

Attendance

Members of the Cabinet

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

Employees

Tim Johnson	Chief Executive
John Denley	Director of Public Health
Alison Hinds	Director of Children's Services
James Howse	Director of Finance
Charlotte Johns	Executive Director of Economy
Richard Lawrence	Director of City Development
David Pattison	Chief Operating Officer
John Roseblade	Director of Resident Services
Andrew Wolverson	Director of Adult Social Care (DASS)
Jaswinder Kaur	Democratic Services and Systems Manager
Dereck Francis	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 Councillor Jacqui Coogan. |
| 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 17 January 2024 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair. |

4 **Our City: Our Plan Refresh 2024-2025**

Councillor Stephen Simkins presented the report on the annual refresh of the Council plan, Our City: Our Plan 2024-2025 for recommendation to Full Council for approval. The plan had been shaped following extensive engagement with Wolverhampton residents, businesses and partners to ensure it reflects their priorities. It continued to set out an overarching ambition that 'Wulfrunians will live longer, healthier lives.' The refreshed plan also provided a snapshot of key achievements during 2023-2024 from which Councillor Simkins highlighted: Cost of Living Support, which was in its tenth year in Wolverhampton; Wolverhampton Business Week, which celebrated its tenth anniversary; and the reopening of The Halls Wolverhampton, that is boosting the local economy to the tune of £10 million. Delivering the Our City: Our Plan would be supported by the new Good Growth Strategy (item 9 below refers).

Resolved:

That Council be recommended to:

1. Approve the Our City: Our Plan refresh for 2024-2025, the City of Wolverhampton Council Plan.
2. Seek cross party engagement to deliver the priorities set out in Our City: Our Plan the strategic framework to level up our city.

That Cabinet notes:

1. That the priorities of Our City: Our Plan have been developed through a continuous conversation with our communities and partners.
2. That a presentation and draft Our City: Our Plan was received by Scrutiny Board on the 6 February 2024.

5 **Capital Programme 2023-2024 to 2027-2028 Quarter Three Review and 2024-2025 to 2028-2029 Budget Strategy**

Councillor Louise Miles presented the key points from the report on an update on the 2023-2024 financial performance of the General Fund and Housing Revenue Account (HRA) capital programmes, that also provided a revised forecast for 2023-2024 to 2027-2028 as at quarter three 2023-2024. The report also recommended revisions to the current approved capital programme covering the period 2023-2024 to 2028-2029 and the updated City of Wolverhampton Capital Strategy for approval and recommendation to Full Council. She reported that the proposed capital programme of £373.7 million showed the Labour Council's continuing commitment to the city and its aspirations for the city. The capital programme underpinned the Council's Our City: Our Plan (item 4 above refers), and together they ensured that the Council's resources continued to be aligned to the needs and priorities of local people. A major part of the overall capital programme was the HRA approved at £643.2 million. This illustrated, in particular the Labour Council's commitment both to new homes for the city and the renovation and improvement of its existing housing stock.

Resolved:

That Council be recommended to approve:

1. The updated City of Wolverhampton Capital Strategy.
2. The revised, medium term General Fund capital programme of £373.7 million, an increase of £14.6 million from the previously approved programme, and the change in associated resources.

That Cabinet approves:

1. The virements for the General Fund capital programme detailed at Appendix 5 to the report for:
 - i. existing projects totalling £6.4 million;
 - ii. new projects totalling £833,000.
2. Delegated authority to the Cabinet Member for Jobs, Skills and Education, in consultation with the Interim Director of Finance and the Director of Children's Services, to approve the allocation of the Childcare Expansion Programme capital budget to individual capital projects and to enter into required grant agreements and to make grant payments where appropriate, in order that projects can be progressed in an agile and timely manner.
3. Continuation of both delegations to the Portfolio Holder responsible for Resources, in consultation with the Interim Director of Finance, to approve the allocation of:
 - i. The Corporate Provision and Contingency for Future Programmes budget to individual projects in order that corporate priorities may be addressed in an agile and timely manner;
 - ii. The Transformation Development Efficiency Strategy to individual transformation projects in order to benefit from the capital receipts flexibility announced in the Autumn Statement 2015 and in line with the Medium Term Financial Strategy.

