

Attendance

Members of the Cabinet

Cllr Stephen Simkins (Chair)
Cllr Obaida Ahmed
Cllr Paula Brookfield
Cllr Chris Burden
Cllr Craig Collingswood
Cllr Steve Evans
Cllr Bhupinder Gakhal
Cllr Jasbir Jaspal
Cllr Louise Miles

Employees

Mark Taylor	Deputy Chief Executive
John Denley	Director of Public Health
Alison Hinds	Deputy Director of Children's Social Care
Charlotte Johns	Director of Strategy
Richard Lawrence	Director of Regeneration
David Pattison	Chief Operating Officer
Laura Phillips	Deputy Director of People and Change
John Roseblade	Director of Resident Services
Brenda Wile	Deputy Director of Education
Becky Wilkinson	Director of Adult Social Services
Alison Shannon	Chief Accountant
Jaswinder Kaur	Democratic Services and Systems Manager
Dereck Francis	Democratic Services Officer

Part 1 – items open to the press and public

Item No. *Title*

- 1 Apologies for absence**
No apologies for absence were received for the meeting.
- 2 Declaration of interests**
David Pattison, Chief Operating Officer reported that Alison Hinds, Deputy Director of Children's Social Care would be declaring an interest in item 5 (Director of Children's Services Appointment) and would leave the meeting when the item is being considered. Mark Taylor, Deputy Chief Executive would be declaring an interest in items 9 and 11 (City Learning Quarter) in so far as he is Chair of Governors at Wolverhampton College. He would also leave the meeting when the reports are considered.

3 **Minutes of the previous meeting**

Resolved:

That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 26 July 2023 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

4 **Education, Skills and Employment Strategy**

Councillor Louise Miles presented for approval the new Education, Skills and Employment Strategy. The new strategy re-emphasised the role of the Council as the main coordinator of the programme for jobs and skills in the city. This was a lifelong development of skills similar to the approach taken to lifelong learning in education where all skills are equally valued be they academic, technical or digital. The programme focused on the Council's key priorities, which included Post 16 provision meeting the needs of city employers, effectively addressing the skills gap. Overall there was also strengthened support for employers. The Council aimed to target specific groups, veterans, those with mental health issues and the 16/18 to 24 age group where there had been consistent underperformance. Targets had also been set with deliverable outcomes involving practical steps.

Resolved:

That Council be recommended to approve:

1. The Education, Skills and Employment Strategy to deliver a whole life approach to learning and work which support children, young people and adults to thrive.
2. The budget from the remaining uncommitted balance of £1.2 million, from the original £3 million programme reserve budget approved by Cabinet on 20 October 2021 for the Wolves at Work 18-24 programme to deliver Wolves at Work Transformation programme.
3. Delegated authority to the relevant Director to approve targeted interventions and the allocation of the associated budget (from the £1.2 million available).

That Cabinet notes:

1. That the priorities set out in the Education, Skills and Employment Strategy have been co-produced with communities and partners across our city.
2. That a presentation and draft Education, Skills and Employment Strategy was considered by Economy and Growth Scrutiny Panel on the 21 June 2023 and by Children and Young People Scrutiny Panel on the 27 July 2023.

5 **Director of Children's Services Appointment**

Having previously declared an interest Alison Hinds, Deputy Director of Children's Social Care left the meeting whilst Cabinet considered the report.

Councillor Stephen Simkins presented the report for recommendation to Full Council on the 12 month secondment appointment for the Director of Children's Services post with effect from 7 September 2023 as per a recommendation of the Special Appointments Committee held on 17 August 2023.

Cabinet placed on record its sincerest thanks to Emma Bennett, Executive Director of Families for her work within Children's and Adult Care Services on behalf of this city.

Resolved:

That Council be recommended to:

1. Endorse the 12 month secondment appointment for the Director of Children's post with effect from 7 September 2023, as per the recommendation of the Special Appointments Committee held on 17 August 2023.

