of the public who may be affected by the Council's activities.

Resolved:

1. That the revisions to the Corporate Health and Safety Policy on the updated structure within the organisation for managing health and safety, and that the Policy is endorsed by the new Leader of the Council, Councillor Stephen Simkins be approved.
2. That the progress and action taken during 2023 with regards to managing health and safety in the organisation be noted.