That Cabinet notes:

1. That the City of Wolverhampton Capital Strategy detailed at Appendix 1 to the report is due to undergo further development and refinement. The result of this would be presented to members at a future meeting.

6 **Treasury Management Strategy 2024-2025**

Councillor Louise Miles presented the report on the Treasury Management Strategy 2024-2025 for approval and recommendation to Full Council. The Strategy was in compliance with all best practice in financial management and in compliance with the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy's (CIPFA's) Code of Practice. Councillor Miles reported that the recent report from the Council's External Auditor's was complimentary about the Council's financial management and this good practice would continue into the future. This sound and prudent financial management enabled the Council to withstand the financial challenges that it continued to face and as outlined in the Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy report (item 7 below refers). The Treasury Management Strategy report also confirmed the authorised borrowing limit for 2024-2025, the forecast borrowing was below this limit.

Resolved:

That Council be recommended to approve:

1. The authorised borrowing limit for 2024-2025 to support the capital strategy as required under Section 3(1) of the Local Government Act 2003 to be set at £1,261.30 million (Reference PI 3, Appendix 3 to this report). The forecast borrowing is below the authorised borrowing limit.
2. The Treasury Management Strategy Statement 2024-2025 as set out in Appendix 1 to the report.

3. The Annual Investment Strategy 2024-2025 as set out in Appendix 2 to the report.
4. The Prudential and Treasury Management Indicators as set out in Appendix 3 to the report.
5. The Annual Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) Statement setting out the method used to calculate MRP for 2024-2025 as set out in Appendix 4 to the report.
6. The Treasury Management Policy Statement and Treasury Management Practices as set out in Appendix 6 to the report.
7. That authority continues to be delegated to the Interim Director of Finance to amend the Treasury Management Policy and Practices and any corresponding changes required to the Treasury Management Strategy, the Prudential and Treasury Management Indicators, the Investment Strategy and the Annual MRP Statement to ensure they remain aligned. Any amendments will be reported to the Cabinet Member for Resources and Cabinet (Resources) Panel as appropriate.
8. That authority continues to be delegated to the Interim Director of Finance to lower the minimum sovereign rating in the Annual Investment Strategy, in the event of the UK's credit rating being downgraded by the third credit rating agency, due to the current economic climate.
9. That authority is delegated to the Cabinet Member for Resources, in consultation with the Interim Director of Finance, to amend the MRP statement should this be required following the outcome of the consultation.

That Council be recommended to note:

1. That the MRP charge for the financial year 2024-2025 would be £20.8 million; it is forecast to increase to £23.2 million in 2025-2026 (paragraph 2.13 of the report).
2. That Cabinet or Cabinet (Resources) Panel and Council would receive regular Treasury Management reports during 2024-2025 on performance against the key targets and Prudential and Treasury Management Indicators in the Treasury Management Strategy and Investment Strategy, as set out in the paragraph 2.11 and Appendices 2 and 3 to the report.

7 **2024-2025 Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy 2024-2025 to 2026-2027**

Councillor Louise Miles moved the recommendations in the report that set out a proposed revenue budget of £332 million for 2024-2025 aligned to the Council Our City: Our Plan priorities and also a proposed council tax increase of 4.99% which incorporated 2% in relation to adult social care, for recommendation to Full Council for approval.

Resolved:

That Council be recommended to approve:

1. The net budget requirements for 2024-2025 of £332.0 million for General Fund services.

2. The Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) 2024-2025 to 2026-2027 as detailed in Section 9 of the report and the key assumptions underpinning the MTFS as detailed in Appendices 1, 2 and 3 of the report.
3. A Council Tax for Council services in 2024-2025 of £2,004.27 (Council element) for a Band D property, being an increase of 4.99% on 2023-2024 levels, which incorporates 2% in relation to Adult Social Care.
4. The refreshed Reserves Strategy as detailed in Appendix 8 to the report.