That Cabinet notes that:

1. The Director of Children's & Adults Services post has been redesignated to the Director of Children's Services with effect from July 2023.
2. The Director of Children's Services appointment was subject to a Special Appointments Committee on the 17 August 2023 as per the Constitution.
3. The Director of Children's Services post has the statutory responsibility for the Director of Children's Services (DCS) function.
4. The Director of Children's Services also has responsibility for the following areas:
 - a. Children's Social Care Services
 - b. Education Services
 - c. Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub 24
 - d. Children's Transformation
5. As a consequence of this appointment backfill arrangements are being made for the Deputy Director of Children's Social Care vacancy – this will also be a 12 month secondment opportunity.
6. The Director of Adults Service post will be redesignated to the Director of Adults Social Care.
7. The Pay Policy statement would be updated to incorporate the Director of Children's Services appointment and subject to Cabinet approval.
8. The outcome of an independent pay review would be presented to Cabinet once completed in autumn 2023, ensuring we are a competitive employer responding to local and national recruitment and retention challenges.

6

West Midlands Combined Authority Trailblazer Deeper Devolution Deal

Councillor Stephen Simkins presented, for formal endorsement, the West Midlands Combined Authority Trailblazer Deeper Devolution Dealer negotiated between the West Midlands Combined Authority and the Government as announced in the Spring Statement. He informed Cabinet that originally launched as a 'trailblazer deal', the government had not gone as far in devolving powers and funding to match the ambition of the region and of the Council. However, it was a step in the right direction and the Council would continue to work closely with its partners and maximise the benefit for Wolverhampton.

Resolved:

That Cabinet:

1. Endorse the West Midlands Combined Authority Trailblazer Deeper Devolution Deal (appendix 1 to the report) following the conclusion of negotiations between the West Midlands Combined Authority and government.

2. Consider the prepared Governance Review (appendix 2 to the report) and Scheme (appendix 3 to the report) outlining the proposed model for Mayoral West Midlands Combined Authority governance of the Bus Service Operators Grant subsidy, and feedback to West Midlands Combined Authority Board.
3. Approve the implementation plan (appendix 4 to the report) for the deal and agree to further discussions with Government.
4. Agree to receive further reports at the appropriate time resulting from the detailed requirements of the deal.

That Cabinet notes:

1. The contents of the deal and recognises that it contains a number of commitments to further devolution with the potential for significant further steps.
2. That at a meeting of the West Midlands Combined Authority Board on the 9 June 2023 it was agreed not to pursue the statutory process to provide West Midlands Combined Authority with the 'health improvement duty' offered as part of the deal. The health improvement duty, therefore, would not form a part of the deal.
3. That the report would be considered by Scrutiny Board on 26 September 2023.

7 **Levelling Up Wolverhampton**

Councillor Stephen Simkins presented the update report on the city's ongoing approach to levelling up and how the Council working alongside private investors and city partners had continued to deliver on its priorities at pace to improve outcomes for local people. Some of the key levelling up schemes being worked on to deliver for the city included: Brewers Yard scheme creating high quality new housing; driving an event city initiative such as Boxpark; supporting the high streets with improvements to the markets in Bilston and Wednesfield; delivering a transformational Health and Wellbeing facility in Bilston; and to continue to drive positive outcomes around skills and employment through the City Learning Quarter scheme.

Councillor Stephen Simkins also made a statement on the Council's financial position following news that Birmingham City Council had declared a Section 114 notice, which meant it had judged itself to be in financial distress and could no longer balance its budget. This had been done as part of its plan to get back onto sound financial footing. He stated that City of Wolverhampton Council had an excellent track record of managing its money well, setting a balanced budget again this year. The Council had set a balanced budget for nine consecutive years despite having to make £240 million worth of savings due to reduced government funding since 2011. The financial outturn report for 2022-2023 went to both Cabinet and Scrutiny panels in July. The report stated that the Council had demonstrated effective budget management and delivered within the budget, despite hugely challenging circumstances. The Council was also able to respond to in-year emerging pressures, particularly on inflation and pay, while contributing to essential earmarked reserves. While the Council had some challenges ahead with budget pressures, it could be proud of its strong track record in managing its money and it was in a good position to tackle the issues it faced.