The Cabinet approves:

1. The updated assumptions used in the Budget 2024-2025 and the MTFS 2024-2025 to 2026-2027 as detailed in the report.
2. That £1.7 million is transferred from the Sustainable MTFS Reserve (formally named the Transformation Reserve) and Re-organisation Reserve to the General Fund Reserve in order that it can be maintained at approximately 5% of net budget over the medium term, which is in line with the Reserves Strategy.
3. That authority is delegated to the Director of Finance, to approve the calculation and allocation of growth in the central share of business rates for 2024-2025 and future years to be passported to the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA).
4. That authority be delegated to the Cabinet Member for Resources, in consultation with the Director of Finance to allocate budgets from the Corporate Contingency for Budget Growth / Emerging pressures once business cases have been completed.
5. That the Council enter into the Better Care Fund Section 75 Agreement along with the necessary ancillary agreements from the main agreement for 2024-2025 with the Black Country Integrated Care Board, and delegate authority to the Cabinet Member for Resources and Cabinet Member for Adults and Wellbeing, in consultation with the Director of Adult Social Care and the Director of Finance to approve the final terms of the agreement.

The Cabinet notes:

1. The significance of the financial distress in the sector as summarised in Section 3 to the report.
2. That the budget for 2024-2025 is in balance without the use of General Fund Reserves.
3. That, in the opinion of the Interim Director of Finance (Deputy Section 151 Officer), the budget estimates and assumptions included in the 24/25 budget (and MTFS) are robust.
4. That, in the opinion of the Interim Director of Finance (Deputy Section 151 Officer), the proposed levels of reserves are adequate in respect of the forthcoming financial year.

5. That, in the opinion of the Interim Director of Finance (Deputy Section 151 Officer), the proposed use of earmarked reserves during 2024-2025 is prudent and proportionate for 2024-2025, but that this is not a sustainable solution to the Council's underlying medium term financial gap.
6. That it is estimated that a further £27.1 million of budget reductions need to be identified for 2025-2026, rising to £32.6 million over the medium term to 2026-2027 in order to address the projected budget deficit.
7. That, due to external factors, in particular the impact of the increasing demand for services, cost of living and inflationary pressures, budget assumptions remain subject to significant change, which could therefore result in alterations to the financial position facing the Council.
8. That there continues to be considerable amount of uncertainty with regards to future funding streams for local authorities over the medium term. At the point that further information is known it would be incorporated into future reports to Councillors. Any reduction in the Government's allocation of funding to the Council would have a significant detrimental impact and further increase the budget deficit forecast over the medium term.
9. That, in recognition of the financial challenges highlighted, and as part of the development of this Medium-Term Financial Strategy, a rigorous programme of work designed to identify and deliver further recurring budget reduction and income generation proposals would be put in place during 2024-2025. Progress against which would be reported back to Councillors.
10. That Councillors must have due regard to the public sector equality duty (Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010) when making budget reduction decisions.
11. That the Council continues to engage with residents, businesses and other key stakeholders throughout the year which focuses on understanding people's priorities for Wolverhampton.
12. That, the overall level of risk associated with the Medium Term Financial Strategy to 2026-2027 is assessed as Red
13. The impact of related parties on the Medium Term Financial Strategy.

8 **Wolverhampton Homes Delivery Plan for 2024 - 2025**

Councillor Steve Evans presented the report on Wolverhampton Homes (WH) Annual Business Plan 2024-2025, the associated Annual Delivery Plan 2024-2025 and its monitoring arrangements for recommendation to Full Council for approval. Wolverhampton Homes had been managing the Council's properties, garages and shops and other services for some 18 years. They employ around 700 staff of which 25 are apprentices. Councillor Evans placed on record his thanks and commended WH for investing in the city's young people and giving them an opportunity. He delivered an overview of the key services WH delivered on behalf of the Council, and an overview of some of the key statistics on WH's performance. He commended the work of WH and placed on record the Council's thanks.

Resolved:

That Council be recommended to approve:

1. The Wolverhampton Homes Business Plan 2024-2025.
2. The Wolverhampton Homes Delivery Plan 2024-2025.
3. The arrangements for monitoring the delivery of the Wolverhampton Homes Business Plan and Delivery Plan.

That Cabinet notes:

1. That the governance and monitoring arrangements of Wolverhampton Homes are to be reviewed following the recommendations of Cabinet 18 October 2023 (Social Housing Regulation Act 2023 – Landlord Services Review).

9

Good Growth Strategy

Councillor Stephen Simkins presented the report on the Council's strategic economic plan, the Good Growth Strategy for recommendation to Full Council for approval. Delivery of the strategy would help to boost the city's economy in the right way. It focused on three themes: people, place and productivity. It was a sustainable model, a road map for economic prosperity and a huge opportunity to improve the life chances and wellbeing of the city's residents. Councillor Simkins reported that City of Wolverhampton had a good track record of growing the economy. Major successes seen over the last 10 years included: the award winning £1billion i54 Business Park; the £150 million Interchange transport hub; the £48 million investment into The Halls that would boost the local economy by at least £10 million per year, and the National Brownfield Institute at the University of Wolverhampton's Springfield Campus.

Resolved:

That Council be recommended to approve:

1. The City of Wolverhampton Council strategic economic plan, Good Growth Strategy attached as Appendix 1 to the report.

That Council be recommended to note:

1. That the priorities set out in the Good Growth Strategy have been developed through consultation and engagement with communities and partners across our city.
2. That a presentation and draft Good Growth Strategy was considered by Economy and Growth Scrutiny Panel on the 29 November 2024.

10

Wolverhampton Local Plan - Issues and Preferred Options Consultations

Councillor Stephen Simkins presented the report seeking approval to consult on a Wolverhampton Local Plan (WLP) Issues and Preferred Options Report and associated Sustainability Appraisal Report during spring 2023 and to adopt a new Wolverhampton Local Development Scheme 2024-2027. He reported that there are no proposals from the Council to build on the greenbelt. The policies within the WLP were aimed to promote high quality environment and healthy living.

Resolved:

1. That the Wolverhampton Local Plan Issues and Preferred Options Report, Sustainability Appraisal Report, and Summary Leaflet attached as appendices 1, 2 and 3 to the report, be approved for consultation during spring 2024.

2. That authority be delegated to the Leader of the Council, in consultation with the Director of Regeneration, to make any necessary minor amendments to the Wolverhampton Local Plan Issues and Preferred Options Report, Sustainability Appraisal Report, and Summary Leaflet, prior to commencement of the consultation process.
3. That a further report summarising key issues raised during the consultation and seeking approval for consultation on the Publication Wolverhampton Local Plan be received.
4. That a new Wolverhampton Local Development Scheme (2024-2027) attached as Appendix 4 to the report be approved.

11 **West Midlands Combined Authority Single Settlement Memorandum of Understanding**

Further to Cabinet's formal endorsement of the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) Trailblazer Deeper Devolution Deal on 6 September 2023, Councillor Stephen Simkins presented for ratification, the Single Settlement Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the WMCA and His Majesty's Government (HMG). The Single Settlement represented a significant change in how the region would receive funding from HMG. It would provide the region with multiyear certainty over a consolidated funding allocation. The MoU established the basic principles of how the single settlement under the Trailblazer Deal would operate.

Resolved:

1. That Cabinet ratify the Single Settlement Memorandum of Understanding at Appendix 1 to the report.
2. That the high-level next steps for Single Settlement negotiations and implementation between the West Midlands Combined Authority and His Majesty's Government be noted.
3. That it be noted that working with the West Midlands Combined Authority and other constituent members the Council would seek to secure the best possible single settlement for the region which tackles inequalities and drives economic growth.
4. That it be noted that a presentation and report on the Single Settlement would be received by Scrutiny Board on 21 February 2024.

12 **Determined Admission Arrangements for Community and Voluntary Controlled Schools 2025-2026**

Councillor Cris Burden presented the report on proposed schemes for co-ordinated school admission arrangements for secondary and primary schools and the admission arrangements for community and voluntary controlled schools for 2025-2026. Lanesfield Primary School was seeking to reduce its Published Admission Number (PAN) from 45 to 30. Full consultation on the request had found that the local authority could meet all the required need within the reduced PAN. The reduced number of places would not harm parental choice and it would bring a lot more stability to the school.

Resolved:

1. That the Co-ordinated Admission Schemes for secondary and primary school admissions at the normal year of entry for 2025-2026 be approved and the Secretary of State be notified by 28 February 2024.
2. That the proposed admission arrangements for community and voluntary controlled schools for 2025-2026, including the reduction of 15 places at Lanesfield Primary School be approved. There are no proposed changes to any other aspect of the arrangements.
3. That the outcome of the external consultation in relation to the Determined Admission Arrangements for Community and Voluntary Controlled Schools 2025-2026 included in section 5 of the report be noted.