Resolved:

1. That the City of Wolverhampton Council's ongoing response to the Levelling Up White Paper, working with key partners including the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities to deliver our strategic framework for levelling up, Our City: Our Plan be endorsed.
2. That the progress that has been made to secure significant funding for the City of Wolverhampton through government's levelling up funds to deliver transformational regeneration schemes which improve outcomes for all in our city be noted.

8 **Supporting Care Leavers with Council Tax Discretionary Relief**

Councillor Obaida Ahmed presented the report seeking an extension of the Council Tax Discretionary Discount Scheme (CTDDS) to allow 100% discount to be awarded to care leavers up to the age of 25 from outside the City of Wolverhampton who are now resident and have a liability to pay council tax in Wolverhampton. The proposal supported the Council's Corporate Parenting Strategy for looked after children to narrow the gap between them and their peers. Care leavers generally lived independently at a much younger age than their peers and often become responsible for their finances without a family support network to rely on. This increased the risk of financial vulnerability often leading to problems with debts and arrears. The existing CTDDS provided 100% discount for care leavers, whose corporate parent is the City of Wolverhampton Council, but currently excluded those care leavers who originate from different council areas and have chosen to live in Wolverhampton.

Resolved:

That an extension of the Council Tax Discretionary Discount Scheme to allow a 100% discount to be awarded to care leavers up to the age of 25 from outside the City of Wolverhampton who are now resident and have a liability to pay Council Tax in Wolverhampton be approved.

9 **City Learning Quarter**

Having previously declared an interest Mark Taylor, Deputy Chief Executive left the meeting whilst Cabinet considered the report.

Councillor Stephen Simkins present the progress report on the City Learning Quarter (CLQ) project. CLQ is a key priority for the Council which would result in improved life chances for people of all ages as new state-of-the-art College facilities alongside Adult Education and Library services are co-located in the City Centre. Since the project was approved by the Council in January 2022 work had progressed well, including the works on the site to create City of Wolverhampton College Technical Centre (CoWTechC), the new £8.1 million motor engineering facility at the College's Wellington Road campus in Bilston. The design of the City Centre college building had also been completed with the assistance of the contractor and their design team. At every stage the Council had worked closely with the College to make sure the project had remained on track. However, owing to matters beyond the control of the Council, the delivery of the City College scheme had been delayed. This had resulted in increased costs and a funding shortfall of approximately £10 million driven by inflation and supplier costs. Discussions with the existing funders, including the Department of Education and the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities had taken place, and there was now a proposal which would allow us to put in place the required funding to take forward the scheme as planned, to deliver

the City Learning Quarter. The recommendations in the report would enable Council officers to press ahead with the project and make sure that new college facilities would be available for students from Autumn 2025, with enhanced facilities at the Central Library for Adult Education and Library Services, as well as making essential repairs to the Grade 2 listed building.

Resolved:

1. That the revised budget and funding strategy for the City Learning Quarter (CLQ) as detailed in the report be approved.
2. That the building known as Wolf Mountain, at Paget Road, be declared surplus to the Council's requirements and disposal to achieve best consideration be approved.
3. That authority be delegated to the Cabinet Member for Governance and Equalities in consultation with the Director of Regeneration and Deputy Director of Assets to approve the terms of the disposal for Wolf Mountain through an Individual Executive Decision Notice and to ringfence the net disposal proceeds as part of the CLQ funding strategy.
4. That the transfer of ownership of Phase 2 Main College site to the College upon completion of the construction phase subject to S123 Consent being obtained by Council be approved.
5. That approval be delegated to the Deputy Leader: Inclusive City Economy and the Cabinet Member for Resources and Digital in consultation with the Directors of Regeneration and Finance for the Council to enter into the required Development Agreement with the City of Wolverhampton College for Phase 2 of the project.
6. That authority be delegated to the Deputy Leader: Inclusive City Economy and the Cabinet Member for Resources and Digital in consultation with the Directors of Regeneration and Finance for the Council to enter into a NEC4 construction contract for the Phase 2 College with McLaughlin and Harvey Limited to progress and complete the City Learning Quarter project subject to the following:
 - a. Confirmation of full funding for the Phase 2 project.
 - b. The execution of a grant agreement with the Department for Education.
 - c. The execution of the Development Agreement with the City of Wolverhampton College.
7. That the Chief Operating Officer be authorised to negotiate, execute, seal and complete all necessary and ancillary documents to give effect to the above recommendations.
8. That the Director of Finance be authorised to enter into all necessary grant agreements.
9. That it be noted that, in line with existing approvals, the Council would continue to cash flow the project until external funding streams are received.

10. That it be noted that, a future report would set out the proposals, and procurement strategy, for the works to Central Library related to façade restoration and provision of facilities for Adult Education.

11. That it be noted that, in line with the Constitution, that the Director of Finance and Chief Operating Officer would complete all necessary and ancillary documents, in respect of Government grants received in support of the City Learning Quarter.

10 Exclusion of press and public

Resolved:

That in accordance with Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the remaining item of business as it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

Part 2 - exempt items, closed to press and public

11 City Learning Quarter

Having previously declared an interest Mark Taylor, Deputy Chief Executive left the meeting whilst Cabinet considered the report.

Councillor Stephen Simkins present an exempt version to the City Learning Quarter (CLQ) report discussed at item 9 above. The report included information on the financial implications of the scheme that were omitted from the public version due to its commercial sensitivity.

Resolved:

1. That the revised budget and funding strategy for the City Learning Quarter (CLQ) as detailed in the report be approved.
2. That the building known as Wolf Mountain, at Paget Road, be declared surplus to the Council's requirements and disposal to achieve best consideration be approved.
3. That authority be delegated to the Cabinet Member for Governance and Equalities in consultation with the Director of Regeneration and Deputy Director of Assets to approve the terms of the disposal for Wolf Mountain through an Individual Executive Decision Notice and to ringfence the net disposal proceeds as part of the CLQ funding strategy.
4. That the transfer of ownership of Phase 2 Main College site to the College upon completion of the construction phase subject to S123 Consent being obtained by Council be approved.
5. That approval be delegated to the Deputy Leader: Inclusive City Economy and the Cabinet Member for Resources and Digital in consultation with the Directors of Regeneration and Finance for the Council to enter into the required Development Agreement with the City of Wolverhampton College for Phase 2 of the project.

6. That authority be delegated to the Deputy Leader: Inclusive City Economy and the Cabinet Member for Resources and Digital in consultation with the Directors of Regeneration and Finance for the Council to enter into a NEC4 construction contract for the Phase 2 College with McLaughlin and Harvey Limited to progress and complete the City Learning Quarter project subject to the following:
 - a. Confirmation of full funding for the Phase 2 project.
 - b. The execution of a grant agreement with the Department for Education.
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7. That the Chief Operating Officer be authorised to negotiate, execute, seal and complete all necessary and ancillary documents to give effect to the above recommendations.
8. That the Director of Finance be authorised to enter into all necessary grant agreements.
9. That it be noted that, in line with existing approvals, the Council would continue to cash flow the project until external funding streams are received.
10. That it be noted that, a future report would set out the proposals, and procurement strategy, for the works to Central Library related to façade restoration and provision of facilities for Adult Education.
11. That it be noted that, in line with the Constitution, that the Director of Finance and Chief Operating Officer would complete all necessary and ancillary documents, in respect of Government grants received in support of the City Learning Quarter.